

Delegating Successfully:

Using the Power of Others



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Introduction

The use of delegation to encourage and nurture employees often gets overlooked by supervisors. It is one of the most valuable skills to develop, but can also be the hardest technique to master. If done correctly, delegation can be a critical survival method for managers and supervisors. Understanding delegation and knowing how to use it is an important time management skill that will produce results for an organization.

Organizations where managers and supervisors use delegation will see numerous pay-offs, such as:

- Faster decision making
- Greater productivity
- More focus on strategic priorities by management
- A more adaptable and versatile team
- Higher morale
- Better retention of talent

If there are so many benefits to delegation, why don't organizations encourage supervisors and managers to delegate more? The answer is a simple one – supervisors and managers are not familiar with how to delegate successfully.

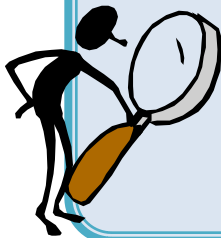
This course will explore many aspects of delegation, including when to delegate and whom to delegate to. You will go through the four steps of delegation and learn how to use these steps to ensure a successful delegation process by avoiding some of the common mistakes.

What is Delegation?

Let's attempt to clear up any confusion right from the start about what delegation is and is not.

Is delegation assigning tasks that you would rather not do yourself because you don't enjoy them? Is it assigning an activity to someone else because your schedule cannot accommodate the task? When your schedule is more flexible, can you reclaim the task? What is delegation?

Wikipedia defines delegation as:



- the assignment of authority and responsibility to another person (normally from a manager to a subordinate) to carry out specific activities. However, the person who delegated the work remains accountable for the outcome of the delegated work.

Three important points should be highlighted from this definition:

1. You are assigning **authority** to someone else to carry out a specific activity
2. You are assigning **responsibility** to that person
3. As the delegator, you remain **accountable** for the outcome of the work

These three points will be discussed in greater detail as you progress through this course.

Simply stated, delegation is the ability to get things done by using other people. It is the ability to effectively assign activity responsibility and authority to another person or team (including virtual teams). It is not simply dumping unwanted activities from your schedule onto someone else, or giving a task to someone to do until time permits you to take it back.

You are not simply delegating simple activities, but ones that require making decisions and managing change based on constant access to relevant information. In some cases it, may be an opportunity for growth. In other cases, it may simply be a means in which to accomplish more.



Does delegation = task assignment?

Delegation and task assignment are very different, but managers and supervisors often believe them to be the same.

Task assignment is more specific than delegation. It is confined to a particular task and provides little freedom. On the other hand, delegation allows for the transfer of power and control to another person. With delegation, you must trust that person to use judgment to make sound decisions to achieve the intended outcomes.

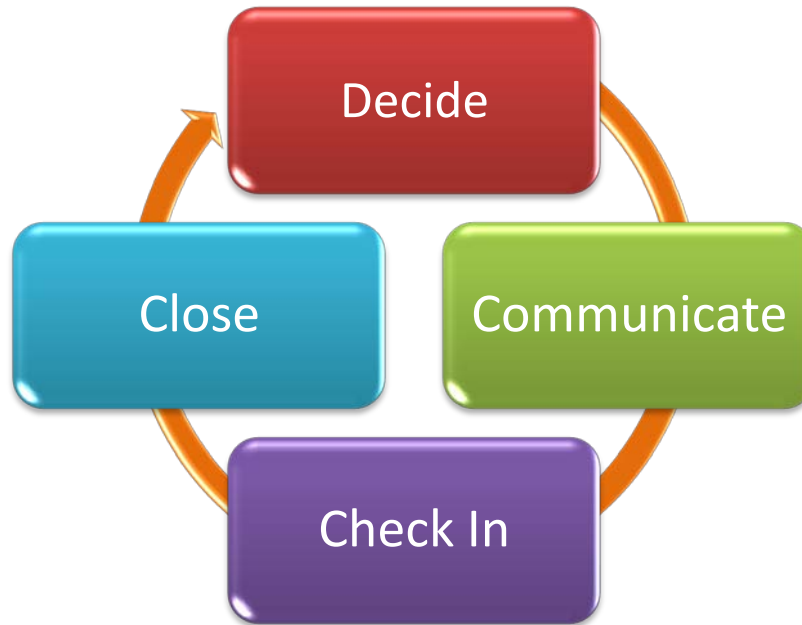
Task assignment is merely a means of accomplishing a task at a specific point in time, while delegation is an investment in your team. It is an investment in their skill development and their ability to be effective contributors to your organization.

