



## BEST PRACTICES

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# Delegate for success

One of the things we do as consultants when we look at a company is to evaluate how well a team functions. We frequently see companies that work very hard, but always seem to be playing catch up. We also notice that many people in middle management, such as account managers and production supervisors, seem to be doing the work of their subordinates. This occurs through all levels of management — even owners doing things that should be done by someone else.

The simple cause of this is the willingness to accept upward delegation. It sometimes starts at a crew leader level. The crew leader is doing too much work himself or riding the large mower — because that is what he did so well to become the crew leader — and neglects his crew leader duties. The result is the crew leader's supervisor, a production manager or account manager picks up the slack and gets consumed doing crew leader work, thereby neglecting his own work, which in turn gets delegated to his boss.

This ultimately results in a dysfunctional team. Often, criticism is directed at the affected manager, saying that he is disorganized or is unable to multi-task. To a degree it is true, but it is also a result of a dysfunctional culture. Lack of proper

delegation becomes a destructive habit of an organization. It's like the whole organization becomes addicted to urgency. People like to *get things done* and do not take the time out to look at what is really happening.

So, how do you correct this problem? I think it is similar to an addiction. First, you have to realize that you actually have the problem. Recognition starts the road to recovery. Individuals must then take two key steps:

1. Stop accepting upward delegation. If an employee is not getting the job done, stop doing it for them.

2. Learn to develop the discipline to delegate.

People tend not to delegate for several reasons, including that it is sometimes easier to do it themselves. The person who should have done the task does not learn, and you are set up to continue to have to do it for him or her. Another reason can be timeliness of getting it done. *It must be done now*. If you do it, no one learns — and you are set up to continue in that pattern. A lack of trust can also contribute to the problem.

You have to break the pattern and start holding people accountable. I recommend starting each day by looking at your to-do list with the specific goal of identifying the things that should be delegated. Then, delegate them.

Success in delegation starts with clear instruction and some coaching. Some people like to have the person receiving the delegation repeat back what he or she was told to ensure that it is understood. This takes time, but saves time in the long run. Successful delegation is completed when you follow up to see that what was delegated was accomplished.

If you can get everyone on your team delegating properly, you will see a tremendous improvement in your organization. It will not solve all problems, but it will make most people more effective — and you will see an improvement in organizational accountability.

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