

Delegation is a skill of which we have all heard - but which few understand. It can be used either as an excuse for dumping failure onto the shoulders of subordinates, or as a dynamic tool for motivating and training your team to realise their full potential.

Phil Yates of Customised Training Solutions Ltd asks

# Are you delegating effectively?

*"I delegate myne auctorite" (Palsgrave 1530)*

AS THE ANCIENT QUOTATION above suggests, delegation is primarily about entrusting your authority to others. Delegation does not mean abdicating, but rather sharing responsibility for the achievement of a specific task with someone else. You, however, remain ultimately accountable and the person to whom you have delegated makes decisions and acts independently - under your guidance, not control. There is a big difference between delegation and dumping.

So why delegate? What are the benefits to you, the individual and your company? Let's start with you ...

## The benefits for the manager

How often have you commented that "There just aren't enough hours in the day"?

One important step in becoming more productive is to stop doing everything yourself. Delegation allows you to achieve more through the proper selection, assignment, and coordination of tasks and resources. Delegation gives you an opportunity to handle aspects of the job that no one else can do. These activities might include project planning and project team involvement, coaching and monitoring team members and handling personnel issues as they arise. Using delegation, you can focus on doing a few tasks really well rather than too many tasks poorly.

Delegation also offers you more time to focus on developing your own skills and knowledge, thereby enhancing your own potential for promotion whilst preparing others within your team to be able to assume your role in the future.

## What are the benefits for your team members?

Delegation develops the skills and capability of your people, to enable them to assume

greater responsibility. A routine task for you may be a growth opportunity for a team member, and people perform best when they are challenged and stimulated to learn. Delegation also encourages team members to understand and influence the work done by everyone else in the team and to see the 'bigger picture'.

## And the company benefits too ...

If both you and your team members benefit from delegation, it follows that the organisation as a whole will also benefit. When you delegate tasks according to the skills and abilities of each individual, the team will function at a higher and more efficient level. Delegation helps you to make the best use of available human resources and achieve the highest possible rate of productivity. In addition, it allows new ideas, viewpoints and suggestions to flourish.

Effective delegation leads to faster, more effective, decision-making. An organisation is most responsive to change in the environment when decisions are made by those individuals closest to the problems. Responsibility and decision-making are pushed further down the organisation, resulting in better customer service and greater competitiveness.

Effective delegation also leads to greater flexibility within the team. When someone is absent or a crisis requires people to assist with tasks not regularly a part of their jobs, they will be able to step in. Delegation prepares individuals for promotion or rotation of responsibilities.

## What to delegate?

What do you delegate and what do you do yourself? You should take a long-term view on this and delegate as much as possible to develop your team to become as good as you are now! Ask yourself the following questions about particular tasks for which you are accountable:

- Is there someone who can do a specific task better than you can? Are you fully benefiting from the expertise of your team members?
- Is there someone who, whilst doing the task slightly differently from you, or taking slightly more time, can still achieve an acceptable level of performance?
- Is there someone who is paid less than you who can do the task satisfactorily, thus lowering the cost of task performance?
- If you can't do the task until tomorrow, is there someone who can do it today?
- Is there someone who would benefit from doing the task, in terms of personal development?

If you are honest with yourself, you will probably be able to answer YES to at least some of these questions. If so, you and your team may well benefit from more effective delegation.

In terms of motivation for your staff, you should distribute the more mundane tasks as evenly as possible; and sprinkle the more exciting ones as widely as you can. In general, but especially with the boring tasks, you should be careful to delegate not only the performance of the task but also its ownership. Task delegation, rather than task assignment, enables innovation. The point you need to get across is that the task may be changed, developed, upgraded, if necessary or desirable. So someone who collates the monthly figures should not feel obliged to blindly type them in every first Monday; but should feel empowered to introduce a more effective reporting format.

Developing the ability to delegate effectively takes time and practice. You will benefit from giving some thought to the following points, which are general guidelines and not precise rules:

## How to delegate

### 1) Decide what to delegate

Allow your team members to be involved in deciding what is to be delegated. Challenge your working practices - just because you have always done this task yourself does not mean that you always have to do it. As tasks come up, determine whether they can be delegated or whether it is essential that you perform them yourself. Remember, your time should be spent doing only the most important tasks for the achievement of your objectives. Think ahead - don't wait for a crisis to occur and then delegate. Delegate in advance. Why not take the opportunity to coach someone to achieve an objective for which the deadline is not immediate?

### 2) Find the right person

In terms of existing and potential knowledge, skills and attitude. Do they have the time to take on the task and what impact will it have on their current responsibilities?

### 3) Delegate whole tasks

Where possible, delegate a complete task rather than just a small section of a task.

### 4) Specify expected outcomes

Make it clear what outcomes or results are expected from the person. Meet with them and discuss the task, carefully explaining what results you expect. Make sure the person understands what you want them to do. Help them to integrate the new assignment into their current workload and to re-prioritise activities as required. Describe how the assignment fits into the larger picture of the team's success and how their success will contribute to larger company objectives.

### 5) Delegate, then trust

Express your confidence in the person's ability to do the job. If the person isn't sure they can handle the task, agree small, interim objectives that will boost their confidence when achieved. Once you have delegated a task, trust the person. Let them get on with it and allow them to decide whether or not they need your help and guidance. Make yourself available to answer questions. Make suggestions when necessary, but don't stand over the person. Be patient and don't demand perfection.

*"If you ride a horse, sit close and tight. If*

*you ride a man sit easy and light"*

Benjamin Franklin

### 6) Monitor and recognise progress

Track progress and give credit where appropriate. Praise is a very powerful motivator. Provide positive feedback and reinforce what the person is doing right. Coach the individual to encourage further suggestions and ideas for improvement. Help the person to anticipate possible difficulties and prepare to overcome these.

Effective delegation is therefore one of the most valuable skills that a Regional Business/Sales Manager can develop. Effective delegation reduces your workload and frees up time to do those things that only you can do. You acquire an opportunity to think more strategically and creatively about the achievement of your team's objectives, which in turn boosts your reputation as a manager. Effective delegation develops the skills, knowledge, job satisfaction, and commitment of the individual(s) to whom you delegate, thus making your team highly motivated to achieve at the highest level. ■

## Delegation Checklist

Ask yourself:

- Which task?
- Who does it?
- Who is capable?
- How long before they will be capable?

Agree parameters, deadlines, resources, limits of authority, performance standards expected. Suggest ideas of approach.

Make time available to coach the individual. Ensure that they are committed to the task. Encourage the individual to follow their own ideas.

Offer as much help as is needed. Receive regular feedback. Prevent mistakes at an early stage.

Check whether the task produced the results you expected. If not, review why not - communication problems, unforeseen problems, wrong individual, not enough help, did not have the necessary skills?

## Further reading:

*Empowering Employees through Delegation*  
by Robert B. Nelson  
Irwin Professional Publishing, 1994

*Leadership Skills for Women*  
by Marilyn Manning & Patricia Haddock  
Kogan Page, 1998

Customised Training Solutions Ltd brings leading edge training & development solutions to pharmaceutical and healthcare organisations throughout the world.

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