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DELEGATION

# learning to let go

BY LESLIE SHREVE



Have you said or heard, "I should have done it myself?" Well, you're not alone, but don't let the fact that you have lots of company stop you from pursuing the art of effective delegation.

There are many reasons why leaders should continue to work at the art of delegation. For one, it boosts productivity. In the long run, it frees up time for leaders to pursue other goals, leaving behind those tasks that are no longer a good use of their time.

It's a common misconception for leaders to avoid delegating something they think they can do better than anyone else. Instead, find someone who can do it 80 percent as well and move on. You may surprise yourself and find someone who can do it just as well as you – or better.

Another good reason to delegate is that it allows other staff members to learn, grow and become motivated by a new challenge, which increases staff retention.

The biggest reason that delegation fails is that not enough time or effort was invested into the process to begin with. When delegation goes awry, it causes erosion of confidence for the staff member, self-induced frustration for the leader and wasted time for all.

You can avoid these and other undesirable outcomes if you invest enough time and attention to the following list of things to do when delegating:

1. Define the task or project, plus the scope of responsibility and authority for your staff member. Set expectations, communicate desired outcomes and give or ask for a timeline. Avoid being rushed, vague or brief.
2. Make yourself available throughout the process and offer the resources and support necessary for successful completion. Meet periodically with your staff member to see if things are on time and on target according to plan.
3. Allow opportunities for the staff member to ask "how to" questions, but don't be too quick to answer them. Quiz your staff member. Get them thinking about what steps they will take. You can advise and course-correct along the way, but avoid micro-managing and do not be the fountain of knowledge unless you see trouble ahead. People will learn more if you let them think on their own.
4. Monitor the outcomes, provide feedback and give a review at the end. Be sure the lines of communication are open both ways so everyone learns.
5. Recognize a job well done and be open and straightforward about areas for improvement.

The point of delegation is to teach others to do (and do well) what you can no longer do or no longer want to do. Or in other cases, it's best to have more than one person know how to do certain tasks. By avoiding the process of delegation you may rob your department or business of future growth or it can cause you to lose good employees who are ready for a new challenge.

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