

Ten Ways To Delegate More Effectively

By Ramona Creel

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Delegation can be a tricky business. You don't want to simply "dump" distasteful work on someone else -- but you need to make sure the job gets done, and it doesn't need to be done by you. And delegating can become a particularly sensitive issues when it is latera; -- asking a fellow colleague, freelance consultant, colleague, family member, or friend for help. But by approaching delegation in the right way -- with a formalized agreement about your goals and how the project should proceed -- you can make the experience enjoyable for both parties:

STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES

When delegating a job to someone else, keep in mind the person's talents, area of specialization, and schedule. Make sure you are delegating to someone who can successfully complete the task at hand. Handing a job off to someone who is missing a key ingredient -- time, skills, resources, experience, or willingness -- will only frustrate you both.

THE LOWEST COMMON DENOMINATOR

The quickest way to turn someone off to a delegated job is to give that person an assignment that is substantially below his or her skill level. Delegate a project to the most junior person who is capable of successfully completing the job. Besides, it's silly to waste \$30 an hour on an administrative assistant when a \$10 an hour temp could complete the work.

USE DELEGATION AS A TOOL

Delegate interesting projects in addition to drudgery. You will wear your team members out if you only give them the "dregs." You want delegation to serve as an opportunity to help the other person grow and expand their skills, as well as a way for you to get menial chores done. And if you challenge your delegees today, you'll be able to give them more difficult assignments in the future (without worrying that they will be overburdened!)

KEEP A DELEGATION LOG

There's nothing more frustrating than handing a job over to someone and forgetting that you delegated it, or WHEN you delegated it, or when it was DUE BACK to you. Keep track of what projects you give to whom. You don't want to wake up at 3AM thinking, "Oh no -- did I ask my web master to update my newsletter yet, or not?" We all suffer from mid-life Alzheimer's at times, so write it down!

TELL THEM WHEN YOU WANT IT

Don't ever hand a job off with the instructions, "I need this back when you finish." Give your delegees a firm deadline along with the assignment. Although the ultimate responsibility for completion of the job lies with you, you don't want to waste all of your time chasing after someone saying, "When will you be done?"

BREAK IT INTO CHUNKS

Since the ultimate responsibility for completing a delegated project does lie with you, it's not always the best policy to wait until two days before the deadline to see what kind of progress your assistant is making. Set milestones or sub-deadlines for completing sections of the project. When you break a job up into smaller "bite-sized" pieces, it's much easier for the delegee to handle. Also, you have set up a series of natural follow-up points throughout the project. Instead of showing up the day of the final deadline, you can check in with your team member at each sub-deadline for a status report.

HAVE THEM CHECK IN

You should not have to guess how far along a delegee is in a project, at any point in the process. Ask your people REPORT their progress at regular intervals -- these milestones are the perfect excuse for a meeting or written report. This allows you to discuss any problems the person has run into, any additional resources he/she might need, and make any adjustments to your project schedule.

AGREE UPON A GOAL

Similarly, you shouldn't have to guess what kind of a finished product your assistant will hand you when the final deadline comes around. Communicate what end result you expect before you delegate the job. That might seem obvious, but few people do this thoroughly enough. Give your helpers enough to go on so they don't have to keep coming back and asking you for more information every step of the way. The whole point behind delegation is to save you time -- and that doesn't happen if you're always on the phone or in meetings clarifying requests.

LET THEM LOOSE

Once you feel the person has a firm grasp on the expected end result, allow your delegee enough freedom to decide HOW to accomplish the job. Delegation is not about "micro-managing" -- it's about letting go of a job you didn't need to do in the first place. And as long as it gets done, who cares how it was accomplished? As long as you don't get arrested, you're fine!

A PAT ON THE BACK

Give credit where credit is due! No one likes to work hard on a job for someone else and receive none of the glory. And your delegees will work harder for you in the long run if you give them a bit of praise.

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