

Six Simple Steps to Effective Delegation

What is delegation?

"Never do anything that someone paid less could"

You can no longer expect to be in control of everything, even though this can cause anxiety and insecurity. Are you one of those managers who reacts to uncertainty about the future by tightening your control even further (introducing more policies/systems/procedures or withdrawing into hands-on activity and over concern for the detail)?

Getting things done through others is accepted as an essential aspect of the process of management. Implicit in this definition is the notion of delegation. It is, however, surprising to find that many managers experience difficulty in seeing that improving their ability to delegate may actually offer a solution to, at least, some of their problems.

Delegation does *not* mean abdicating one's responsibilities. Delegating effectively is, in fact, a prime responsibility of the manager. It can be regarded as a means by which results can be achieved, through the empowering and motivating of others to carry out tasks, for which you are ultimately accountable, to a specified level of performance.

Step 1 ~ Recognising the opportunity

The need for delegation

Some managers will claim that their jobs don't allow them to delegate. If this sounds like you, ask yourself the following questions about particular tasks for which you are accountable:

- Is there someone who can do the task better than you can? Are you really benefiting from the expertise of your staff?
- Is there someone who, while doing the task slightly different from you, or in slightly more time, can still achieve an acceptable level of performance?
- Is there someone who is paid less than you who can do the task satisfactorily thus lowering the cost of task performance?
- If you can't do the task until tomorrow, is there someone who can do it today?
- Is there someone who would benefit from doing the task, in terms of personal development?

If you are honest with yourself, you will probably be able to answer YES, to at least some of these questions. If so, you and your business may well be able to benefit from more effective delegation.

How will you benefit from effective delegation?

The easiest way to save your time is to use someone else's. A key benefit of delegation is freeing up your time for future oriented, strategic tasks such as developing teamwork, improving service, updating systems, etc. However do bear in mind the additional benefits

- Makes more efficient use of your budget - costs less for staff members rather than you to perform the same task.
- Your business attracts top performers who seek out and enjoy challenges; conversely forces out poor performers who don't want to be challenged.
- Work won't come to a halt when you are out of the office.
- Promotes teamwork and generates new ideas; as others get involved in more tasks, they have a better understanding of the overall business, and how things can be improved.

Bear in mind

- People who feel they will be praised for good results as well as constructively criticised for mistakes, are more likely to take on tasks in the first place
- The degree to which paperwork, queries and interruptions are handled when you are away from the office highlights a practical reality, that you do many low pay-off activities which could be done by others
- Your people are more likely to fail through your doubting their abilities than through their own inexperience
- In order to be effective at delegating you must believe:
 - People want to improve
 - Ordinary people can perform in extraordinary ways

Typical excuses

- *"It takes too much time to explain, I can do it quicker"*
In the short-term yes, but in the longer term if you delegate you are saving time
- *"They aren't yet capable"*
And never will be unless you start incorporating delegation as part of your people's development plans
- *"No-one, except me, is up to it"*
Maybe, but are you being too much of a perfectionist? Does the task need such a degree of excellence? If not, maybe someone can do the job adequately in less time
- *"I enjoy these tasks - losing them would make my job less interesting"*
In the longer term, improvement in staff morale and performance will make your job easier and just as enjoyable
- *"I delegate some things - the things I hate"*
Consider whether simply discarding and offloading work you don't want to do is the most effective way to develop and motivate people
- *"If someone else does it I'll lose control and respect"*
You'll lose more control and more respect by not devoting enough time to managing the whole business effectively because you are too wrapped up in the detail

Action step 1

What will you gain from delegating more effectively?

What are the things holding you back?

What one step could you take today to start to overcome any of these?

Step 2 ~ Identifying what to delegate

Make a shopping list of the things you do:

How many tasks could you pass on?

- Which tasks don't you delegate because you like them? *Should you be delegating any of these?* (see 'excuses' above)
 - Which tasks do you delegate because you hate them? *Are there any you should be doing yourself?* (see 'excuses' above)
 - If the job and the decision-making involved is sufficiently routine, delegate it if one of your team can do it
 - better
 - quicker
 - more cheaply, or
 - if it will help to develop the subordinate
 - Don't delegate managerial tasks, which relate to the work unit as a whole, e.g. conceptual planning, morale problems. Don't delegate tasks which are your specific responsibility, e.g. reviewing individuals' performance, planning and setting staff objectives, confidential matters.
 - Which tasks need to be completed on a regular basis (rather than as a one off*), so that
 - time invested will pay off over time
 - the person who takes on this task has an opportunity to practise and perfect it
- * This may still include tasks which are one off, but the process is something that can be repeated over time

Action step 2

Considering all the points above, brainstorm all the tasks you currently perform, which could **potentially** be done by someone else.

