



# Better Delegation = Better Leadership

A productivity expert provides a roadmap to delegate tasks effectively.

*By Eric Bloom*

**T**o lead and manage well, you must delegate some tasks to your staff. If you don't delegate, you'll be overworked and your staff will be underutilized. In fact, you do a disservice to your staff if you don't delegate. Lack of delegation inhibits employees' ability to learn new things and grow as professionals.

But too many leaders delegate on the run, without putting much thought into the process. When that happens, no one is well served. Delegation must be done in a careful, ethical, and forward-thinking manner. To that end, consider the following tips when delegating tasks to your staff, contractors, vendors, and others.

## 1. Clearly define what can and can't be delegated

Be mindful of what you should and shouldn't delegate. For example:

- **Some tasks may contain proprietary information** that shouldn't be shared at your staff's organizational level.
- **There are tasks that your team members may not be qualified to perform**, thus setting them up for failure.

- **Don't dump things onto your staff** just to get unwanted activities off your plate. People will figure this out and it will hurt your credibility.

Delegation is a powerful tool to maximize people's productivity, enhance their skill sets, help them grow professionally, and free you up to perform higher level tasks. Just make sure you're delegating the right tasks for the right reasons.

## 2. Create a prioritized delegation plan

Develop a plan outlining what tasks you'll delegate to which staff member. When determining who gets which tasks, ask yourself the following questions:

- **Who is fully qualified** to perform the task?
- **Who could perform the task** with proper instruction and mentoring with the goal of enhancing that person's skill set?
- **Who should not be given the task** because of their professional weaknesses or for specific political reasons?
- **Who deserves the task** based on seniority, past performance, and other relevant considerations?

- **How important** is the task to your department or organization?
- **How visible and far-reaching** will the results of this task be?

Delegating tasks to the right people isn't always easy or popular, but if you do it with transparency, fairness, consistency, and for the good of the organization, your staff will learn to respect your decisions.

### 3. Provide clear instructions and define specific expectations

There's nothing worse than being delegated a task, not given instructions on how the task should be performed, not told what is expected, working diligently to complete the task, and then being told it isn't what was wanted. Give specific instructions as to what needs to be done and your expectation of the ending result. This combination of instructions and expectations provides the correct delegation framework and establishes criteria as to how your employee will be judged when the task is completed.

### 4. Provide a safety net

When delegating something – particularly if it's a new experience for the employee being assigned the task – always have a safety net in place. A safety net is an environment that provides enough support to assure success, for both the employee and the task.

Assure such an environment with the following practices:

- **Provide the needed resources** and training.
- **Allow enough time** for people to properly perform the delegated tasks.
- **Help employees navigate** organizational politics.
- **Clearly explain** the desired results.

### 5. Let go and allow people to do their work

If you delegate a task and then micro-manage it so much that you've essentially performed the task yourself, it's not delegation. Neither should you totally divest yourself from the task. You're ultimately responsible for the work you delegate. The trick is to walk that line between being overbearing and non-participatory.

### 6. Be mentoring and instructive

Be available to answer questions and offer direct advice to the person performing a delegated task. This type of task-based instruction is a "learning moment," a form of on-the-spot training. Base the level of help you provide on factors such as the person's experience, the task difficulty, and political ramifications.

### 7. Give credit to those doing the work


Adhere to the philosophy of "It's either the team's success, or it's my failure." This mindset causes you to raise the visibility of your staff's good work. Doing so will instill loyalty toward you. This approach also reminds you that you're ultimately responsible for both your team's growth and your organization's productivity and performance.

### 8. Actively solicit feedback from your team

Asking the members of your team if they believe you've delegated the right tasks to the right people has the following advantages:

- **You'll grow as a manager and leader** by learning how others perceive your delegation abilities.
- **People's insights on better ways** to delegate and support your staff will improve your team's performance.
- **Accepting people's suggestions** makes you more approachable.

### Move outside your comfort zone

For those not comfortable delegating tasks to others, be willing to go outside your comfort zone. Your willingness to take this leap will boost your organization's productivity, improve your managerial ability, and help your staff members expand their knowledge and skill. 

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