

# The Fine Art of Delegation

By Kathy Paauw

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“No man will make a great leader who wants to do it all himself, or to get all the credit for doing it.”

--Andrew Carnagie

Success in delegation is not measured by how you go about delegating, to whom you delegate, or how often you delegate. Your success will be judged by the results you achieve through delegation. Effective delegation does not just add to your achievements...it multiplies them. In most cases, the absence of effective delegation will slow down your progress faster than anything else. If you want to leverage your time, delegation is essential.

Delegation is more than just assigning work. It means making others accountable for the results. It means giving someone else the latitude to make decisions about how to go about reaching those results. It means letting go.

I know someone who used to bring work home every night. Each night after dinner with his family, he would go into the den and work for several more hours. One night his six-year-old daughter asked her mother, “Why does Daddy always go into the den every night after dinner?” The mother explained that Daddy had a lot of work to do that he wasn’t able to finish during the day. The daughter replied, “Then why don’t they put daddy in a slower class?” When his wife told him what their daughter had said, it jolted him into reality. He decided from that point on that he would not take work home with him anymore. The only way he could get all the work done was to delegate some of it to others. As he learned to delegate, he dramatically improved his management skills and was eventually promoted to president of the company.

Here are some tips for effective delegation:

1. Select the right person for the job. You select the delegatee for one of two reasons: This individual is best qualified and can deliver the best results...OR...This individual will most benefit from the learning experience of taking on this job. This project will contribute to his/her experience and development, which the company will draw on at a later time.

2. Provide enough information. Provide the “big picture” so the delegatee can see how the work fits into the overall operation. Don’t hoard information or keep them in the dark. Determine what success looks like so he/she has a clear picture of what you want to accomplish.

Point out the win-win. What’s in it for him/her. “Having you take this responsibility will allow me

more time to focus on XYZ, and you'll have the opportunity to learn more about what's going on outside of our department, which will better position you for that promotion you are working towards."

3. Delegate the entire job to one person and give them full authority. This will heighten the individual's interest in the project and provide a deeper sense of accomplishment and satisfaction when the task is completed. Although the ultimate responsibility lies with you, when you delegate something to someone, be sure that others know that you've given the responsibility and authority to that individual, and that they are accountable for producing the results.

One manager brings little plastic footballs to his staff meetings. When he delegates a project to someone, he writes the project name on the football. Then he tosses the ball to the delegatee and says, "You're responsible for the XYZ Project. Don't drop it." -- a dramatic way to let the delegatee and other staff know that he/she has been given responsibility, authority, and ownership for the project!

4. Focus on results, not on process. Delegate responsibility, not work. Too many managers confuse delegating responsibility with offloading work onto someone else. When assigning a project, allow the delegatee the freedom to exercise some personal initiative. Focus on what you want, not how to do it. Let him/her develop the methodology for how to achieve the goal.

There are exceptions to this. For example, if you work in an industry that requires tight control over certain processes and procedures which must be followed, then the how becomes important. (An example would be how to draw blood at a blood bank. Not following sanitation procedures could create disastrous results.)

5. Delegate through dialogue. Don't do all the talking, and don't delegate in the hall. Delegate in an environment that is conducive to fully explaining the project. Minimize interruptions and allow plenty of time for dialogue. Involve the delegatee in the discussion and encourage his/her suggestions and comments. Instead of asking "Do you understand?", ask questions such as, "Any ideas as to how you'll proceed?" You'll get a better sense of whether or not your request was clear.

6. Establish deadlines and build in accountability. Don't leave due dates uncertain or open-ended. Don't say, "Can you get this to me as soon as possible?" or "Please do this whenever you can get around to it." Be specific about when you want it done by. "I trust you to take full responsibility for getting this done. If you foresee any problems or need help, you know how to reach me. Do you see any problem in getting this done by May 31?"

7. Establish check-in dates. Be aware of the status of the project, but don't hover. Without checking on progress, you have not delegated – you've abandoned! Keep a Delegation Log [http://www.orgcoach.net/delegation\\_log.html](http://www.orgcoach.net/delegation_log.html) to help you track each task you delegate. Ask the delegatee to report progress on specific check-in dates you've negotiated.

8. Give positive and corrective feedback. Do not focus on what is wrong, but rather on what can be done to make it better. "It looks like there's a problem here. What do you need to do to get back on track?"

9. Provide the necessary resources. Point delegatee in the right direction if the work involves other people or resources needed to get the job done. "See Jim in Accounting. Sue in Purchasing can provide you with the necessary forms you'll need."

10. Offer guidance and advice without interfering. Point out the roadblocks they may encounter. "James in Purchasing never checks his e-mail, so it's best to call him for anything you need back in

a hurry. You may need to light a fire under Rick in Marketing to keep this project moving forward.”

11. Establish the parameters, conditions and terms before you delegate. Don't impose controls after you've delegated. State those up front.

12. Keep the monkey on their back. Don't let them delegate back to you. If someone brings a problem to you, you can listen without assuming responsibility for solving the problem. The delegatee may stop you in the hall and ask, "What do you think?" Turn the question around and say, "What do YOU think?" Or the delegatee may ask if it is possible to delay the deadline for another week. Again, turn the question around and say, "Is it? Will that help us reach our goals?" Or you can ask questions like:

- What recommendations do you have for how to handle this situation?
- What are some feasible alternatives?
- Which move do you suggest we go with?

In other words, don't rescue! In your dialogue, keep the focus on the delegatee and don't let them put the monkey back on you.

13. Provide back-up and support when necessary. There's a difference between rescuing and supporting. If something is not going well, provide support from behind the scenes, such as placing a discreet phone call to someone involved who is not cooperating with the delegatee. Let them know they don't have to fight their battles alone.

14. Give full credit and recognition to the person who gets the job done. Don't take the credit yourself. If the delegatee is unsuccessful, take the brunt of the blame yourself rather than using him/her as a scapegoat. If the delegatee has not developed their skills fully enough to accomplish the task, you as the manager can assume the responsibility for that. Learn from the experience so you can more effectively delegate the next time.

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