Step 3 ~ Analysing the task

Once you have a full list, consider which would give you or your team the greatest return e.g. best development opportunity, save the most time, best improvement in standards, etc.

Action step 3

What is the task and what do you hope to gain by delegating it?

Now analyse the task by asking these questions

The Task		
Origin	What is the background to this task	
Rationale	Why is this task necessary – how does it fit in with the business	
Expectation	What do I hope to achieve by delegating this task	
Objective	What is the aim of this task	
For whom	Who will benefit from the end results of this task	
Scope	What is the nature of this task – what does and doesn't it include	
Measurement		
Result	What is the desired result/output	
Criteria	What are the measures of success	
Timescale	By when should this task be accomplished	

Step 4 ~ Identify the person & the relevance to the task

Once you've decided what to delegate, identify who to:

- Take your time; if you have been under delegating - or you are dealing with less experienced staff - transfer responsibility gradually.
- Select a person for the task - not necessarily the one with the best skills or the most time. There may be good reason for delegating to a less than perfect candidate to develop their skills in areas where they are weak. Also, what they lack in experience and skill, they may more than make up for in potential and motivation.

Action step 4

Now answer the following questions

The Person		
Why them	Why is this task suited to this particular individual	
Development	What training or support will they need before they can conduct the task effectively	
Motivation	What is in it for them	
Priority	What precedence should this task have over other tasks	
Timescales	How long it is likely to take them, allowing for questions and set backs	
Others	How will others be affected	
Review		
Monitoring	How will you monitor and review performance during the task	
Deadlines	When do want the task completed, allowing buffer time for any errors	
Follow up	How will you monitor and review performance on completion	

Only when you have considered the answers to these should you brief the person.

Step 5 ~ Brief and handover

- Set a clear and simple objective for the task. It should build confidence, develop and stretch, not break the person or be considered an 'offload'.
- Discuss the assignment and, importantly, how the task fits into the big picture, why it's important for the business.
- Explain why you've chosen the person for the task - you value their judgement and aren't just pushing dross work their way.
- Provide guidance - not 'how to' do the task - but all the necessary facts, possible approaches, expected results.
 - Make suggestions, but allow scope for decision-making
 - Enthuse, by asking for their ideas and suggestion
 - Set challenges: Why do we do it this way? Can we do it smarter? Where can we improve?
- Check for understanding.
- Make a delegation 'contract' establishing resources available, how often you will follow-up, how performance will be measured.
- Establish controls - budget, deadline, when and how a formal review will take place.
- Delegate, then trust them to get on with it. Make yourself available, particularly at critical times, but let them decide whether, and whenever, they need your help and guidance.
- Publicise that the task has been delegated - recognition is all part of the motivational mix and the challenge to succeed.

Action step 5

Where and when will the briefing take place?

Step 6 ~ Review

- Evaluate the finished project. Remember, you are not looking for perfection and you cannot expect them to complete the task in the same time or same standard you might do yourself. Ask yourself, has it got the task done to achieve its objective?
- Before feeding back consider
 - what went right, and what didn't go well for them
 - what went right, and what didn't go well for you, and identify lessons learned
 - how to develop the process for next time
- Ask them for their own evaluation – if you have set measurable criteria for success they will generally be able to tell you what went well and where things could be improved without you having to point these out
- Ensure that any additional feedback you give on specifics covers
 - what they did well, how it helped and praise for a job well done
 - what they did which could be improved, and in what way it hindered the task
 - how they can build on successes / make improvement next time
- Limit the feedback to something manageable – 2 to 3 key points
- Remember the purpose of feedback is to build on performance and improve, so it needs to be motivational

Action step 6

What key points do you need to cover in your feedback?

Follow steps 3 to 6 for each new task you delegate, and review points 1 and 2 periodically to ensure you are capitalising on all opportunities to delegate.