

# **Successful Delegation**

## **Using the Power of Other People's Help**

**By Jane Doe**

If you work on your own, there's only a limited amount that you can do, however hard you work. You can only work so many hours in a day. There are only so many tasks you can complete in these hours. There are only so many people you can help by doing these tasks. And, because the number of people you can help is limited, your success is limited.

However, if you're good at your job, people will want much more than this from you. This can lead to a real sense of pressure and work overload: you can't do everything that everyone wants, and this can leave you stressed, unhappy, and feeling that you're letting people down.

On the positive side, however, you're being given a tremendous opportunity if you can find a way around this limitation. If you can realize this opportunity, you can be genuinely successful!

One of the most common ways of overcoming this limitation is to learn how to delegate your work to other people. If you do this well, you can quickly build a strong and successful team of people, well able to meet the demands that others place. This is why delegation is such an important skill, and is one that you absolutely have to learn!

### **Why People Don't Delegate**

To figure out how to delegate properly, it's important to understand why people avoid it. Quite simply, people don't delegate because it takes a lot of up-front effort.

After all, which is easier: designing and writing content for a brochure that promotes a new service you helped spearhead, or having other members of your team do it? You know the content inside and out. You can spew benefit statements in your sleep. It would be relatively straightforward for you to sit down and write it. It would even be fun! The question is, "Would it be a good use of your time?"

While on the surface it's easier to do it yourself than explain the strategy behind the brochure to someone else, there are two key reasons that mean that it's probably better to delegate the task to someone else:

- First, if you have the ability to spearhead a new campaign, the chances are that your skills are better used further developing the strategy, and perhaps coming up with other new ideas. By doing the work yourself, you're failing to make the best use of your time.
- Second, by meaningfully involving other people in the project, you develop those people's skills and abilities. This means that next time a similar project comes along, you can delegate the task with a high degree of confidence that it will be done well, with much less involvement from you.

Delegation allows you to make the best use of your time and skills, and it helps other people in the team grow and develop to reach their full potential in the organization.

### **When to Delegate**

Delegation is a win-win when done appropriately, however, that does not mean that you can delegate just anything. To determine when delegation is most appropriate there are five key questions you need to ask yourself:

- Is there someone else who has (or can be given) the necessary information or expertise to complete the task? Essentially is this a task that someone else can do, or is it critical that you do it yourself?
- Does the task provide an opportunity to grow and develop another person's skills?
- Is this a task that will recur, in a similar form, in the future?
- Do you have enough time to delegate the job effectively? Time must be available for adequate training, for questions and answers, for opportunities to check progress, and for rework if that is necessary.
- Is this a task that I should delegate? Tasks critical for long-term success (for example, recruiting the right people for your team) genuinely do need your attention.

If you can answer "yes" to at least some of the above questions, then it could well be worth delegating this job.

### **The Who and How of Delegating**

Having decided to delegate a task there are some other factors to consider as well. As you think these through you can use our free [Delegation Log worksheet](#) to keep record of the tasks you choose to delegate and who you want to delegate them to.

## To Whom Should You Delegate?

The factors to consider here include:

1. The experience, knowledge and skills of the individual as they apply to the delegated task.
  - What knowledge, skills and attitude does the person already have?
  - Do you have time and resources to provide any training needed?
2. The individual's preferred work style.
  - How independent is the person?
  - What does he or she want from his or her job?
  - What are his or her long-term goals and interests, and how do these align with the work proposed?
3. The current workload of this person.
  - Does the person have time to take on more work?
  - Will you delegating this task require reshuffling of other responsibilities and workloads?

### Tip:

When you first start to delegate to someone, you may notice that he or she takes longer than you do to complete tasks. This is because you are an expert in the field and the person you have delegated to is still learning. Be patient: if you have chosen the right person to delegate to, and you are delegating correctly, you will find that he or she quickly becomes competent and reliable.

## How Should You Delegate?

Use the following principles to delegate successfully:

1. Clearly articulate the desired outcome. Begin with the end in mind and specify the desired results.
2. Clearly identify constraints and boundaries. Where are the lines of authority, responsibility and accountability? Should the person:
  - Wait to be told what to do?
  - Ask what to do?
  - Recommend what should be done, and then act?
  - Act, and then report results immediately?
  - Initiate action, and then report periodically?
3. Where possible, include people in the delegation process. Empower them to decide what tasks are to be delegated to them and when.
4. Match the amount of responsibility with the amount of authority. Understand that you can delegate some responsibility, however you can't delegate away ultimate accountability. The buck stops with you!
5. Delegate to the lowest possible organizational level. The people who are closest to the work are best suited for the task, because they have the most intimate knowledge of the detail of everyday work. This also increases workplace efficiency, and helps to develop people.
6. Provide adequate support, and be available to answer questions. Ensure the project's success through ongoing communication and monitoring as well as provision of resources and credit.
7. Focus on results. Concern yourself with what is accomplished, rather than detailing how the work should be done: Your way is not necessarily the only or even the best way! Allow the person to control his or her own methods and processes. This facilitates success and trust.
8. Avoid "upward delegation." If there is a problem, don't allow the person to shift responsibility for the task back to you: ask for recommended solutions; and don't simply provide an answer.

9. Build motivation and commitment. Discuss how success will impact financial rewards, future opportunities, informal recognition, and other desirable consequences. Provide recognition where deserved.

10. Establish and maintain control.

- Discuss timelines and deadlines.
- Agree on a schedule of checkpoints at which you'll review project progress.
- Make adjustments as necessary.
- Take time to review all submitted work.

In thoroughly considering these key points prior to and during the delegation process you will find that you delegate more successfully.

## **Keeping Control**

Now, once you have worked through the above steps, make sure you brief your team member appropriately. Take time to explain why they were chosen for the job, what's expected from them during the project, the goals you have for the project, all timelines and deadlines and the resources on which they can draw. And agree a schedule for checking-in with progress updates.

Lastly, make sure that the team member knows that you want to know if any problems occur, and that you are available for any questions or guidance needed as the work progresses.

We all know that as managers, we shouldn't micromanage. However, this doesn't mean we must abdicate control altogether: In delegating effectively, we have to find the sometimes-difficult balance between giving enough space for people to use their abilities to best effect, while still monitoring and supporting closely enough to ensure that the job is done correctly and effectively.

## **The Importance of Full Acceptance**

When delegated work is delivered back to you, set aside enough time to review it thoroughly. If possible, only accept good quality, fully-complete work. If you accept work you are not satisfied with, your team member does not learn to do the job properly. Worse than this, you accept a whole new tranche of work that you will probably need to

complete yourself. Not only does this overload you, it means that you don't have the time to do your own job properly.

Of course, when good work is returned to you, make sure to both recognize and reward the effort. As a leader, you should get in the practice of complimenting members of your team every time you are impressed by what they have done. This effort on your part will go a long way toward building team member's self-confidence and efficiency, both of which will be improved on the next delegated task; hence, you both win.