

Effective Task and Responsibility Delegation

Delegation is often very difficult for new leaders. Many leaders want to remain comfortable making the same decisions they have always made. They believe they can do a better job themselves. They don't want to risk losing control of the situation or outcome. Often, they don't want to risk giving authority to others in case of failure.

Delegating vs. Directing

Delegating is a critical skill for leaders at any level.

Delegating involves working with a team member to establish goals and granting them sufficient authority and responsibility to achieve those goals. It often means giving them 1) substantial freedom in deciding how the goals will be achieved, 2) remaining available as a resource to help them achieve the goals, 3) assessing the quality of their effort and attainment of the goals, and 4) addressing performance issues and/or rewarding their performance. Ultimately, the leader/supervisor retains responsibility for goal attainment, but chooses to achieve the goals by delegating to someone else.

Delegating is different than directing. Work directing is telling someone what to do and how to do it. There usually is much less freedom as to how the team member does the task and many times less ownership, participation and learning on the part of the other person as well.

Delegation can sometimes be a major challenge for new leaders to learn because they are concerned about giving up control or struggling to have confidence in the abilities of others. Supervisors and leaders who can effectively delegate can free up a great deal of their own time, help their organization members to cultivate expertise in learning, and it can develop their own leadership skills -- skills that are critical for problem solving, goal attainment and learning.

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Five R's of Delegation

Repeat

Ask the team member to repeat back what is being asked of them. This will help make sure they are clear on the task at hand.

Remind

Once the task has been discussed, follow up with an e-mail reminder that summarizes the conversation and provides the basics. Do not add additional responsibility or information. This will help both the leader and the person taking on responsibility.

Reinforce

Repeating and reminding serve as reinforcement of the expectations and needs.

Record

Keeping record of the conversations will provide additional accountability and can serve as a resource for both the leader and the other team member, who may need future verification of what they have done.

Return

Returning to the conversation at agreed upon times will allow for progress to be checked up on and allows the leader to maintain ultimate responsibility, as will usually be the case.

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Leadership Backpack

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10 Tips for Delegating

These 10 tips can aid leaders when they are faced with the desire or need to delegate responsibility for task completion to other members of their team.

1. Delegate early.

Making an effort to delegate the task early will help avoid unnecessary pressure and allow the person to better plan.

2. Select the right person.

Ensure that the person has the time, skills, and capabilities to take on the responsibility. Assign the task to the most appropriate person. Make sure the person has the training and resources to succeed.

3. Communicate the rationale and benefit.

Identify the reason for the task and how it will contribute to the goals of the organization. Also, point out how the delegated task could benefit the person. For example, they could develop a specific skill that is needed. Remember that a routine task to you may be a new challenging task to someone else.

4. Delegate the entire task to one person.

This gives the person the responsibility, increases their motivation, and avoids ambiguity in accountability. Otherwise, different people will have different ideas about who does what and when.

5. Set clear goals and expectations.

Be clear and specific on what is expected. Give information on what, why, when, who and where. You might leave the “how” to them. Be prepared to accept input from others. Confirm and verify task goals and expectations.

6. Delegate responsibility and authority.

Ensure that the team member is given the relevant responsibility and authority to complete the task. Let them complete the task in the manner they choose, as long as the results are what you specified. Be willing to accept ideas from them on task fulfillment.

7. Provide support, guidance, and instructions.

Point others to the resources they may need to complete the task or project. It could be people that they need to coordinate crucial information with. Be willing to be a resource yourself.

8. Take personal interest in the progress of delegated task.

Request to be updated on the progress of the task and provide assistance when necessary. Be careful not to be intrusive; giving the perception that you do not trust the other person. Keep communication lines open. Provide ongoing feedback.

9. If you're not satisfied with the progress, don't take the project back immediately.

Rather, continue to work with the other person and ensure they understand the project to be their responsibility. Give advice on ways to improve. This ensures accountability and dependability.

10. Evaluate and recognize performance.

Evaluate results more than methods. Analyze cause of insufficient performance for improvements and recognize successes as soon as possible.

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