

Delegating effectively – a balancing act

“When delegating, it is important to maintain a fine balance between interest, support and motivation on the one hand, and interference or neglect on the other.”

From Successful Delegation



The costs of NOT delegating:

- Disorganized manager
- Manager who spends inordinate # of hours completing low priority tasks
- Over worked managers
- Low morale among the underemployed staff
- Basic processes slowed by bottlenecks

Heller & Hindle

Ideally, delegation is a positive action (for example, a means of developing staff) rather than a negative one (passing on a job you don't like).

Delegating well is an essential management skill because it

- frees up our time
- increases the range of skills on our team
- motivates people by providing challenging work
- encourages us to prioritize our work and think strategically
- helps us assess the potential of our team members and ultimately contributes to succession planning.

With all of these benefits, why do so many of us avoid delegating?

Because of two primary barriers – Issues related to **Time** and **Risk**

1. Delegation takes time. It requires effort and personal investment. The pressure we feel to meet the many demands on us encourages a short-term focus. It seems wiser just to get it done ourselves especially if downsizing has left us feeling we have no one with sufficient time, competence or resources to take on additional assignments.
2. Delegation is about getting other people to do part of your job – a job that is your responsibility but need not be done completely by yourself. Therefore, there is a certain level of risk to you if the task is not done well.

Vagueness about boundaries of responsibility causes a great deal of confusion in organizations. Is it your expectation that the person you're delegating will:

- Make a decision independently with no need to report to you?
- Make a decision and then report to you?
- Make a decision only after a discussion with you?

Delegating is not simply dumping work on your staff. Make sure they have the resources needed to complete the task successfully. Be available in case they have problems or need advice.



Our behavioural style impacts our readiness or resistance to delegate:

High D (Dominant)

- You are highly subject to the time barrier described above
- You can do the task faster than most and have little patience for explaining detailed steps to others
- You find it frustrating to slow down and listen

High I (Influencer)

- You tend to delegate freely, unencumbered by either the time or risk barrier.
- Your strength is to optimistically assume that the individual you're delegating to has the skills and resources to do the task.
- However, this optimism may lead you to provide insufficient details and instruction.

High S (Steady)

- You tend to put other people's needs ahead of your own and are therefore reluctant to ask others to 'do some of your work'
- You are more willing to accept having too much on your plate – i.e., you will work longer hours or overtime in order to get it done
- Your high sense of responsibility for your work can lead to your being possessive and protective about it – therefore you are less likely to think in terms of sharing

High C (Compliant)

- You are highly subject to the risk barrier described above
- You mistakenly believe that nobody else can do the job as well as you can
- Your high need for control makes it difficult for you to let go and allow the person to complete the job independently

“An effective manager must monitor a delegated project, assuming responsibility while allowing the delegate autonomy.”

Heller & Hindle

Our behavioural style also points us to strategies that will help us be more successful when delegating:

High D (Dominant)

- Remind yourself of the long-term benefits of delegating. This will help you resist doing it yourself to save time in the short-term.
- Sell the benefits – explain exactly what’s in it for the person and take the time to listen to their thoughts or concerns.
- Be available for consultation – don’t leave people to sink or swim.

High I (Influencer)

- Be aware of your tendency to over-estimate the capabilities of others. Force yourself to assess possible problems such as – What negative impact might this have on the individual?

What is the worst case scenario for the team, the organization and the customers?

- Plan the delegation carefully and be specific about the outcomes

High S (Steady)

- Rather than thinking that you are imposing on others to do your work, remind yourself that many people WANT you to delegate challenging work to them because they want to develop their skills.
- Remind yourself of the benefits of delegation to the team, organization and customers

High C (Compliant)

- Be clear about your expectations. Delegation works best when the person taking on the job fully understands what is required and is enthusiastic and willing to take it on.
- Specify the standards you expect – e.g. You may need to specify the way the information should be presented, by when, to whom, etc. But resist telling him/her how it should be done. The person undertaking the work is responsible for deciding how best to accomplish it.
- Allocate sufficient time. Agree on a schedule and arrange to meet and compare notes along the way.
- Review and evaluate the positive outcomes of both accomplishment of the task and staff development. Address any failures constructively and make notes about what could be done the next time.



“The purpose of getting power is to be able to give it away.”

Aneurin Bevan

“Guidelines for bureaucrats:

1. When in charge, ponder.
2. When in trouble, delegate.
3. When in doubt, mumble.”

James H. Boren

Consider the person you're delegating to

It's easy to fall into the habit of delegating to the same people over and over. Why not consider what the job is and what skills and qualities are required to complete it successfully? Ask yourself whether you want someone for example:

- Who is reliable and has plenty of experience
- Who will take a risk but bring about a quick result
- Whose development will benefit from the challenge
- Who will simply absorb the workload as a matter of routine

Consider also the behavioural style of the person you're delegating the work to. It is human nature to delegate to others the way we ourselves like to be delegated to, rather than delegating the way THEY want to be delegated to.

- When delegating to someone with a Dominant style, delegate the whole task, not a chunk of it, and give them the authority for the activity also. Then let them get on with it. They require less 'hand-holding' than other styles.
- When delegating to someone with an Influencer style, be sure to clarify what the person is going to do, when it is to be done, what resources are required, and what outcome is expected. Agree on a schedule and arrange interim meetings to help keep them on track.
- When delegating to someone with a Steady style, discuss the boundaries of responsibility and be very clear about exactly what is expected. Take the time to listen for any concerns they may have. Give them time to digest the requirements of the assignment and think about how they will proceed. Ask to meet in a day or two when their questions will have surfaced. Support them through the process. They appreciate knowing when they're doing it right.
- When delegating to someone with a Compliant style, be prepared to answer their questions. They will want to comply with your requests and may need more information about the details – how, when, who, what, why, where.

This newsletter incorporates ideas from the article *Successful Delegation* in the book *Business: The Ultimate Resource*

Helpful Resources:

→ Robert Heller and Tim Hindle. *Essential Managers: How to Delegate*. 1999.

A great little book that simplifies for managers how to let go and provides the steps to delegating effectively. It is an easy-to-read reference that demystifies delegation – a user-friendly compilation of the best general, tried and true thinking on how to delegate successfully.

**Would you like to recommend a book or resource?
Please send a review and why you like it and we'll post your recommendation!**