

# WHY THEY FAIL TO DELEGATE

By DR. NEWEL W. COMISH

Everyone is limited in what he can do personally by having only one head, two hands and twenty-four hours in each day. The only way managers can multiply their capacity to get work accomplished is by using the heads, hands and time of subordinates. Delegation is the way of achieving this objective; yet it isn't used as extensively as it should be by most managers. Why?

The work of managers can be arbitrarily divided into two general categories: (1) Doing and (2) Managing. Doing is worth about \$1.60 per hour. Managing is worth about \$20.00 per hour. A manager must do both types of work, however, the proportion of time spent on each changes as a manager carries more responsibility.

However, every manager, no matter what his level of responsibility, has a good deal of discretion over how he allocates his time to the two categories of work. If he wants to maximize his contribution to the job, he should spend as large a portion of his time as possible on managing. To do this he must delegate as much work as possible to his subordinates, and use the control systems to assure performance. This is a well-accepted principle of management, yet it isn't practiced as extensively as it should be by most managers. Why?

The purpose of this address is to explain some of the reasons why, and thus expose the rationalizations managers use to justify their failure to delegate.

## The Superman Concept.

Some managers have a romantic view of themselves as the indispensable fount of wisdom; the pivot upon which their organization must turn. They must provide leadership, in all aspects of the work of their subordinates. They feel they must make all the decisions and create all the new ideas.

Managers who believe in the "Superman Concept" usually have some easily recognizable characteristics... They are poor listeners... After all, why listen? Subordinates, they believe, do not have anything worthwhile to listen to. Using this line of reasoning they justify the rudeness with which they cut into subordinates' comments... After all, it saves time and keeps the manager in the conversational spotlight.

Such managers tend to be very impatient with subordinates who may not move or think as fast as they do, and often embarrass subordinates before others to display their superiority. On the other hand, this type of manager has a "thin skin" when he is criticized for his shortcomings.

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## WHY THEY FAIL TO DELEGATE (Continued)

"Superman" managers are prone to make quick decisions on inadequate information. They force themselves to do this for they believe that a delay in making a decision shows weakness.

"Superman" managers tend to be more interested in *how* a job is done than in results. They want to be sure the job is done their way. They spend too much time checking on subordinates to be sure the work is being done their way, which limits the time they can spend on managing.

Such managers create problems for themselves. The lack of time to manage results in the inevitable inefficiency and confusion which is usually blamed on the inadequacy of subordinates. The authoritarian approach they use is resented by their subordinates; morale is low and listlessness replaces initiative.

### Action Equals Productivity.

A variation of the "Superman Concept" is the belief that managers should work harder than subordinates. Those who have this point of view equate with productivity. They are busy all the time. They seem to be fearful that delegation will leave them with nothing to do.

A reflection of the A.E.P. attitude is the belief that the only difference between managing a large unit and a small one is hard work. It just requires that the manager move faster and put in longer hours. Men who believe this fail to understand why they seem to have reached a ceiling on their advancement. At the same time, they are a bit fearful of a bigger job for they are unable to run any faster or put in more hours than they are doing now on their present job. These are the type of men who ruin their home life and kill themselves by overwork.

A.E.P. men have some common characteristics. They are usually extremely busy. Their subordinates have a tough time getting in to see them. When they do get to see the boss they have trouble making their point for the boss is constantly being interrupted or distracted by telephone calls, pressing paperwork and unsolved problems that "only the boss can handle." Such managers complain that they are always behind in their paperwork. They also complain about being overworked, but don't really mean it.

One of the objectives of delegation is to turn over to subordinates all the work they can do so the manager can spend most of his time managing.

### Regression.

When a manager spends a good deal of his time doing the work of his subordinates he has probably regressed to the security of the work he did before he was promoted. Regression is pathetic. Managers who regress justify themselves by claiming to be giving "leadership" to their subordinates. What they are really doing is avoiding the unfamiliar, and to them, unpleasant work of a manager by involving themselves with the familiar and pleasant work of subordinates.

The symptoms of regression are easy to recognize. A regressive manager is seldom in his office for he is off providing "leadership." The operation of the unit managed by a regressive manager is uneven. Those areas of interest to the manager are well handled but the others are not.

Subordinates turn to others for leadership. This situation provides an excellent development ground for management talent. The man that fills the leadership vacuum gains excellent experience as a manager without carrying the title. Thus the seemingly illogical situation exists where a poor manager becomes an excellent developer of managers.

