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The secrets of efficient delegation and why it is so important

By | [September 23, 2013](#)

Delegation is one of the most crucial skills for leaders. When delegation goes wrong, it can result in high costs and unhappy employees. In the following article we look closer at particular aspects of delegation and how you can bring your delegating skills to perfection.



This article is based on the free eBook
“High-impact interpersonal skills”

Delegation defined

Firstly what do we mean by delegation?

Delegation is giving responsibility to someone to carry out tasks that you might normally do yourself. By delegating you give others the authority to do things, but you remain accountable for the outcome.

To understand delegation it's useful to answer some key questions:

- How do you give responsibility to someone else?
- How do you ensure they feel clear about what they are being asked to do?
- How do you support and encourage those to whom you have delegated responsibility?

Why delegate?

Before considering the “how” questions above, perhaps we need to answer an even more pressing question. Why delegate in the first place? There is a common tendency for leaders to try and keep hold of tasks, activities and processes. What’s wrong with this? Well, the famous industrialist Andrew Carnegie provided a powerful answer to this question:

“No person will make a great business who wants to do it all himself or get all the credit.”

This quote from Carnegie makes two good points. Firstly, to grow you need to trust other people to get important things done. Secondly, when you do delegate and someone is doing the tasks really well, give them the credit for what they are doing.

Delegation also matters at a practical level. It:

- Releases your time to concentrate on other key tasks.
- Develops the capability of others in your team.

Leaders delegate both to give themselves more time to lead, and crucially to help others to develop and grow in their abilities and responsibilities.

How do you delegate?

Done well, delegation is an invaluable tool for leaders. However, to do it well we must think of it as a process. This includes several stages and proper use of a set of communication skills. Combining these will help ensure that delegation is effective. The 5 stages for effective delegation are:

1. Identify the person

- Trust the other person and build trust.
- Apply the willing and able test – do they want to do the task and have they the capability to do it?

2. Select the task

- Match the right person to the task, and their development needs.
- Don’t delegate just the mundane! Delegate activities that are worthwhile and

valuable.

- BUT do delegate less important tasks, allowing you more time to focus on the important.
- Think about delegating tasks to others in your team who have strengths in areas that you might not possess. Others may have strengths where you have weaknesses.

3. Clarify expectations

- Outline what is expected and what needs to be achieved. Make sure you clarify how this task fits with other things that are being done and why it matters.
- Specify the outcome and key things that need to be achieved. Let the individual work out how they will achieve this.
- Give a clear briefing.

4. Provide support, encouragement and feedback

- Encourage questions, continue to be available and plan to monitor and review progress.
- Review initially in a supportive manner, then less frequently over time as the individual's expertise increases. Don't be "looking over someone's shoulder" all the time.
- Provide support appropriate to your colleague's need. Avoid the two extremes sometimes associated with poor delegation. Either of abdicating your own responsibility to support, or of being over-bearing, retaining too much control.

5. Review

- Did the delegation activity result in you being free to focus on other important leadership tasks?
- How did the person to whom you delegated develop? Have they increased their own capability and expertise?
- What lessons have you learned from delegating?

Here's why it's best to leave others to work out how to do something:

“Never tell people how to do things. Tell them what to do and they will surprise you with their ingenuity.”– General George Smith Patton, Jr.

If you would like to learn more about delegation, then “[High-impact interpersonal skills – How to be a persuasive leader](#)” written by Apex Leadership Ltd is the right book for you.

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