

Leading Ways: THE ART AND IMPORTANCE OF DELEGATING

As managers move into leadership roles one of the most difficult things for many of them is to properly delegate. As most leaders have risen “up through the ranks,” they’re very familiar with all the details of a department’s functions- how everything works and how it is “supposed to be.” However, they are often no longer tasked with personally contributing to the work product or even running the functional area, but in leading and becomes impossible without effective delegation at a level beyond what they did as a manager.

Developing and using good delegation skills saves time, it develops individuals on the team, it prepares everyone for uncertain times, and it serves to motivate and inspire. Most importantly, it provides time for the leader to do the high value work in building relationships, setting directions, creating new approaches and sustaining a viable culture that is expected of them. But it has to be done in the right way. If done poorly, many of the opposite will happen and effectiveness as a leader declines.

WHY DON'T “WE” DELEGATE MORE OFTEN?

Just about every leader can improve their game by improving their delegation effectiveness, and this begins by getting some insight into what keeps them from delegating more effectively. Here are some common “reasons” for not delegating.

- It is easier to do it myself
- I don't trust others to do it the right way
- I lack confidence that it will get done right or on time
- I am insecure in my position
- I like doing the technical parts of the job
- “They” will only be happy if I do this job
- I like it the way I do it
- No one has the skills that are needed or my level of experience
- They don't have time

But when work is not effectively delegated the whole organization suffers, including the leader that is not delegating. These are the results of faulty delegation:

- Leader works too hard
- Leader doesn't get the right things done
- Leader doesn't develop others and misses the use their time and talent
- Leader does not get around to the “higher end” parts of our job
- There is no time for reflection or long-term planning
- Leader does not achieve a sustainable work/life balance

BENEFITS OF DELEGATING WELL

The benefits to the leader are the reverse of the results list above. If the leader delegates easily and with skill the impact will be significant. They will have more time to get to the priorities of their position. They will also have time to invest in their development and in delegating opportunities for the development of those around them. And they can get back the time needed for moving toward a healthy work-life balance.

Direct reports also benefit from a good regimen of delegation. If delegation is tied to a well-constructed development plan it can lead to improved skill, better understanding of the work, higher levels of engagement and motivation and greater overall satisfaction.

The larger organization also benefits as the people that make up your team are being deployed at their highest level of performance. A well thought through delegation and development plan is also the foundation of succession planning for every position on your team, including the leader. Teams, units and groups that have an effective delegator as a leader make better decisions, communicate more easily and have higher levels of productivity and satisfaction while lowering incidence of burnout and turnover.

HOW TO DELEGATE WELL

UNDERSTAND WHAT IS BEING DELEGATED

This might sound ludicrous, but it is likely that the things that are ready for delegation are things the leader could do in their sleep, so they may not be as aware of the nature of the work as you were the first time they did it. To improve, the leader needs to put themselves in that beginner's frame of mind and recall important skills, valuable context and underlying anxieties that you faced and give the person receiving the task a heads up on these. It is also really useful to ask how much of this is **task** delegation and how much is **responsibility** delegation. Always be stretching toward the responsibility end.

KNOW PERSONAL STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES

Much of this is related to the level of self-awareness of the leadership profile. As a leader do you focus more on the people or the work? Are you more creative or buttoned down? Do you tend to be anxious when losing some control of a situation? Do you like to be leading from the front of the room or behind others? The more you know yourself the more effective you will be in the next two steps of delegation.

TAILOR IT TO THEM

There are three considerations here. First, what are the strengths and capacities that are needed for this task and how much risk is involved. The delegation may need an experienced perspective, so giving the delegation to a novice will not be a good choice, even if they might have a great stretch opportunity. Second, knowing something about the leadership style of the person to receive the delegation will make things more successful. Do they like a lot of direction or less constraint? Are they naturally an open communicator or do they need prodding to offer details? Finally, some insight

into how this person learns best will make the delegation far better, but also enhance what they learn from the experience. Are they more experiential or do they do better when they are fully prepared? Do they learn better visually or verbally?

TIED IT TO DEVELOPMENT

The best way to share a delegation is in the context of giving another person the chance to learn a new skill or try on a new role. Every delegation will not have a significant development dimension, but most have more than we typically think. The only way to uncover this is by being clear about the development priorities of the people that work for you. Having a development list for each direct report that is focused, tied to assessment of performance and goals, aligned with unit, group and company goals that are shared and transparent is an essential step in effective delegation. Not every aspect of a delegation will have development potential but try to make at least a third to a half of every delegation be a stretch assignment. For more assistance on developing others go to this [link](#).

COMUNICATE

Be crystal clear on what and when, with less emphasis about how. Establish timeframes, goals and subgoals if needed, and how the project will be measured. An important part of this is making sure that the person that has received the delegation knows how much information they need to share about their progress, how often and in what format- i.e., email updates or fact-to-face summaries. At first be clear and descriptive about what is needed. As their work on the delegated project develops, switch to more questions to guide them and to draw out their critical thinking skills. One important step that is often skipped is the debrief. A few minutes to review lessons learned, problems encountered, improvement in self-knowledge and the always useful “What would you do next time,” will multiply the value of the delegation for them and their performance in the next delegation.

Get out of the way

Better development is possible if the direct report is able to be as independent as possible and the supervisor receives what they need. To do this be sure that as delegator you:

- Give the person a whole task to do.
- Ensure the person understands exactly what you want them to do.
- Provide the resources and authority to get the work done.
- Share your vision with them.
- Identify milestones when you want feedback about progress.
- Identify the measurements or the outcomes desired.
- Encourage them along the way, let them know how you see it, good and bad.
- Thank and reward them when it is over.

Improving delegation skills is one of, if not the, quickest ways to make substantial improvements in leadership effectiveness.