### Lack of Time.

It is tempting for the impatient manager to take the easy way out by doing the job himself. If he does the job it gets done quickly and done just the way the manager wants it done. All the time-consuming and often frustrating work of delegation is avoided. If delegation is to work effectively subordinates must be told what to do, taught how to do it, motivated to do it, and checked upon. This takes time, but it must be done. There is no other way for a manager to multiply himself through people.

Managers must force themselves to spend the time and effort necessary to make delegation work. The time spent in delegating should be looked upon as an investment which will pay off later in a reduction of the workload of management. Managers cannot afford the time that a lack of delegation wastes.

### Lack of Confidence in Subordinates

Some managers fail to delegate because they fear that their subordinates might make a mistake, which in turn will reflect unfavorably upon the manager. Subordinates will

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make mistakes, but it is one of the standard risks of management. If a manager has done a good job of selection, training and motivation, the errors that result will be few. Errors are a low price to pay for the motivation and effort that results from the opportunity to exercise initiative subordinates receive through delegation.

Another aspect of the confidence problem is the fear that subordinates will not do the job as well as the manager. This is the traditional refuge of the perfectionist and the manager with the overdeveloped ego. A manager should look upon the imperfection of a subordinate's job as a challenge to overcome through effective instruction and motivation. Most subordinates, if properly taught and motivated, can learn to do a job as well, and often better, than the boss. Even if it is not possible to get a subordinate to achieve perfection, it is wiser to accept imperfection to save management's time to devote to more rewarding tasks.

If, in spite of reasonable efforts, a subordinate continues to be incapable of performing tasks to the boss' satisfaction, then the subordinate should be replaced. It would be depressing to know how many subordinates remain on the payroll year after year doing unsatisfactory work, because the manager lacks the courage to replace them.

### Fear of Subordinates.

Some managers are concerned that the work they delegate to subordinates will provide the opportunity for the subordinate to get too much recognition. They feel such recognition will have one of several undesirable effects:

1. Recognition for the subordinate, not the boss.
2. Reduction in the boss' stature by doing a better job than the boss could do.
3. Requests for an increase in pay.
4. Promotion of the subordinate out of the manager's control.
5. Or in extreme cases, promotion of the subordinate to replace the boss.

These deep seated fears of an insecure manager not only inhibit delegation, but encourage a variety of other bad management practices such as hiding talent and using high paid subordinates to do low skilled jobs.

When a manager lets these concerns get the better of his good judgement, he hurts the subordinate, the organization for which he works and himself. He hurts the subordinate by stunting his growth and frustrating his advancement. He hurts the organization for the contributions the subordinates can make, in both the short and long run, are blocked. And finally, he hurts himself, for managers are usually paid and promoted on the basis of their ability to get work done through others, not on the basis of their ability to do the work their subordinates should do.

Although a manager may agree with the logic of delegation, it still takes a lot of intestinal fortitude, patience and unselfishness to delegate.

Higher management has the responsibility to provide the leadership and the environment that encourages, rather than stifles delegation. When promotions are based on factors other than merit, it adds fuel to the fears that block delegation.

### Lack of Planning.

Effective delegation requires planning, particularly if the tasks to be delegated are complex. The plans must include the establishment of priorities, the setting of objectives, the determination of how, when or how well a task will be done, and finally who will do it. This type of planning is hard to do and some managers find it to be unpleasant. The alternative is to do the work themselves so they can do their thinking as they go along. This is not good management; unfortunately, it happens altogether too often.

### Lack of Leadership.

The natural tendency of a manager is to do as the boss does. If the boss doesn't practice delegation, the course of least resistance is to do likewise. If the boss got where he is with his present methods of management, it seems logical that his subordinate managers should follow suit. Also there is the fear that the boss will criticize and embarrass a subordinate for delegating more work than the boss' standards allow.

It takes courage to delegate when there is a lack of leadership. The exercise of such courage is likely to win more praise than criticism for the increased production and higher morale that usually accompany effective delegation.

### Conclusion.

The rationalizations, fears and lack of planning and leadership that prevent managers from delegating as much authority and responsibility as they should, don't stand up under common sense analysis. It is unfortunate, however, they still prevent delegation, and are thus *limiting the growth of the manager, frustrating his subordinates and short-changing the institution for which they all work.* This is a human and economic waste.

### EDITOR'S NOTE:

Dr. Newel W. Comish is Professor of Business Administration and Acting Chairman of the Department of Business Administration, Florida Technological University, Orlando, Florida.

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