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# **How to Delegate Effectively**

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# How to Delegate Effectively

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## Criteria for

**Success:** The first step to becoming a successful delegator is to let go.

Managers frequently complain that they have too much to do and too little time in which to do it. Unchecked, this feeling leads to stress and managerial ineffectiveness. In many cases, managers could greatly reduce their stress by practicing a critical management skill - delegation. The inability to delegate frequently has led to the downfall of many leaders - from presidents to first-line supervisors.

This article helps managers to identify what delegation is, the benefits of delegating, what and to whom one should delegate, and finally the systematic approach to the delegation process.

Recall a situation in the past where, in hindsight, a delegation did not go right. Use the following format to recall the experience:

- The job or task you delegated.
- The person to whom you delegated.
- The reason you delegated the particular assignment.
- The outcomes you expected.
- The actual outcomes.

## What You Should Know Before Getting Started

### *Why Do You Need to Know About Delegating?*

- Mastering the art of delegation makes you a more effective manager.
- Delegation is an effective means of developing your employees.
- The “do-more-with-less” climate makes delegation a must.
- Delegation is the key to organizational effectiveness.

## **Criteria for Success:**

The first step to becoming a successful delegator is to let go.

## **Watch Out For...**

Successful businesses, regardless of size, encourage not only their managers but others as well to master the art of delegation. Historically, delegation has been a vertical process, with managers delegating to subordinates in a clearly defined hierarchical structure. Today's successful businesses are emphasizing both horizontal and vertical delegation. With the growing emphasis on teamwork, the ability to influence and delegate to others over whom you have no direct control is critical to the team's success. Whether delegating vertically or horizontally, delegation must be accompanied by effective coaching. Delegation will not be effective unless managers and other designated coaches work with employees to help them develop the skills needed to get the job done. Effective delegation also requires good communication and a high degree of trust between the delegator and the delegatee.

## **The Process of Delegating**

To understand the concept and practice of delegation, you will look at the following areas:

- Definition of delegation
- Benefits of delegating
- Barriers to delegation
- What and to whom
- Delegation process
- Potential pitfalls

## **Defining delegation**

**Delegation is not task assignment.** Task assignment is simply assigning work to an individual within the duties and responsibilities of his/her position. Delegation, on the other hand, involves the manager giving someone the responsibility and authority to do something that is normally part of the manager's job.

**Delegation is not “dumping”.** You should take special care to make sure that the employee does not think you are trying to “dump” unpleasant assignments on him or her. If delegation is not done properly, employees feel put upon and resent what they perceive as doing the boss’s work.

**Delegation is not abdication.** The manager still has the ultimate accountability for the assignment. That’s why it is important for you to establish appropriate controls and checkpoints to monitor progress.

**Managers should give delegates the appropriate authority or power to act along with clear expectations including any boundaries or criteria.** The manager, however, should try to avoid prescribing HOW the assignment should be completed.

**Delegation involves three important concepts and practices: responsibility, authority, and accountability.** When you delegate, you share responsibility and authority with others and you hold them accountable for their performance. The ultimate accountability, however, still lies with the manager.

Responsibility refers to the assignment itself and the intended results. That means setting clear expectations. It also means the you should avoid prescribing HOW the assignment should be completed.

Authority refers to the appropriate power given to the individual or group including the right to act and make decisions. It’s very important to communicate boundaries and criteria such as budgetary considerations.

Accountability refers to the fact that the individual must “answer” for his/her (or their) actions and decisions along with the rewards or penalties that accompany those actions or decisions.

## ***Benefits of delegation***

### **Benefits to the manager**

- Makes your job easier.
- Frees you to do what you should be doing.
- Makes you look good.
- Grooms your successor so that you can move on to bigger and better things. Often managers derail their own advancement by not having someone to take their place.
- Reduces stress.
- Develops trust and rapport with your employees.

### **Benefits to the employee**

- Provides professional growth opportunities.
- Develops their skills.
- Gives them personal satisfaction and a sense of achievement.
- Enhances their value to the organization.
- Gives them opportunities to be involved with decision making which in turn leads to more commitment and increased morale.

### **Benefits for the organization**

- Saves money.
- Increases productivity and efficiency.
- Promotes teamwork.

## ***Barriers to delegation***

The biggest barrier to delegation is you, the manager. When managers are asked why they don't delegate more, they often give the following excuses:

- "It takes too long to explain."
- "No one on my staff is capable of doing it."
- "If you want it done right, you have to do it yourself."

- “My people are already overworked. I can’t dump anything more on them.”

Take a moment to check the excuses you may have offered as reasons for not delegating.

Although managers offer the above excuses, the real reasons may be discovered in the following list:

- “I’m comfortable doing the job I’ve been doing for a long time. If I give that up, then I have to concentrate on the responsibilities of my new job which I am not comfortable with.”
- “If someone else can do my job, maybe I won’t be needed anymore.”
- “I’m the boss; I’m supposed to have control over everything.”
- “What if the other person “messes up? I’m still accountable.”

