

Free Up Brain Space & Delegate

by Diane Gibson

Do you ever experience a need to redo a staff assignment, special task or project? Are you reluctant to really let it go or feel it might be easier to do it yourself? If the temptation to revise, redo or revamp a project keeps you at the office long after everyone else has gone home, you might need to delegate! Research shows 9 out of 10 managers do not delegate enough. Managers might *think* they have delegated because they assign a project, but successful delegation is more than handing off an assignment to someone else.

The word “delegate” can be traced to the Latin words *lega*, meaning “to commit, entrust or appoint; to send as a deputy” and *de*, is best defined as “being away from something or some person.” Delegation, is the transfer of authority. In a supervisor/subordinate role, the supervisor transfers or “loans” a portion of his authority to the subordinate. With this authority, the subordinate is entrusted to act for his supervisor to achieve a stated objective.

Delegation, as one company president describes it, “is both success and survival. Successful delegation provides employees an opportunity to develop and learn new skills. Survival is simply realizing that one manager or leader cannot do it all.”

Successful delegation brings great returns to any business - large or small. Training future leaders means delegating authority. Employees gain skills, experience and confidence. Yet, many managers resist delegating. Why is this? (Read on, and don't forget to delegate the task of reading this article to your staff!)

Barriers to Delegation

Those empowered to delegate often justify their resistance because it takes too much time, too much explanation; it's too risky or too uncertain. For some, the very process of delegation stirs up fear of failure or loss of control. Organizational structure, cultural differences and listening skills may also complicate the delegation process. Subordinates develop their own opinions as well. They may avoid additional responsibility because they sincerely disagree. They may have experienced managers that failed to communicate a clear objective, micro-managed the project, failed to support them or neglected to give credit where credit was due.

Working through these barriers can be a slow process, yet incredibly rewarding as both managers and subordinates attest. A manufacturing manager admits, “It took a lot of discipline and trust to let go and not micro-manage the project.” Employees experience “growth and confidence knowing management trusts them.”

Trust and Responsibility

Developing and maintaining a healthy balance between trust and responsibility are important factors in delegation. A high level of trust in an organization is essential to achieving organizational objectives. Delegating responsibility to employees demonstrates trust. Trusting employees not only encourages them to perform at a higher level; it provides an opportunity to develop skills and experience success. That translates into success for the entire organization.

Equally important to accepting a delegated project is being accountable for it. Not every delegation assignment ends with glowing results. Failure happens. Critical errors are made. Fact-finding ensues. Managers ask, “What went wrong?”

Delegators & Delegates

Selecting the *right delegate* is probably **the** most important step in the delegation process. It is not giving the job to the person with the lightest workload or the one in closest proximity to the boss. Nor does a subordinate's past success in one area guarantee success in another. Managers need to match the level of skill required for the project with employee skill levels and interests.

Participative management suggests employees be encouraged to join in the project decision making process. When subordinates speak their mind and share ideas, it can indicate healthy delegation is in development.

A health care recruiting manager told me about inheriting three employees that were not given much freedom or latitude with their previous manager. She's now slowly grooming them to take on more responsibility and risk. For employees to be successful with new responsibilities, managers must provide resources such as materials, time or financial resources. Managers need to be a visible source of support; help build relationships, develop networks and provide moral support, both internally and externally.

Delegating Well

Delegation is really part of a larger, ongoing effective management process. But research suggests following these steps will contribute to a successful delegation.

- **Define the project.** Define the objectives of the project, what needs to be accomplished.
- **Identify the person.** Remember employee skill level, interests, etc. to ensure project and employee success.
- **Discuss the project.** Discuss the project and listen for ideas; listen with understanding. Both parties should know exactly what is expected and how the project will be evaluated.
- **Review progress.** Resist the temptation to micro-manage. The method chosen to *achieve* the expected outcome will likely be different depending on the person(s) involved. Review results.
- **Recognize and celebrate.** This is a step of great importance. Recognize the people involved in the project, celebrate the success.

No one person can do it all. Effective delegation is one of the most powerful tools a manager or supervisor has for managing more efficiently, for getting things done, for achieving organizational goals. Moreover, empowered employees strengthen the team by developing confidence, competence and commitment.

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