



The necessary art of delegation

by JOHNNY CULLISON

When your workload expands beyond your physical and time limitations and employees are added, delegation, however informal, *must* take place. It's needed in all but the smallest of organizations.

Delegation is more art than science.

When I think of science, I think of formulas and gear ratios and levers; things that I can measure and quantify. Successful delegation, however, depends on variables such as individual moods, and job and family relationships.

Even so, delegation can be charted. For instance, most of us are familiar with an "organization" chart. It shows the president at the top, then the executive vice president below that, followed by the assistant vice president, then it branches out to the various department heads or managers.

But instead of looking at it as an organization chart, look at it as a "delegation" chart, and focus on these benefits of delegation:

▶ It allows us, as managers, to extend our influence beyond the boundaries of time and space.

▶ It optimizes resources, allowing us to combine human resources in ways to minimize the weaknesses and maximize the strengths of the entire group.

▶ It allows completion of a task at the lowest cost, although this isn't absolute. Sometimes the least expensive resources aren't available. Sometimes the need to complete a task overrides economic considerations. Sometimes it's desirable to use more expensive resources to build a spirit of cohesion within a group.

▶ It's probably the best way to develop the leadership skills of subordinates. Most of us learn better by practice. A manager can strengthen the confidence and the ability of a team to take on greater responsibilities.

While we realize that we have to delegate responsibility, we must also delegate an equal proportion of authority. Otherwise it's like asking someone to mow grass

Four keys to proper delegation

1. Evaluate—Completing any task requires both the investment of human and, usually, mechanical resources. Both of these resources translate directly into financial requirements. Any attempt to delegate tasks will be futile unless adequate resources can be allocated.

2. Educate—All the resources in the world are useless unless they can be properly applied. Employees must be trained in basic job skills as well as in safe work practices. Certain types of training are now required by law and must be documented for review by regulatory officials. Leadership development is also essential to the growth and longevity of every organization. Individuals with leadership potential should be identified and encouraged.

3. Communicate—Management philosophies and expectations must be clearly communicated before they can be applied. Employees are not mind readers, yet we often act as if they are. We expect them to act on what we mean regardless of what we say. Beyond philosophies and expectations, we must also communicate basic task information. It is important to communicate the task—not the procedure. If employees are told every move to make, they soon become mental cripples, dependent entirely on someone else to do all the thinking.

4. Validate—Inspect completed work to see that it is completed properly and in a reasonable amount of time. Talk with employees to get suggested changes or improvements and to determine whether or not they are satisfied with the finished product. Provide feedback to employees. Give praise for jobs well done and correction where needed. □

without a blade.

Establishing boundaries or limits of authority is also necessary. Some of the more common limits include:

Authority to hire and fire employees. Most first-line supervisors aren't given sole authority to add additional or fire present employees. They must, however, be directly involved in the process.

Authority to acquire and dispose of assets. Few operations have the type and quality of equipment to do the best job possible. Authority to add or replace equipment is almost always limited. Limits may be based on types of equipment or on dollar values.

Expenditure limits. I know of no manager at any level who has a blank check. Limits may be determined by dollar amount, capital equipment threshold, or as needed for routine operations. Managers must maintain good communication lines about financial matters.

Rarely, however, is the "art" of delegation a straight-forward proposition.

A manager's ego, guilt (feeling uneasy about asking others to perform unpleasant tasks), and fear of losing control complicate the process.

It's scary to let others have such a significant role in controlling your destiny. It is, however, very rewarding to share the credit for collective successes.

As one of my former employees once said (and he surely wasn't the first to say it): "You can do anything there is to do in this department, but you can't do everything." **LM**

—The author is assistant vice president for physical plant at Oklahoma Baptist University, Shawnee, Oklahoma. Cullison presented these remarks at the 1995 Institute of Parks and Grounds Management in Toledo, Ohio, this past winter.

ALCA technician exam readied

The National Landscape Technician Council, chaired by Gary Thornton, CCLP, Thornton Gardens, Maineville, Ohio, finalized the certification exam for exterior landscape technicians. ALCA purchased the exam in 1994 from the California Landscape Contractors Association.

The test, standardized for national distribution and also modified to reflect regional variations, will be offered for the first time this spring. The test is designed to assess an exterior technician's knowledge and skills.

So far, 13 states and two Canadian provinces had signed on with ALCA to become licensees of the program. They are California, District of Columbia, Illinois, Maryland, New York, North Carolina, Oregon, South Carolina, Texas, Utah, Virginia, Washington and Wisconsin. Also British Columbia and Ontario.

For more information on this program, contact Vicki Buswell at (800) 395-2522.

New Certified Landscape Pros

In a separate ALCA program, the following people passed the Certified Landscape Professional (exterior) examination: Dennis Barriball, Hemlock Landscapes, Inc., Chagrin Falls, Ohio; Colleen Cotten, Gardener's Guild, San Rafael, Calif.; Thomas Heaviland, Heaviland Enterprises, Vista, Calif.; Patrick DeZeeuw, Botanical Technologies, Dallas, Tex.; Scott Hall, Classic Landscaping, Woodsboro, Md. All now get to use the "CLP" designation with their names.

Bertotti honored

Bertotti Landscaping, Novato, Calif., earned a Judge's Award in the 1995 ALCA Exterior Environmental Improvement Awards program. The project was a private residence and highlighted a natural swimming pool and spa with waterfalls. Bertotti Landscaping placed more than 600 tons of boulders in and around the pool. The pool structure was engineered to withstand an earthquake of 8.0 on the Richter scale.

Record turnout

ALCA says its conference this past November in Fort Worth drew a record 662 landscape professionals, the most ever. Judging by attendance, the most popular session was Dr. Gerry Faust's "Building a Successful Management Team" which played to standing-room-only for three hours.

The 1996 conference is set for Nov. 17-21 at the Omni Netherland Plaza in Cincinnati, Ohio.

NY conference cooks

The New York State Turfgrass Association reports its 1995 show was the most successful in the association's history. More than 1800 attended, and 347 companies exhibited. Among the highlights, Dr. Norman Hummel, ex-turf program director at Cornell University, received the NYSTA Citation of Merit for his contributions to the turfgrass industry.

The 1996 show will be held November 12-15 in Rochester.

1995 Operating ratio study

If you're curious about how your lawn care company stacks up with others in the industry, get PLCAA's 1995 *Operating Efficiency Study for the Lawn Care Industry*.

PLCAA executive vice president Ann E. McClure describes the study as a "snapshot of how resources are allocated and priorities lie."

The "snapshot" shows that the industry is widely divergent in both operating methods and key financial results. According to the study, "size alone is a significant factor

in operating results. The data suggest that higher profitability is earned, not through sheer size, but rather by achieving operating economies within a tightly defined and managed market."

Prepared by Wall-Bruning Associates, Inc., Columbia, S.C., the study contains geographical, sales statistics and major business emphasis sections.

To order a copy, contact PLCAA at (800) 458-3466. Fax is (770) 578-6071.