"It is critical to delegate the task and not the responsibility" Sage

"You can delegate authority, but you can never delegate responsibility for delegating the task to someone else. If you picked the right man, fine, but if you picked the wrong man, the responsibility is yours—not his." Richard E. Krafve

10 Tips for Successful Delegation

Okay readers, complete this sentence … “If you want it done right, ___ ___ _______!” If you said, “… do it yourself”, you are in the company of many supervisors and managers who have had a few less than successful experiences with delegation. Worry not! Delegation is easier than you may realize. Follow these 10 tips to ensure you delegate successfully every time!

Tip #1 Avoid the most common delegation error. The most common mistake managers make is delegating to someone who has the skills to do a task or take on a project but who does not have the interest (motivation) or time to complete the task. This mistake leads to sub-standard results, delays in starting or completing the task and often also to a good deal of complaining.

Tip #2 Avoid the second most common delegation error! The second most common error is to delegate a task to someone who is willing to take the task(s) on but who lacks the skill(s) needed to be successful. This situation results in someone (likely you) having to teach or coach the person through the task(s) causing you to use more of your time—not less!

Tip #3 Delegate the task and responsibility but NOT accountability. When you delegate a task that you are normally responsible for completing, you retain the accountability for the quality of the outcome and for meeting timelines. Assuming you have delegated to someone who has the skills, motivation and time required, you must not micro-manage his/her work. In other words, you give them full responsibility for completing the task. Make the person aware that because the task originally belonged to you, the accountability for quality and timeliness continues to be yours.

Tip #4 Define the task(s), expected outcomes and timelines for completion. Lack of clarity over the task itself, quality standards and timelines is also a common delegation problem. If you have done the task many times before, all the “details” are very obvious to YOU. The specifics may be less clear to someone who has not done the task before.
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Clarify (in writing or in person) what your expectations are, what the specific outcome should be, what the quality standards are and the timeline for completion. This helps prevent misunderstanding and problems down the road.

Tip #5 Identify who currently has the skills, interest and time required to complete the task. There may be more than one person who fits these criteria. You may decide to delegate to a team of people if the task is large or time consuming. If so, make sure that the team develops an action plan (who, will what, by when) to ensure everyone in the team is clear on their tasks and timelines.

Tip #6 Identify and secure the resources needed. Delegation without resources is a path to nowhere. Resources come in many forms including, people, time, money and technology. Remember that accountability falls back to you because the task was originally yours to complete. Therefore, you must ensure everything needed for success is available. Making timelines too short or not providing support (for example, your time and expertise when needed) can cause many hours of picking up the pieces after delegation fails.

Tip #7 Establish communication checkpoints. If the task is short and simple, this step may not be necessary. However, if the task is a bit bigger or complex, then regular check-ins are important. This can be time-based (every week or two) or milestone based, when key parts of the task are complete. Communication helps ensure that people doing the task don’t wander off course or flounder because of lack of clarity, direction or support.

Tip #8 Provide coaching when needed. Although you have chosen someone who has both the skills and interest to do the delegated assignment, coaching may be needed to ensure successful outcomes with delegated tasks. It is important to help people solve problems and remove roadblocks. Coaching also supports ongoing learning, making future delegation even more likely to succeed.

Tip #9 Debrief the results of each delegation experience. Assume you would like to create a series of successful delegation experiences. After each delegation, you need to explore what was learned, what worked and what could be improved upon. This can be as simple as an informal face-to-face meeting for an hour or so. Ask a series of questions such as: Was the task completed successfully? Where did things go smoothly? Where did we struggle? What would make this better in the future?

Tip #10 Don’t delegate if there is no one with the skills, time or motivation. Delegating to someone who has the skill but who is unwilling to do the task is a path to almost certain failure. While you might "force the issue" the results will likely be disappointing. It is better to do the task yourself or put it on a backburner until the timing is better.
Sometimes there is a team member who is willing and has the time for a new task, but does not have the skill. Develop a coaching plan so that she/he can develop the skills needed for you to delegate in the future.

**Bonus Tip:** Effective delegation is down, not up or across. Forgive me the old structural language to make this point. Expect in emergencies, supervisors and managers should not be asked to do the tasks of employees who they supervise (delegating UP) or of other managers or supervisors (delegating across). Delegation is a process that support learning and it part of effective succession planning. Effective delegation helps confirm employees’ skill sets and readiness for advancement within the organization.

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