



Improve Your Delegation Skills

By

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Learning To Delegate – What You Need To Understand

Understanding That The Manager Doesn't Have To Do It All!

One of the most difficult things I had to learn as a young business person was effective management delegation. I was afraid to delegate tasks to those beneath me; partially because I was used to doing so much on my own and partially because I was afraid the job wouldn't be completed to my own personal standards. Rather than take the risk, I tried to finish projects by myself and rarely asked for help.

What a mistake! I soon had more work than I could handle and the quality of my completed tasks was suffering; not because I didn't care but because I simply didn't have enough time. I quickly realised that delegating tasks is not only integral to the successful completion of projects, but it is also an effective method of time management!

When your superiors give you a task, you automatically become responsible for the project and can be held accountable for the outcome. You'll then delegate the task to an individual or group, thus transferring responsibility to those who are going to do the physical work. In the end, however, your superiors are going to look to you for the end product and you will always be held accountable for the quality of the work.

Your team should be properly trained and prepared for any task you hand them. You have, after all, spent countless hours working with them so there should be no question in your mind as to whether or not they can handle any given situation. Some managers are afraid of giving up power or control, but this is also an unreasonable excuse for avoiding delegation.

Delegation can be a scary concept for both new and seasoned managers, but it is one you have to learn to deal with rather quickly. There is not a single person in the world that can do everything, and you've been given the authority to hire a team for a reason. As long as you have taken the time to properly train your new hires, there should be no reason to hold back when it comes to delegating tasks.

Take a close look at the members of your team. Are they properly prepared for anything you may have to throw at them? If not, you haven't done your job and you need to make a plan to remedy the situation as soon as possible!

Understanding The Difference Between Delegation & Abdication

Once you understand that as the manager you don't have to do all of the work to ensure that the work gets done, we need to discuss the issue over "over-delegating". There is a difference between delegation and abdication and you can go too far in the wrong direction when it comes to delegating tasks to your workforce.

As a manager it is your job to allocate work tasks, whether you keep them for yourself or give them to your team members. When it comes to allocating that work, you can either abdicate or delegate.

When a manager participates in abdication he is giving his team members work that he should really be keeping for himself. This is not good. It doesn't benefit the team or the

project and, in reality, only opens the team up for errors and problems later on down the line.

On the other hand, when a manager delegates work he is giving his team members specific projects that were deliberately designed for the team. The tasks he delegates are designed to help the team members learn about the task and do their jobs more effectively. Tasks that are delegated are meant to help employees grow.

When you look at those two terms it makes the task of delegating a little more palatable. Know the difference between the two words and if you ever find yourself questioning a task just stop and ask yourself – am I abdicating or delegating? The answers will make your task much easier!

Understanding The Principles Of Delegation

Learning to practice delegation of authority is one of the most difficult tasks for new managers. Part of the problem is that they don't understand the main principles of delegation. In this section, I'm going to outline what they are so that you can think about them and make an assessment about your personal situation.

1. How well do you know your team members, and how well do you know yourself? If you don't know each other well enough, you may be hesitant to delegate your authority because you have a lack of trust or experience.
2. Have you assessed the strengths and weaknesses of each person on your team? Everyone has strong and weak points. Making a quick assessment will enable you to properly delegate work to the person most suited for each individual task.
3. Does your organisation have written job descriptions? If so, know what they are and determine if there are any legal limitations to whether or not you can go outside of those descriptions when assigning tasks.
4. Understand the requirements of each and every job. If you don't understand the instructions you shouldn't expect that anyone else will either.
5. Evaluate your communication skills. Are you constantly working with your employees to make sure they understand the task and to ensure they are making progress?
6. After the project is complete, look back on the process you used and determine if you should make any changes the next time you delegate a task.

You're almost guaranteed success if you can learn to incorporate the above principles into your day to day delegation interactions. As always, there's no reason for you to try to do everything on your own. Start the delegation process as soon as you can!

Breaking Down The Delegation Process

As we have discussed, the first time I found myself preparing to delegate a task I had an overwhelming sense of worry. After all, up until that point I had taken responsibility for every single project I'd ever worked on. What if my team didn't live up to my expectations?

As a manager, this is exactly the sort of thought process you need to break away from. As we've discussed before, you've chosen the members of your team for a reason – they're all skilled enough to get the job done!

Now you simply have to learn HOW to delegate a task. There are three main components to consider:

- 1. Assigning the task**
- 2. Granting your employee the authority to complete the task**
- 3. Creating accountability**

Assigning the task is all well and good, but if your employee doesn't have the authority to access certain files or perform certain functions than you may as well have done the project yourself. When you make the assignment you must tell your employee exactly what he has the authority to do, especially if that means granting authority he doesn't necessarily have.