Be honest with yourself. What are the REAL reasons you don’t delegate as much as you should?

Sometimes employees resist or fail to accept responsibility for some of the following reasons:

- They may fear criticism or embarrassment from the boss if they don’t do things exactly as he/she expects.
- They may not have the skills or ability to do the job.
- They may feel that they are being “dumped on,” that is, that they are expected to do the boss’ job.
- They may feel that it’s easier to ask the boss than to decide for themselves.
- They have received no reward or recognition in the past for a job well done.

Study this list? Can you think of others? Then ask yourself if you have in any way contributed to employee resistance.

### ***What and to whom to delegate***

The first step in delegating is to identify what should and should not be delegated.  
Do delegate...

- All routine or even sporadic clerical duties (filing, counting, sorting, routine reports).
- Making minor decisions.
- Answering routine questions. Make the employee think for himself/herself.
- Minor staffing problems such as scheduling.
- Anything your employees are expected to do when you're not there.
- obs that can develop the employee in other areas for potential promotion.

Don't delegate...

- An emergency or short-term task where there is not time to explain or train.
- Morale problems.
- Assignments from your boss that he or she expects you to do personally.
- A job no one else in the department is qualified to do.
- Personnel issues. such as hiring, firing, or disciplinary matters.

The next step is to select the appropriate delegatee. As Andrew Carnegie once said, "The secret of success is not in doing your own work but in recognizing the right man [person] to do it." Think about the delegatee's personality as well as his/her skills. This is an important consideration when presenting the assignment to the chosen person. Some people may want and need a great deal of detail and explanation; others respond better to a simple statement of expectations and guidelines, then want to be left alone to "go to it."

### ***The delegation process***

Determine what you are going to delegate. Then take the time to plan how you are going to present the assignment, including your requirements, parameters, authority level, checkpoints, and expectations. It's a good idea to write down these items and give a copy to your delegatee in order to minimize miscommunication.

Choose the right person. Assess the skills and the experience of your employees as objectively as possible. Don't be too quick to choose the person who you always know you can depend on.

Give an overview of the assignment including the importance of the assignment and why you have chosen the employee for the job.

Describe the new responsibility in detail, outlining sub-tasks, defining any necessary parameters, and setting performance standards. Make sure the employee understands his/her level or degree of authority. Let the employee know who he/she can turn to for help as well as other available resources. By the way, make sure that you notify those affected by the delegatee's power.

Solicit questions, reactions, and suggestions. At this point you may want to ask the employee what approach he/she might take.

Listen to the employee's comments and respond empathetically. This step helps to get employee "buy-in" and will also help you determine if the employee does indeed understand what is expected of him/her.

Ask the employee for commitment and offer help or some type of back-up assistance. An employee who already feels overwhelmed may worry about completing the assignments already on his/her plate. It is your responsibility to help establish priorities and relieve some of the pressure by getting someone else to share some of the delegatee's routine tasks for the duration of the assignment.

Be encouraging. Express confidence in the employee's ability to successfully handle the new responsibility.

Establish checkpoints, deadlines, and ways to monitor progress. The entire discussion should be a collaborative process. You should strive for mutual agreement.

Keep in contact with the employee and observe the checkpoints the two of you agreed to. However, don't hover. Remember, delegating means letting go.

Recognize and reward the person for his/her successful completion of the assignment.



## ***Avoiding pitfalls***

Reverse or upward delegation. Sometimes employees feel they don't know how to do what they were delegated or just try to take the easy way out. In either case, you may find them coming back and asking you what to do. Many managers fall into the trap by taking the assignment back unwittingly. To avoid falling victim to the reverse delegation syndrome, make the employee think or problem solve for himself/herself. This is the perfect opportunity to practice coaching skills. Begin by asking the employee various open-ended questions to find out what has already been done and what the person thinks should be the next step. Offer help and support, but don't take back an assignment that you have delegated to someone else.

Dumping. You may think you're doing a great thing by delegating an assignment to one of your employees and may wonder why the individual isn't ecstatic over the opportunity. The culprit in this case is most probably poor communication. It's easy to assume that the employee knows and understands your motivation. Quite often, however, the employee perceives he/she is being "dumped on," that is, taken advantage of. To prevent this from happening, take special care to explain the benefit to the employee. Remember to point out the WIIFT - What's In It For Them.

Grabbing the glory. Some managers seem to overlook the importance of giving credit where credit is due, and take credit for the delegatee's hard work. Make sure that you give the appropriate recognition and quietly pat yourself on the back for being a great delegator.



## About the Author

*Karen Lawson, PhD, CSP, is an international consultant, executive coach, speaker, and author. She has built a successful organization and management development consulting firm working with Fortune 500 companies as well as small businesses. Dr. Lawson specializes in cultivating outstanding leaders who enable their organizations to outperform the competition. For a complete list of her products and services, contact Lawson Consulting Group, Inc. at 215-368-9465 or at [www.LawsonCG.com](http://www.LawsonCG.com).*

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