

Empowering leaders know the value of delegation. It not only benefits the manager by freeing up time so that he or she can lead more effectively, but also benefits the employee by developing them and helping them to feel valued. Brin Bendon explains the art of delegation...

Over to you

If I delegate responsibility for work to you, it means that I trust you to do a good job. If I never let go and delegate responsibility to you, it sends out a very negative message and you feel that I don't trust you enough. In turn you feel undervalued and distrustful of me.

So why do managers procrastinate over delegation? Managers are reluctant to delegate for many reasons:

- Fear of letting go and losing control
- Not being organised
- Failure to trust people
- Feeling indispensable
- Intolerant of differences
- Unwilling to let others take over the managers favourite tasks
- Afraid that others might perform tasks better than themselves

Such managers will often make excuses such as 'I'm the only one who can do this job.' 'In the time that I would need to tell someone what to do, I could have done it myself.' 'I'll only end up having to spend time doing it all over again.' 'Nothing that I do can be delegated.'

Your unwillingness to delegate any task that is under your control means that others never get a chance to prove they can do it. It may well be that you are the best person to do the job, but doing it prevents you from doing more. The belief that it is quicker to do the job yourself than to teach others is a view that guarantees that you end up doing it all yourself.

It does take time to coach people, but this is a far better use of your

time than continually getting involved in activities which detract from your efficiency. Many of the reasons given for not delegating have to do with the perceived lack of time, yet, it is a known fact that if time is considered to be the problem, it is usually the will to delegate that is really lacking.

There are also those who think they are really good at delegating because they give so many tasks away. But they may not have grasped that there is a considerable difference between delegation and abdication. If you give too much away, it means that:

1) People may have responsibility, but not authority, so they have little influence in getting things done should others prove unco-operative,

2) People can be asked to carry out tasks which are outside their skills and abilities, so they are unlikely to be able to complete them satisfactorily, and

3) People may not understand how their given task fits into the overall picture, so they are unable to produce their best work for the circumstance. The consequence is, that when people do not achieve results, they may become unresponsive and unwilling to take on anything extra.

So, despite your attempts to delegate, you end up having to do it all yourself. Even if people do achieve results, they can end up feeling disillusioned because they are doing all the donkey work while you appear to be taking any credit that is going. Giving too much away, is, in fact, just

as bad as not giving away anything at all.

There are many good reasons for delegating including making better use of your time, developing the skills of others and being able to get on with other important tasks.

To be effective however, delegation needs clear lines of accountability, clear responsibilities with the authority and adequate resources for people to do the task. It is unfair of managers to make people responsible without giving them the authority or the resources they need. It is also unfair to delegate tasks to people who have not been trained in the execution of such tasks. Hence we only fully delegate responsibilities to people who have been trained and are competent to perform the tasks.

The key to effective delegating is to be able to answer three basic questions:

- What job can I give away?
- What does the job involve?
- What do I need to do to ensure that people know what they are doing?

Deciding which tasks to delegate

It is a mistake to think that you can delegate any task that takes your fancy, possibly because you do not feel like doing it. Or, because you have to keep someone busy. Deciding what to delegate requires you to consider everything you do and to make a list of the tasks you do under four headings:

Circle of Delegation

Adapted from Eugene J Bengo



■ **Tasks you must delegate.** These are jobs you should not be doing at all. Very often they are jobs you have always done, or jobs which you particularly enjoy and are reluctant to give away to anybody else. Delegating these tasks enables you to make better use of your time while minimising the risk involved in handing them over to others.

■ **Tasks you should delegate.** These are routine jobs which you may never have considered delegating but which other people are quite capable of carrying out. Not only that, they could also find them both interesting and challenging to take on.

■ **Tasks you can delegate.** These are jobs which others could be doing if they were fully capable of doing so. Delegating these tasks provides them with the opportunity to develop their skills, so long as you ensure that the necessary coaching or training is forthcoming to enable them to require the requisite skills.

■ **Tasks you must retain.** These are the jobs which are your core responsibilities, such as planning ahead for future actions, selecting someone new, monitoring people's performance and effort, supporting, evaluating and rewarding people. This should prompt you to realise that you may still be carrying out some tasks which you really should have delegated years ago. However, this does not mean that you should delegate the dreary tasks while keeping all the attractive ones for yourself. Nor should you delegate work which you find difficult. If you have problems, it is unlikely that other people will do any better than you unless they are specialists.

Delegation is not the same as 'giving out work'. Giving out work is simply allocating jobs which already form part of the duties of subordinates. Delegation consists of charging the subordinate with the authority to take decisions within defined areas of responsibility. It is an effective use of peoples' time, talent and resources. We need to differentiate between responsibility, authority and accountability.

Responsibility in this context means the work delegated. The duties of the job itself.

For example, a Deputy could be given the responsibility to maintain the stock of chemicals.

Authority means charging the subordinate with the right to take decisions and the action to enable the responsibility to be successfully discharged.

For example, a Deputy could be charged with the authority of placing orders to replenish stationery.

Accountability means 'carrying the can' for the success or failure of the task. Leaders cannot shrug off their accountability by delegating. They are ultimately held to account.

For example, the Head Greenkeeper retains the accountability for controlling the course budget and should the Deputy over-order the stock, the manager still carries the can.

The task, duty and authority can be delegated; accountability cannot. You continue to 'carry the can'. So, before delegating any of the tasks you have selected as suitable, you need to evaluate how much of a risk you are taking when you pass on a job for which you are ultimately answerable. In practical terms, this means assessing.

1) How much risk - what are the consequences of the job being mis-managed and what are the chances of that happening?

2) How much responsibility - what obligations which you are relied upon to care about are you handing over?

3) How much authority - what extent of your command and control will you be giving up?

Deciding who can do it

Once you have decided which tasks can, and should, be done by others, you have to decide who could do them. Ideal delegation is that which assigns a task to a person who is competent to do it, and who will find it stimulating and challenging. To get as near as possible to this ideal, you should look at the task you have decided to delegate and match it against the skills of the people who might best execute it. Not everybody is at the same stage of development in their knowledge and skills.

Considering capabilities. When deciding who might do a particular task, you should start by consulting your list of skills, and then consider the capabilities of the people available. You are likely to find that people tend to fall into three categories when you come to determine their abilities.

1) **Star performers** - these are your very experienced people. It is essential that they are left alone once the task has been handed over, unless help is requested.

2) **Average performers** - these are fairly experienced people, but need support from time to time. It is important to check progress intermittently and monitor unobtrusively while giving encouragement.

3) **Incompetent performers** - these people need to learn how to do the task, so you may not have considered them at all. But, a lack of experience should not be confused with a lack of ability. They ought to be told how to carry out the task and given feedback if they are to gain confidence and learn quickly.

Practice these simple techniques and you will find that not only will you become more effective as a manager, but your people will become more effective, since effective delegation promotes skill development and motivation.



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