

Five Keys to Delegation That Work

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Delegation is something that every leader has feelings about.

Some feel they do it well. Some don't even know where to start. Some have seen a good example of it. Some feel like every time someone has "delegated" to them, it felt like they'd just been dumped on. Some think it is something they should do. Some resist it.

Regardless of your feelings and experiences, there will be something here for you.

What follows are five keys to making any delegation experience more satisfying for you, more effective for the other person and more beneficial for the organization.

Treat delegation as an investment. You've said it; and so has every other leader you've ever met. "It would take me longer to teach than it would to just do it myself." Not only have you said it, but it is true. It just isn't a complete statement. Here is the complete statement (but unfortunately not what people say): "It would take me longer to teach than it would to just do it myself, *the first time.*" Delegation seldom pays the full dividend on the first time. You will need to explain and coach and follow-up the first time, but each successive time you will have to do less and eventually you don't have to do the task at all – meaning you can work on something of different or higher value. Investments pay off over time – and that is what delegation does.

Go slow to go fast. If you have ever delegated a new task to someone via email or a hurried conversation, you know that it doesn't usually go well. Your investment in effective delegation is your time and to get the return you want, you need to give it the time it needs and deserves. All this is to say that the more time you invest in the beginning, the more effective the end result will be (both in the short term and the long term.)

Pick your spots. Because it will take some time to do it well, there are times when you will be better off doing it yourself. But if you always justify doing it yourself because you are always in a crisis mode, it is time to invest in delegation to turn that picture around. Also pick the right person. Don't delegate everything to the same person, think strategically. Who would benefit in their growth and development to do this task? Whose natural gifts and strengths will help them be most successful? Pick wisely – both when to delegate and who to delegate to.

To delegate is to coach. ([Tweet that!](#)) If the task is easy or people have done it before, delegation is easy – and that isn't what we are talking about here anyway. The bottom line is that the only way to delegate valuable things well is by coaching and supporting people in being successful. Coaching encapsulates the first three points, and leads us to the last one.

Beware the swinging pendulum. Are you on either end of this pendulum? On one end are the people who never delegate because they believe they are indispensable and do it best. On the other end is the person who delegates, but hovers and micromanages. The swinging is – “Ok, I don’t want to give up the task, but I will, but I need to supervise the work closely so it gets done correctly.” Then if it doesn’t go well they convince themselves to go back to doing it themselves again. The answer, get off the swing! That swinging pendulum has all of the focus on the leader and their ego - not the task, not the person they could develop by teaching, and certainly not the organization in the long term. The solution, get off the swing and think about the other points in this article. As long as you stay on this swing, you will never be a successful and effective delegator (and never is a very long time).

To delegate effectively we must get ourselves out of the center and put the needs of the other person and the task itself clearly as the focus. When you do this you will begin to embody the ideas I’ve shared, and then you will be on your way to truly successful delegation.