Your ultimate goal by delegating is to remove yourself from the equation by providing opportunities to empower your team so they can operate without you. This will provide you with opportunities to advance within your own career and not be held back by a team who requires continuous guidance.

As you progress through the course, your understanding of what delegation is will become clearer.

The Four Steps to Delegation

To develop a culture of high delegation, management should practice using the following steps:



You will be exploring these steps more in detail. But for now, think of them in terms of simple questions you can ask yourself.

1. **Deciding what to delegate:** Why should I use delegation? What projects can I delegate to others? Who has the time, desire or skills to take on a new project?
2. **Communicate the delegation:** What should I be communicating?
3. **Check in:** How do I ensure that I provide support through the delegation?
4. **Close:** How successful was the delegation? What do I need to consider for next time?

Deciding on What to Delegate



Wouldn't it be nice if you could have someone else talk to an employee who has been causing problems in your department? Unfortunately, there are some things you can delegate and others that need to remain with you!

Delegation should be seen as an opportunity for others to develop skills. It is not an opportunity for you to simply “dump” unwanted tasks or projects onto someone else.

What should you delegate and what should you keep? This is probably one of the more challenging questions that you will face when considering delegation. This is an important question, that deserves some serious thought, but it should not be an excuse for you to avoid delegating.

Does this sound familiar?

“It will take too long to explain. It will be faster if I do it myself.”

If so, remember that effective delegation is an important skill. It enables you to balance workloads and provide opportunities for staff development. It also creates a positive and motivating environment.

Know your team

Good managers and supervisors know their team. They know their skills, weaknesses, interests and goals.

You may want to complete a skills, abilities and interests' inventory of your team members. This will help you determine who you should delegate to. Knowing who can do what and who is interested in what will aid in your decision on the types of things you want to delegate to your team.

Look at your tasks

There are things that you can delegate:

- Activities that can easily be handled by others, such as administrative duties
- Activities for which team members have all the necessary information for decision making
- Activities at the operational level (organizational detail), not at the strategic level (planning and organization)
- Activities that others may be better skilled at doing than yourself
- Activities that provide an opportunity to grow or develop another person's skills
- Activities that will recur in a similar form in the future

It is important to create a balance between providing more work for someone and that of providing work that requires more responsibility, authority and challenge.

Have you considered?

1. The experience, skills and knowledge of the person

What skills, knowledge and attitude does the person already have? Will the person or team be interested in acquiring the required skills? If so, who will provide the training? Do you have time and resources to provide any necessary training and support?

2. The individual's preferred work style

How independent is the person you are delegating on to? What does the person expect from his or her job? What are the person's long-term goals and interests? How well aligned are these with what you are proposing for them?

3. **The current workload of the person**

Does the person you are delegating work to have the time to take on the work? Do you need to help the person reshuffle some of their responsibilities on to others?

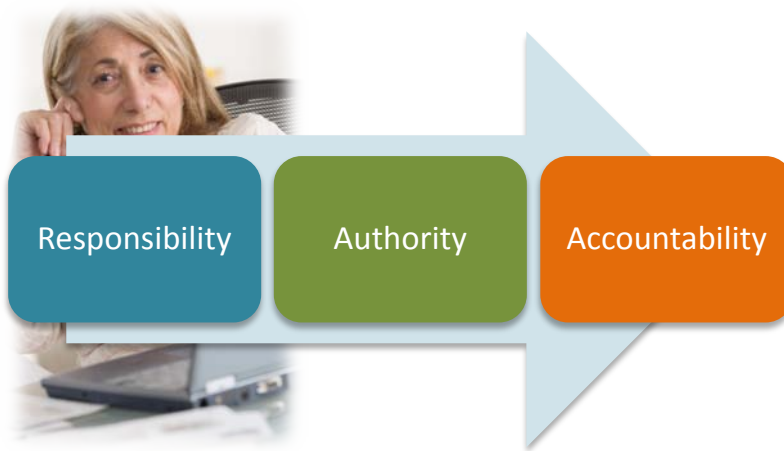
4. **Project timelines or deadlines**

How much time is available to complete the task? Is there time to correct anything that may need to be redone should it not be completed properly the first time? What are the consequences should the job not be completed as per the deadline?

5. **Expectations**

How important is the task to be completed to the highest standard? Is adequate sufficient in the case of this task? Would failure be critical? How much would failure affect other variables, such as phases of a larger project?

