

DELEGATION

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Despite the many reported benefits that accrues with delegating, managers are still generally reluctant and some even speak about being afraid to delegate. It seems that the attraction of being more efficient, productive or “empowering” is just not convincing enough to make managers feel comfortable to delegate.

Why do managers then have this resistance or fear to delegate?

When asking this question, I have been told by some managers that their staff might feel insulted because they think they are dumping tasks onto them that they don't like doing themselves, “doing the bosses dirty work”. Other managers have bravely admitted that they fear losing control. Managers have also reported that they are not sure if their direct reports will deliver the work to their exact high standards. Therefore mistakes and poor quality will cause them to suffer reputational damage. I have also noticed how managers who find it difficult to delegate are caught up in the “expert” contributor trap, the technical expert role. It's their comfort zone, it's what they are good at. It's why they got promoted into management in the first place. Some managers fear being surpassed by their more competent staff.

Could this fear and uncertainty of delegation also have something to do with managers not feeling able, in other words, lacking the skill, knowledge and attributes of how to delegate?



What makes for effective delegating is:

- Knowing what should and should not be delegated; this is crucial.
- Diagnosing the employee's readiness level (motivation & skill).
- Having a good communications process, allowing for clarity, questions and feedback.
- Having a good empowerment framework:
 - Meaning - Explains *Why* the task is important.
 - Competence - Task structures to develop confidence and competence.
 - Autonomy - Allows freedom to have discretion and autonomy.
 - Feedback - regular information about the impact of performance.

The most effective way to grow and development and to get your employees to learn more about their work unit or organisation, is to give them tasks which stretches them beyond their current levels of competence. If you do this with as many in your team as is possible, then you increase your unit's ability to perform, you'll have a stronger performing work unit. Your reputation as an effective leader will precede you.

What about the issue of responsibility, authority and accountability?

Ultimately you cannot delegate away your responsibility, you still remain responsible in the end. This fact should not be an excuse however, for not delegating, it should serve as a motivation to delegate effectively. You must ensure that your staff knows that you do hold them responsible to deliver and achieve the milestones and objectives associated with the task you have delegated to them. You must also ensure that you give them the necessary amount of authority to deliver on the task. They will need this authority to marshal the resources and cooperation. They must know that you will hold them accountable to achieve the outcomes.

Leave alone zap!



When you have delegated, it is important to keep the appropriate distance as you regularly evaluate and monitor progress. Micro managing and policing will kill all natural creativity that staff may have to bring. Think of yourself as a helicopter, as you, from a safe distance hover above and maintain a clear view of the process. There should be enough distance to ensure the staff has the appropriate levels of autonomy to be creative and bring their own uniqueness to bear.

The leave alone zap implies, walking away after delegating and only ever appearing when things are going wrong to reprimand and warn.

Steps to effective delegation

Be clear and specific about what you want done and Why you have chosen the individual for the assignment.

- Have I pitched the assignment at the appropriate level of difficulty and challenge?
- Has the employee sufficient time to do the assignment?
- Have I given the employee the right amount of authority to carry out the task?
- How will I explain my expectations for this assignment?
- How will I task structure this assignment?
- What level of priority will I give this assignment?
- What will I say to explain why this assignment is important and where it fits into the overall work of the department?
- What must I write down, so that I don't forget anything during my discussion?



Discuss the task and match expectations.

- Am I sure the employee clearly understands what I expect from them?
- Can the employee reflect back to me what is expected to established shared understanding?
- Does the employee understand where the task fits into the unit or organisational goals?
- Does the employee know where to find resources and help when they feel stuck?
- Are timelines, milestones, deadlines clearly understood?
- Is the employee clear about how I will monitor and supervise their progress?

Allow space and freedom for employee to do it their way.

- Do I know how the employee prefers to work?
- Do I know what the employee values?
- Do I know what motivates them?
- Have I given the employee appropriate amount of authority to execute the task?
- Am I approachable enough for the employee to raise any concerns with me?
- Does the employee feel trusted enough to use their discretion and bring their approach to bear on the task?

Monitor progress, keep appropriate distance and don't be too quick to rescue.

- Have I communicated what I will be holding the employee responsible for?
- Have I checked to ensure that the employee is comfortable to speak with me about anything that may come up during the task?
- Have I shared with the employee my own stories of fears and failures when doing my first assignment to relax them and humanise the relationship?
- I must check myself, not to jump in and rescue at the first sign of problems and challenges.
- Did I sufficiently and sincerely express my confidence in the employee's ability?
- Am I giving praise and recognition as the employee wins small victories?
- Am I giving well timed and balanced feedback to course correct the employee's approach, behaviour or attitude when it's appropriate?

Give Praise, Show recognition and explain impact.

- Did I:
 - Say Thank you?
 - Specifically describe what they did/achieved?
 - Tell them how their achievement added value to the unit, dept. or organisation?

Key microskills you will need to delegate effectively are:

1. Listening
2. Empathy
3. Probing
4. Problem solving
5. Giving and receiving feedback

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