



Delegation Skills

How to delegate work to other people

Delegation involves passing responsibility for completion of work to other people.

This section examines the reasons you should delegate, how to delegate, failure to delegate and what should not be delegated.

Delegation is useful for the following reasons:

- Once people have learned how to work with you, they can take responsibility for jobs you do not have time to do.
- You can develop people to look after routine tasks that are not cost-effective for you to carry out
- It transfers work to people whose skills in a particular area are better than yours, saving time.
- Transfer of responsibility develops your staff, and can increase their enjoyment of their jobs

The ideal position to reach as a manager is one where your staff carries out all of the routine activities of your team. This leaves you time to plan, think, and improve the efficiency of what you are doing.

How to delegate

The following points may help you in delegating jobs:

- ***Deciding what to delegate:***
One way of deciding what to delegate is simply to list the things that you do which could be more effectively done by someone either more skilled in a particular area, or less expensive. Alternatively you may decide to use your activity log as the basis of your decision to delegate: this will show you where you are spending large amounts of time on low yield jobs.
- ***Select capable, willing people to carry out jobs:***
How far you can delegate jobs will depend on the ability, experience and reliability of your assistants. Good people will be able to carry out large jobs with no intervention from you. Inexperienced or unreliable people will need close supervision to get a job done to the correct standard. However if you coach, encourage and give practice to them you may improve their ability to carry out larger and larger tasks unsupervised.
- ***Delegate complete jobs:***
It is much more satisfying to work on a single task than on many fragments of the task. If you delegate a complete task to a capable assistant, you are also more likely to receive a more elegant, tightly integrated solution.

- ***Explain why the job is done, and what results are expected:***
When you delegate a job, explain how it fits into the overall picture of what you are trying to achieve. Ensure that you communicate effectively:
 - the results that are needed
 - the importance of the job
 - the constraints within which it should be carried out
 - the deadlines for completion
 - internal reporting dates when you want information on the progress of the project
- ***Then let go!***
Once you have decided to delegate a task, let your assistant get on with it. Review the project on the agreed reporting dates, but do not constantly look over their shoulders. Recognise that your assistants may know a better way of doing something than you do. Accept that there may be different ways of achieving a particular task, and also that one of the best ways of really learning something is through making mistakes. Always accept mistakes that are not caused by idleness, and that are learned from.
- ***Give help and coach when requested:***
It is important to support your subordinates when they are having difficulties, but do not do the job for them. If you do, then they will not develop the confidence to do the job themselves.
- ***Accept only finished work:***
You have delegated a task to take a workload off you. If you accept only partially completed jobs back, then you will have to invest time in completing them, and your assistant will not get the experience he or she needs in completing projects.
- ***Give credit when a job has been successfully completed:***
Public recognition both reinforces the enjoyment of success with the assistant who carried out the task and sets a standard for other employees.

Why do people fail to delegate?

Despite the many advantages of delegation, some managers do not delegate. This can be for the following reasons:

- ***Lack of time:***
Delegating jobs does take time. In the early stages of taking over a job you may need to invest time in training people to take over tasks. Jobs may take longer to achieve with delegation than they do for you to do by yourself, when coaching and checking are taken into account. In time, with the right people, you will find that the time taken up reduces significantly as your coaching investment pays back.
- ***Perfectionism - fear of mistakes:***
Just as you have to develop staff to do jobs quickly without your involvement, you

will have to let people make mistakes, and help them to correct them. Most people will, with time, learn to do jobs properly.

- ***Enjoying 'getting my hands dirty':***
By doing jobs yourself you will probably get them done effectively. If, however, your assistants are standing idle while you do this, then your department will be seriously inefficient. Bear in mind the cost of your time and the cost of your department's time when you are tempted to do a job yourself.
- ***Fear of surrendering authority:***
Whenever you delegate, you surrender some element of authority (but not of responsibility!) This is inevitable. By effective delegation, however, you get the benefits of adequate time to do YOUR job really well.
- ***Fear of becoming invisible:***
Where your department is running smoothly with all routine work effectively delegated, it may appear that you have nothing to do. Now you have the time to think and plan and improve operations (and plan your next career step!)
- ***Belief that staff 'are not up to the job':***
Good people will often under-perform if they are bored. Delegation will often bring the best out of them. People who are not so good will not be effective unless you invest time in them. Even incompetent people can be effective, providing they find their level. The only people who cannot be reliably delegated to are those whose opinions of their own abilities are so inflated that they will not co-operate.

It is common for people who are newly promoted to managerial positions to have difficulty delegating. Often they will have been promoted because they were good at what they were doing. This brings the temptation to continue trying to do their previous job, rather than developing their new subordinates to do the job well.

What should not be delegated?

While you should delegate as many tasks as possible that are not cost effective for you to carry out, ensure that you do not delegate the control of your team.

Remember that you bear ultimate responsibility for the success or failure of what you are trying to achieve.

Effective delegation involves achieving the correct balance between effective control of work and letting people get on with jobs in their own way.