The Three Elements



Responsibility = the ownership of the activity

Authority = the power needed to complete the activity

Accountability = who is going to achieve the desired results

Motivational theories highlight the importance of **accountability** and **responsibility** in determining team behaviour. Team members will feel more involved and engaged if entrusted with important responsibility. The work becomes far more rewarding if team members are included in decision making where they have the opportunity to consider tasks, alternatives and make appropriate choices.

Responsibility is given to a person to complete a task as per the desired outcomes. If you find yourself involved in too many operational details even though you have delegated responsibility to someone else, then you have failed to do one vital thing. You have probably not given that person the responsibility to explore their own means of achieving the desired outcomes. In essence, you have not delegated the responsibility to someone else. It is important to allow the person the freedom to explore their own means of accomplishing the desired results.

You cannot make someone responsible for achieving results without granting them the appropriate level of authority to make judgment calls. How often have you heard of situations where someone is expected to produce results, but has not been given the power to complete the activity?

Let's look at the following example:

Frank is a warehouse supervisor. A last minute order has come in and must go out before the end of the week. Frank's manager is taking off on holidays with his family to some remote fishing lodge in Alaska. Before departing, he stressed to Frank the importance of meeting this deadline for the company. After assessing the magnitude of the order, Frank feels that the only way he can get the order out the door by the date promised is to have people work overtime. However, Frank has not been granted the authority to make people work overtime as this will affect the operational costs of the company and only the manager has that authority. Without the proper authority, can Frank be held accountable for the failure to get the order out by the promised time?

If Frank was given the authority to approve overtime for his staff, he could have met the deadlines as set out by his manager. What do you think happened when his manager came back from vacation and learned that the order did not go out as promised? Who is accountable - Frank or his manager?

When you delegate, you distribute responsibility and authority to others while holding them accountable for their performance. However, the ultimate accountability still remains with you, the supervisor or manager. You are the one who must decide who is best suited to take on an activity and what is required to support that person in achieving the desired outcomes. Who do you think is at fault for the missed deadline?

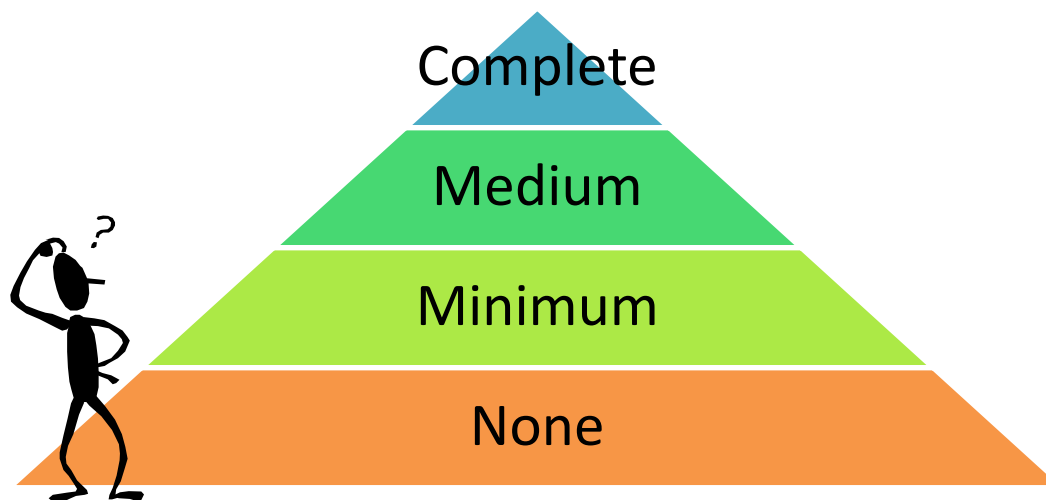
Levels of Authority

As you now know, delegating is more than just telling someone what to do. There is a wide range of freedom that can be assigned to a person. The more experienced or reliable the person, the more freedom you can give that person. The more critical or higher the risk the activity is, the more cautious you should be exercising before extending a great deal of freedom.

The delegation of authority can be temporary or permanent. Where permanent delegation is often tied to organizational structure, like expenditure authority, temporary delegations can be seen more as development opportunities. Managers can assign authority to a team or team member that normally rests within their job description.

Authority grants team members such power as to spend money, direct or seek assistance, or represent the organization. When granting a level of authority, confirm with the person that they feel comfortable with the authority being given. Some members of your team are more confident than others and will welcome the authority being granted to them, while others may feel that they are not ready for that new level of responsibility.