You also need to make sure your employee is accountable for the project once it's been assigned. Make it clear that the task is not optional – it must be completed within a reasonable amount of time.

The three parts of the delegation process don't happen automatically just because you decide to delegate a task. You must clearly communicate your ideas, visions, and goals to the employees you're working with. Make sure you touch all of the bases and you'll have a properly completed project exactly when you expect to receive it!

Effectively Delegating Tasks To Your Team

When you delegate tasks to your teammate, you should also be delegating the autonomy and ownership of that task to them. If you don't you undermine the value of their work and send messages of mistrust.

First of all, think of the benefits of allowing your team member to take on more responsibility. They will take greater pride in the work and its success, they will work smarter and more productively, they will use more of their creativity, and they will learn more ideas for the future. So, how do you create ownership and allow them to flourish in their new-found responsibility? Here are some ideas...

Show Them The Big Picture

This lets people feel confident and create the best results. If you do this, they will know how this project or task relates to the bigger goals. Make sure they know how their success will impact others or the organisation, and your customers.

Take A Step Back

Difficult, I know, but essential. If you want people to have ownership, you have to give it to them. If you want others to own a project or task, you have to turn it over to them, and let them do it. Also, when you have mentally let go of the project or task, it's easier to concentrate on the things you need to do.

Support Them

Once you have delegated, you then support. Be there to guide but not direct. Be a facilitator to. If it is their responsibility, they need to own it – if you rescue them by taking it back, you destroy their confidence and show them through your actions (however well intentioned) that they never owned it to start with.

Don't Tell Them The Answers

When you have handed off the project, people will have questions. You will want to answer their questions, but resist. Ask them how they will solve their challenge, rather than solving it for them. Listen carefully (an important part of your support) and help when needed, but talk less and listen more.

Talk About The 'What' Rather Than The 'How'

By telling them how the job should be done, you chip away at their creativity. Besides, you want them to own the journey as well as the end destination. So if you have an idea of how it should be done, let your teammate find or discover it, rather than show them.

Remember; what you're trying to create are partners in the problem-solving journey. By allowing them to own the task, you get more commitment. This is very different from them simply doing a task because you didn't want to do it. Think of delegating tasks that will develop their skills and thinking abilities. That way, the pride in commitment grows and the instilling of ownership flourishes.

Reducing The Fear Of Delegating To Improve Your Managerial Skills

In this report we have talked about understanding what delegation is and how to delegate effectively, but it is still expected for you to be a little hesitant sometimes – especially when delegating very important tasks or when delegating to new members of your team who you may not have worked with for very long.

So in this final section we are going to look at 4 ways in which you can reduce the fear of delegating so that you can delegate more effectively and improve your skills as a manager.

Put In Milestones

If they feel they are trusted, employees will put a lot of effort and creativity into a project. However, we still need to keep tabs on how it's going, so we need to act as an autopilot, checking on how the project is advancing. Putting milestones in place, with specific meeting times and ideas on where they will have progressed by that time, will help you both to determine progress and resist the need to be continually looking over their shoulder. That way, you are able to deal with any variation from the planned path before it becomes a crisis.

Get Lots Of Feedback

One of the best ways to delegate effectively is to coach. This means that instead of telling people what to do, you ask more questions, allowing the employee to come up with the answers. This encourages creative thought and builds confidence in them 'owning the results'. If they ask you for advice, feel free to ask them first what they think. This helps you to resist the temptation to take over the project, and helps establish trust and credibility in the employee, as they actually prove they know what to do with the project.

Be A Supporter

A strong support network should always be in place. The best way to support a delegated employee is to establish ground rules and norms when they need to make enquiries or ask for further resources. The support should help them develop their skills and get the project completed, not actually take it over from them. Allow them to ask for whatever assistance they need and discuss how this support will improve efficiency and effectiveness.

Praise Their Successes, Learn From Their Mistakes

It's always said that the best way to motivate an employee is to show them how valuable they are. Giving praise for a job well done is free and very effective. Don't overdo it, or it will become patronising. Recognise when they have done an effective job, and they will feel the pride in having accomplished a goal that will drive them forward.

If something goes wrong (time-delays, quality problems, etc) resist the temptation to jump and take over or discipline the employee. Ask what you personally can learn from them not achieving the goal. Did you miss something out at the beginning? Was your checking-in process not robust enough? Was the task too stretching?

By recognising what you need to do to rectify any shortcomings, you will ensure the same mistakes are not carried forward to the next project.

About MTD



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