How to Delegate Effectively

Managers get things done through other people. They delegate primarily because it makes their job easier. If they try to do everything themselves, they become unnecessarily burdened; their performance and health deteriorate; they fail to develop their staff adequately; and, in time, the organization will suffer. Indeed, many writers believe that the ability to delegate is the main distinguishing feature between good and bad managers. Knowing how to delegate is, therefore, a crucial management and leadership skill.

1. From your prioritized jobs, select one to delegate.

List in priority order those tasks you might consider delegating. To qualify for this list, a task should be taking too much of your time, be not strictly related to your key role, be rather routine, be appropriate and challenging for another staff member, or be better undertaken by someone with more appropriate skills or know how than yours. The purpose of delegating is not just to dodge work or to unload unrewarding, tedious, or difficult tasks-nor should you retain only the jobs you enjoy. Select a task that could and should be delegated.

2. Define clearly for yourself the task to be delegated.

Clarify in your own mind the task to be delegated. Think through the task so that you can outline it clearly. For example, be able to provide details of:

• the expected results or product

• how the task might be approached

• subtasks within the overall task

• the limits of authority

• the necessary time lines

• how you will know the task is done

• what resources will be required

• what training might be necessary.

Understand the task fully yourself so that you will later be able to brief a staff member thoroughly.

3. Select the right person for the job.

As a good manager, you should be aware of the strengths and limitations of your staff and delegate accordingly. Ideally, the person you choose should have the ability, knowledge, skills, enthusiasm, talent, and time needed to get the job done. Unfortunately, such qualities are not always found in the one person. So, before selecting someone, ask yourself:

• Who has the necessary skills?

• Who would be most challenged?

• Who would learn most? Who would benefit least?

• Does the task require previous experience? Will training be needed?

• What particular personal qualities are needed? Who has them?

• Who can be trusted to do the job?

• What other workloads does that person have?

• Is more than one person needed? If so, can they work together successfully?

• Who would enjoy a job like this? How will others react?

Delegation to the right person should improve skills, morale, and esteem.

4. Conduct a thorough briefing.

In handing over the assignment, be prepared to set aside adequate time in private to communicate clearly:

• the scope of the task

• the specific results required

&bull: the time schedule and deadlines

• the available resources

• the authority needed to carry out the job

• how performance can be measured

• sensitive or risky aspects of the task

• reporting procedures

• your confidence in the person you select.

Ask for feedback and encourage questions to eliminate any confusion.

5. Delegate appropriate authority.

When you give people a job, make sure you tell them how much authority you are handing over. For example: • 'Look into the problem; suggest three solutions; and I'll choose the best.'; or

• 'Look into the problem; tell me how you plan to solve it; and do so unless I tell you otherwise.'; or • 'Solve the problem and tell me when you're finished.'

Set parameters and establish controls to ensure this authority and the accompanying power will be properly used. If necessary, inform other relevant staff.

6. Keep lines of communication open.

When you delegate, you do not abdicate responsibility: you must maintain some control over the project. At least, agree to have your delegate inform you only when things are not going according to plan. Be accessible but not meddlesome. The delegate should make the first contact.

7. Monitor progress unobtrusively.

Keep an eye on your delegate's progress without intruding. If necessary, confirm in advance how often progress is to be reported. As the delegate gains confidence, tactfully withdraw-but remain alert for problems. Help if asked to do so.

8. Reward performance.

Appreciate a job well done by recognizing good work privately and publicly. Sincere recognition will increase your effectiveness in working with others.

9. Delegate as part of a master plan.

Review the project on its completion to make sure your delegate has also gained from the task. See delegation as part of the planned growth of your staff. Through delegation, they grow in confidence; and they-and your organization- will benefit in the long run.

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