It is essential that you choose the appropriate level of authority to ensure the task is completed effectively with minimal involvement from you – as you saw in the example with Frank. You want to make sure that the person has enough authority to complete the task. How do you decide on which level to grant a person? Look at the following descriptions of the different levels as a guide.



Level 1 – No Authority

In some instances, it would be prudent of you to assume all authority – for example, when a person is new to your organization or does not have a great deal of experience with the activity. The activity could also hold a great deal of importance to your organization’s success. Be aware that some may see this approach to mean that you do not trust them. The reasons for not granting authority should be well communicated to the person you are delegating the activity to.

Level 2 – Minimum Authority

This level of authority allows the person to have some say in the decision-making process. However, no decisions are made without your approval. This ensures that you continue to remain well informed of progress and have the opportunity to provide guidance if difficult problems should arise.

Level 3 – Medium Authority

This level of authority allows for the person being delegated a task to make some decisions without your permission. The person is autonomous, only consulting you should a difficult problem arise.

Level 4 – Complete Authority

When you feel a person is a trusted member of the team who has demonstrated competence in completing similar tasks, they can be granted this level of authority. This is the level you strive to achieve with all team members as it provides you with more discretionary time and the confidence that all team members are able to complete work to the highest standard.

Some common problems you may encounter with authority are:

- Not giving enough authority
- Approval after the fact
- Making a person accountable without providing authority