The seven levels of delegation

Delegation isn't just a matter of telling someone else what to do. There is a wide range of varying freedom that you can confer on the other person.

The more experienced and reliable they are then the more freedom you can give.

The more critical the task then the more cautious you need to be about extending a lot of freedom, especially if your job or reputation depends on getting a good result. Take care to choose the most appropriate style for each situation.

1 "Wait to be told." or "Do exactly what I say."

No delegation at all.

2 "Look into this and tell me what you come up with. I'll decide."

This is asking for investigation and analysis but no recommendation.

3 "Give me your recommendation, and the other options with the pros and cons of each. I'll let you know whether you can go ahead."

Asks for analysis and recommendation, but you will check the thinking before deciding.

4 "Decide and let me know your decision, but wait for my go ahead."

The other person needs approval but is trusted to judge the relative options.

5 "Decide and let me know your decision, then go ahead unless I say not to."

Now the other person begins to control the action. The subtle increase in responsibility saves time.

6 "Decide and take action, but let me know what you did."

Saves more time. Allows a quicker reaction to wrong decisions, not present in final level.

7 "Decide and take action. You need not check back with me."

The most freedom that we can give to the other person. A high level of confidence is necessary, and needs good controls to ensure mistakes are flagged.

Delegation and team development

Delegating freedom and decision-making responsibility to a team absolutely does not absolve the manager of accountability.

That's why delegating, whether to teams or individuals, requires a very grown-up manager.

If everything goes well, the team must get the credit; if it all goes horribly wrong, the manager must take the blame.

This is entirely fair, because the manager is ultimately responsible for judging the seriousness of any given situation - including the risks entailed - and the level of freedom that can safely be granted to the team to deal with it.

Here are the levels of delegated freedom, with some added explanation that should make it easier to understand and apply.

1. The Manager decides and announces the decision.

The manager reviews options in light of aims, issues, priorities, timescale, etc., then decides the action and informs the team of the decision.

The manager will probably have considered how the team will react, but the team plays no active part in making the decision.

The team may well perceive that the manager has not considered the team's welfare at all.

The team sees this as a purely task-based decision

2. The manager decides and then 'sells' the decision to the group.

The manager makes the decision as in 1 above, and then explains reasons for the decision to the team, particularly the positive benefits that the team will enjoy from the decision.

In so doing the manager is seen by the team to recognise the team's importance, and to have some concern for the team.

3. The manager presents the decision with background ideas and invites questions.

The manager presents the decision along with some of the background which led to the decision.

The team is invited to ask questions and discuss with the manager the rationale behind the decision, which enables the team to understand and accept or agree with the decision more easily than in 1 and 2 above.

This more participative and involving approach enables the team to appreciate the issues and reasons for the decision, and the implications of all the options.

This will have a more motivational approach than 1 or 2 because of the higher level of team involvement and discussion.

4. The manager suggests a provisional decision and invites discussion about it.

The manager discusses and reviews the provisional decision with the team on the basis that the manager will take on board the views and then finally decide.

This enables the team to have some real influence over the shape of the manager's final decision.

This also acknowledges that the team has something to contribute to the decision-making process, which is more involving and therefore motivating than the previous level.

5. The manager presents the situation or problem, gets suggestions, and then decides.

The manager presents the situation, and maybe some options, to the team.

The team is encouraged and expected to offer ideas and additional options, and discuss implications of each possible course of action.

The manager then decides which option to take.

This level is one of high and specific involvement for the team, and is appropriate particularly when the team has more detailed knowledge or experience of the issues than the manager does.

Being high-involvement and high-influence for the team this level provides more motivation and freedom than any previous level.

6. The manager explains the situation, defines the parameters and asks the team to decide.

At this level the manager has effectively delegated responsibility for the decision to the team, albeit within the manager's stated limits.

The manager may or may not choose to be a part of the team which decides.

While this level appears to give a huge responsibility to the team, the manager can control the risk and outcomes to an extent, according to the constraints that he stipulates.

This level is more motivational than any previous, and requires a mature team for any serious situation or problem. (Remember that the team must get the credit for all the positive outcomes from the decision, while the manager remains accountable for any resulting problems or disasters.)

7. The manager allows the team to identify the problem, develop the options, and decide on the action, within the manager's received limits.

This is obviously an extreme level of freedom, whereby the team is effectively doing what the manager did in level 1.

The team is given responsibility for identifying and analysing the situation or problem; the process for resolving it; developing and assessing options; evaluating implications, and then deciding on and implementing a course of action.

The manager also states in advance that he/she will support the decision and help the team implement it.

The manager may or may not be part of the team, and if so then he/she has no more authority than anyone else in the team.

The only constraints and parameters for the team are the ones that the manager had imposed on him from above. (Again, the manager retains accountability for any resulting disasters, while the team must get the credit for all successes.)

This level is potentially the most motivational of all, but also potentially the most disastrous.

Not surprisingly the team must be mature and competent, and capable of acting at what is a genuinely strategic decision-making level.

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