



WORDS ON WISE MANAGEMENT

The difficulty with delegating

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Have you ever wondered why it's difficult to get things done? Why employees feel burned out and underutilized at the same time? Or why well-qualified employees don't deliver the "goods" on a project by the deadline? The unfortunate reality is that many of our highly compensated executives and leaders don't delegate properly. In addition, we send a subtle message to our employees that great work doesn't matter.

Delegation is an "ugly" word that sometimes translates to an employee's belief that he is doing his boss's job for her and the company doesn't care about him or his career. This lowers employee engagement and morale, creates performance issues, and produces the risk of lawsuits and discrimination charges.

To overcome these challenges, we must learn to delegate well by investing in training and using a process that assesses the needs of both the person delegating and the person to whom the delegation is made. Here are some tips on delegating for managers.

Explain the value of the assignment. We rarely tell an employee why the assignment we are giving them is important. When we share the value of the assignment with an employee, we're demonstrating its importance and developing a commitment.

Explain why you chose the employee. Employees start projects daily but have no idea why they were picked for the assignment. Some employees make up stories in their heads about why they're working on a project. Typically, those reasons aren't accurate, and in many cases, they're negative. As a delegator, you should explain to employees why you chose them for a particular project.

What you want doesn't matter. It's about the employee. When delegating an assignment, some leaders are micromanagers, and other leaders provide a lot of freedom. Micromanagers get a bad rap, and those that provide freedom get a free pass. Employees who need structure like micromanagers, while employees who want freedom enjoy managers who provide freedom. The problem occurs when there's a mismatch in style. It's the leader's responsibility to know the preferences of her employees.

Consider responsibility and accountability. When delegating an assignment, we want to identify

what the employee is responsible for and what he is accountable for. However, that doesn't absolve the leader of responsibility and accountability. Accountability is a two-way street, and we need to ask ourselves and our employees questions like:

- How can I best support you, and what information will you need along the way?
- To whom can I introduce you to make your job easier?
- What training do I need to provide you?
- What's the best way to communicate with you about the project?
- When and how should I make myself available to you?

Delegate—don't dump. Delegation is a strategic process that not only supports your organization but grows your employee as well. Too many leaders indiscriminately remove things from their plate without thinking about how it will improve the organization and develop their employee. Employees see such "dumping" as busy work and lose respect for both the organization and their manager. Most employees end up turning in less than a stellar effort when they're frustrated and lack commitment.

This is not a test! Early in my career, my boss gave me an assignment to test me. The problem was, the assignment was designed so that I would most likely fail. When a leader handles delegation as a test, two generally negative things can happen. First, the employee struggles, fails, and becomes broken or leaves. Second, the employee struggles but succeeds more because of his street smarts than anything else. The result is that the employee no longer trusts his manager.

In today's work world, we are busy running at fast pace. To compensate for less time, we quickly dish out assignments while spouting the Nike mantra, "Just Do It." Unfortunately, that produces problems. Next time, before handing something off, take a moment and think about the tips shared in this article.



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