Deciding Whom to Delegate to

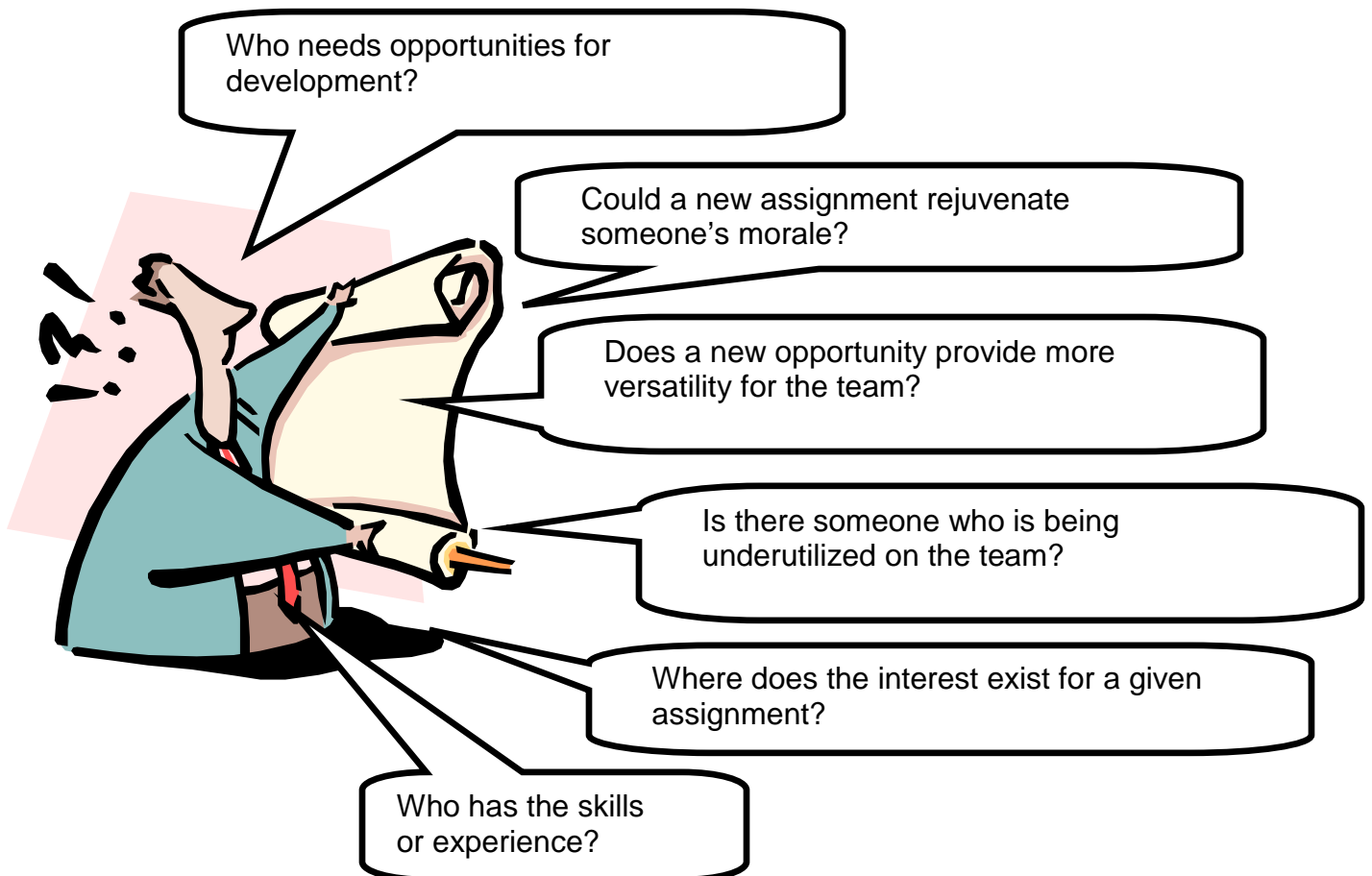


How do you pick the right person for the job?

- Demonstrated skill
- Motivation
- Workload
- Matching skills and people

Even though everyone has different standards, it is impossible to do everything yourself.

When choosing the right person, ask yourself the following questions:



In choosing whom to delegate to, you must balance short-term goals, such as timelines, with longer-term goals, such as skill building. Be careful to avoid a consistent focus on the short-term goals. It is easy to want to get something done quickly, but building staff skills is important for morale, team versatility and a culture of high performance.

You must consider what type of culture you are nurturing within your organization. Are team members encouraged to take individual initiative and accept greater responsibility? Are those seeking greater responsibilities rewarded or recognized for their efforts?

Some team members may possess an innate desire to grow. As a supervisor, it is important to interact with team members to assess and devise plans for training and development of those members. A key aspect to this is finding tasks you can delegate to them. To assist in doing this:

- Make an inventory of skills and interests of all team members
- Rank them according to their willingness to learn and develop
- Identify individuals that may require opportunities to upgrade so they can become better performers (low performers or average workers)

Communicate the Delegation



Supervisors and managers can often fall short in this stage of the process.

Supervisors and managers are always hesitant to load more on to their team since they feel team members are already struggling to manage their current workload. This is the attitude you must overcome. If you are not providing opportunities for growth, your team may feel unmotivated by their daily routine.

It is essential to communicate the reasoning for the delegation to the team. Sit your people down and explain why you have chosen to delegate. Explain the benefits for them and the organization.

Following the basic steps – Explain, Involve, and Commit – will ensure mutual understanding, result in achievement of the desired outcomes and create a culture of growth.



Explain

1. Describe the assignment – what specifically needs to be accomplished?
2. Provide context and relevance of the assignment
 - Why is the task being done?
 - Why is it important?
 - Is it a part of a larger project – what does the entire project entail and who is working on it?
 - Any potential complications?
3. Tell the person why they were chosen for the assignment

4. Clearly explain the expected outcomes and completion date
 - What are the consequences to the organization and individual if the task is not completed on time?
 - What level of accuracy is expected?
 - What are the performance standards in which the person will be evaluated?
 - How will performance be measured – Observations, survey, interviews, reports, presentations?
5. Outline any necessary steps, but do not provide a process or method. Give the person flexibility on how to achieve the outcomes as much as possible.
6. Specify the degree of authority the person will be given
7. Specify what resources and support will be provided
 - Your role and availability
 - Who can provide indirect support as to other resources
 - Notify others as to their role and the person's role



Involve

1. Confirm understanding – there is always a possibility that mutual understanding does not exist
2. Encourage questions
3. Be open to input
4. Involve the person in solving any problems at this stage



Commit

1. Agree on goals, expected outcomes, required steps, available resources and support, etc.
2. Establish a follow-up process for monitoring progress – meetings, report, practices
3. Affirm why the person was chosen and your faith in their abilities
4. Thank the employee for their participation
 - Establish rewards and recognition

Close



Effective delegation has a strong return on investment for teams and organizations. When done well, people are more productive, goals are achieved, and teams gain strong leadership.

To ensure that supervisors and managers know how to delegate successfully, it is essential that the delegation be evaluated upon completion. This wrap up will provide insightful information that will enhance the process for future delegations.

Suggested steps are:

1. Review the team member's performance. Meet to discuss the strengths and weaknesses of the person. Review what went well and where improvements could have been made. Ask the person what they learned and how that knowledge and experience can be transferred into the job.
2. Praise the person for their performance. Recognize and award the person for their efforts and willingness to take on the task.
3. Review your own performance. Ask the person for their feedback. Can they suggest any recommendations to improve the next delegation process?

