

DELEGATION

A Parable

This is a story about four people named Everybody, Somebody, Anybody, and Nobody. There was an important job to be done and Everybody was sure that Somebody would do it. Anybody could have done it, but Nobody did it. Somebody got angry about that, because it was Everybody's job. Everybody thought Anybody could do it, but Nobody realized that Everybody wouldn't do it. It ended up that Everybody blamed Somebody when Nobody did what Anybody could have done.

This parable illustrates the importance of effective delegation, and the consequences of a lack of delegation of tasks. The delegation of responsibilities has been universally acclaimed as a cure-all for the many problems facing a leader, and yet it is rarely used by those who proclaim its virtues. Over and over again leaders insist, "it is better if I do it myself, because then I know it has been done right!" In the process, the leader harms group morale and group process considerably. When morale is low enough, such a leader may be inspired to delegate some responsibility, but in doing so often creates a "garbage detail" of nuts and bolts that anyone could carry out--and the group morale drops even lower.

Why do some leaders hesitate to delegate responsibility? Sometimes the leader just doesn't know how or what to delegate. Leaders can become frustrated when the group dreams up great ideas, but no one will assume the responsibility to carry them out. Leaders should feel secure enough to use appointments instead of always asking for volunteers. Members can always decline the task, but the leader, knowing his/her members well, is apt to choose a member who will perform the task well, and in the process of appointing someone, displays confidence in members who may be afraid to jump in.

Following are some general guidelines to follow in order to become an effective delegator:

1. In order to delegate effectively, you must believe in the volunteer. You should also take the time to determine the interests and skills of your members.
2. Always delegate a task that can be accomplished. Be sure to give the volunteer any necessary training, materials, or other resources. Also be sure that the responsibility is well defined.
3. It is important to show the volunteer the value of the task. Take time to explain why the task needs to be done. If the individual believes the task is important, she/he will be more diligent in accomplishing it.
4. When you delegate, be available consistently during the project to give support, advice, and encouragement, but *do not* attempt to take over.
5. When the task is accomplished, be sure to sincerely thank the individual. This can be done with a simple thank you note, or in any other way you see fit to do so.