

Delegation

“Delegation crowns the process of developing people: it is the seat of recognition, respect and trust.” John Adair

Definition: Giving a person the **Responsibility** and **Authority** to carry out a task whilst remaining **ACCOUNTABLE**

Delegation is one of the most important management skills. Good delegation saves you time, develops your people, grooms a successor, and motivates. Poor delegation will cause you frustration, demotivates and confuses the other person. Poor delegation also fails to achieve the task or purpose itself. It is a valuable management skill that's worth developing.

Steps for successful delegation

1. Be consistent.

Ask yourself if the particular activity to be delegated is a one-off, or part of a general trend or framework of assigning activities to others and of developing their skills. It is important to be consistent so that staff understand what to expect and a climate of trust starts to build. It is important to work out - with your boss as well as with those for whom you are responsible - the boundaries of responsibility which enable your people to:

- take a decision on their own with no need to report to you
- take a decision and then report to you
- take a decision only after discussion with you.

Vagueness about boundaries of responsibility is common and is the cause of much confusion in organisations.

2. Identify the activity to be delegated

Be clear on what you want to delegate. Ask yourself what end result you want (in terms of people development as well as activity) and use this as the basis for deciding what to delegate. Delegate whole activities rather than parts. If you delegate the whole activity, it raises the motivation level of the person carrying it out, develops them, and also helps them to really understand the job.

3. Think through the benefits of delegation

Clarify for yourself exactly what the benefits of delegation will be. Firstly, think through how it will benefit:

- you
- the person to whom you are delegating the activity
- the team
- the department
- the organisation
- the customers.

Only when you are clear about the benefits to most or some of these will you be able to sell the idea that it is worthwhile for the individual to take on the delegated activity. The act of explaining the activity is one of the key ways of gaining commitment to it, so you need to be clear about the benefits even at this early stage. But equally, try to assess possible problems:

- What might happen if things go wrong?
- What is the worst case scenario for the team, the organisation, or the customers?
- What negative impact might this have on the individual?
- How much support should you give?

4. Identify the person

Make sure you are not too one-dimensional when selecting the right person for the job. It is all too easy to choose someone you have chosen before. Start afresh with a clean piece of paper and really work through what the job is, and the skills and attributes required. 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.

5. Negotiate the delegated activity

Delegation works best when the person taking on the activity fully understands what is required, and is enthusiastic and willing to do it. This process may need to be carried out in quite minute detail. If you are delegating the writing of a report, you may need to specify the way the information should be presented, the arguments or hypotheses to put forward, and even the number of pages it should contain. Sit down with the individual and come to an agreement about what they are going to do, when they are going to do it, what resources they will need and the outcome that is expected. Sell the benefits to the person. Explain exactly what's in it for them and check they are happy doing it. Draw out the delegate's thoughts or fears and allow for these as you clarify and agree goals.

Remember, they do have the right to say no, and if they do, you must try not to hold this against them.

6. Allocate time and be supportive

Allocate the right amount of time. Agree a schedule and arrange to meet up and compare notes. After a few weeks, check how the activity is going. Remember you are not just dumping work on them - you are actually working with them to make sure they can carry out the work you want. You should make sure you are available to them so that they can come and talk to you if they have a problem or need advice.

7. Work out the right level of responsibility and authority

If you are delegating a part of your job which needs authority, make sure that the delegate knows they have your full support, and that other people in the organisation are aware of this too. If the delegated activity involves other sections, make sure that the appropriate people understand what is happening, why and with whose authority.

8. Make it happen

The routes by which delegates achieve what is required are up to them. Do not specify how the job actually has to be done. Remember you have just delegated an activity - it is up to the person concerned to come up with the best way of making sure that it happens. Allow the person to get on with the delegated

9. Review and evaluate

When they have completed the activity, carry out a review to see how well it went. Evaluate the positive outcomes in terms of the activity and the skills or learning which have accrued. Be constructive about any failures and try to establish what could be done better next time, for yourself as much as for the person to whom you delegate. Managers should avoid:

- giving people tasks without supporting and monitoring their progress
- dictating how the job should be done
- choosing the same individual every time you delegate a task
- failing to credit the responsible person when delegated work is completed.

A delegation checklist from the Chartered Management Institute.

A simple delegation rule - The SMARTER rule. Delegated tasks must be:

- **Specific** - What is the outcome, is it clear?
- **Measurable** - How will we know when the outcome has been achieved?
- **Agreed** - Have all parties bought into the activity?
- **Realistic** - Are the expectations reasonable given levels of skill knowledge and experience?
- **Timebound** - Has a date / time been set for key milestones and completion
- **Ethical** - Is it appropriate?
- **Recorded** - Is it recorded to be able to refer back to what was agreed.?

Further Reading

Stephen R. Covey – The 7 habits of highly effective people

Blanchard and Hersey – Situational Leadership
re;<http://www.chimaeraconsulting.com/sitleader.htm>

Questions for Consideration

- What stops me from delegating?
- What are the benefits of delegation?
 - For me
 - For the individual
 - For the organization
- How can I best achieve each of the 9 steps?
- What skills and behaviour do I need to focus on to improve my delegation?