

Preparing to Delegate

Most people have a built-in urge to stretch out, to explore new areas. Delegation is the skill of channeling that desire to grow so that it benefits the employee, the company and you. Managers who haven't had much success in delegating tend to make the same mistakes. They may be too intrusive or rigid in their delegation, leading to demoralized employees who feel afraid of stepping "outside the lines"; or they may confuse delegation with abandonment, leaving employees to figure things out for themselves and, all too often, fall prey to their own inexperience or misunderstanding.

The Proteus delegation model, which you can learn about through other resources in this Delegation topic of proteusleader.com, helps you delegate projects and responsibilities to employees in a clear and collaborative way, so as to avoid these problems. You'll give your employees both the information they need, and the most helpful balance of supervision and autonomy.

This preparation tool will support you in the first step of delegation: thinking through WHAT you'd like to delegate and TO WHOM. When selecting what to delegate, it is best to think of an area of responsibility that falls into one or more of the following three categories:

1. **Areas that are not key to your value in an organizational context.** As a leader in your organization, you should be operating at a higher, more strategic level—this is where you can add the most value. If there is a something for which you are currently responsible that may not be the best use of your time, value and experience, it's probably something you should delegate to a direct report.
2. **Areas where others can succeed and demonstrate growth as long as those areas are not full of political minefields.** Successfully delegating an area of responsibility does more than free up your time—it can be an incredible motivator and development tool for your employees. As they learn new skills and successfully take ownership of new initiatives, they become more engaged and better prepared for the future. Just make sure that your employees can be successful with what you delegate; that they won't be derailed by challenges that are beyond their ability to resolve.
3. **Areas where you can comfortably let go of responsibility.** Sometimes leaders maintain ownership of tasks that were part of a former role or are simply "easy" when compared to the responsibilities of their current job. These, too, may be good areas of responsibility to delegate since they are often less complex and wonderful ways to build trust and develop skills in your employees.

When thinking about which of your employees will be the best person to whom to delegate a particular responsibility or project, consider the following questions:

- How well does it align with their current job? It's usually best to delegate responsibilities that expand or deepen someone's existing role. That way you can leverage knowledge and relationships they already have, and they're more likely to see it as a clear path to growth.
- Do they already have some of the needed skills or experience? It's much harder to delegate a project or responsibility to someone who is starting from zero; it will require a lot more oversight and involvement from you. Building on existing skills is easier for you and for the employee.
- Are they likely to be interested in doing this? You may not always be able to make a "passion connection" with delegation, but it's worth it to try. The more interested an employee is in taking on a new responsibility, the more successful they are likely to be at doing it.

WHAT: Choose the area of responsibility or project you want to delegate, and then define it. What "big picture" information does this employee need in order to understand what's being asked of him or her and to succeed in taking on this responsibility? Simply define the overall area of responsibility vs. offering a list of to-dos.

Area of responsibility or project (you will delegate):

WHO: Choose an employee to whom you'd like to delegate this project or area of responsibility.

Employee Name: