

LeaderPerfect Newsletter

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Delegation Done Well: Eight Critical Considerations

by Dr. Mike Armour

In the [previous issue](#) we defined delegation as "the process by which management at any level entrusts a portion of its authority and a sub-set of its duties to a lower level of the organization."

The concept of delegation is rooted in the idea that the party to whom we delegate has the right to act and speak on our behalf and to do so with a certain degree of independence. Worded that way, delegation is a very serious matter. Every manager should want to do it well.

Let's imagine, therefore, that you are preparing to delegate a duty (or a set of duties) to Susan. Here are eight factors to consider as you make that preparation.

Your Purpose for Delegation

What is your primary reason for making this delegation?

- Is it to buy more time for yourself by removing one or more tasks from your calendar?
- Is it to take advantage of Susan's superior mastery of a topic on which you are not as well informed?
- Is it to provide a developmental experience for Susan?
- Is it to maintain a critical continuity during periods when you are traveling extensively?

Begin the delegation process by gaining clarity on your primary purpose (and any secondary purposes) for choosing to delegate this particular duty. This clarity of purpose will serve as a valuable point of reference for structuring the delegated duties and for choosing the way in which you approach the delegating conversation.

Level of Independence

To what degree do you want Susan to carry out her delegated duty independent of regular input or sign-offs from you? To what degree do you want her to collaborate with others? And if you want her to collaborate, who specifically should she include in this collaboration?

Parity of Authority and Responsibility

As we saw in the [previous article](#), Susan must be delegated sufficient authority to perform the duty for which she is accepting immediate responsibility. On the other hand, she should not be given authority which exceeds what the duty demands.

The goal is to provide parity between her level of responsibility and her level of authority. If you are uncertain of this balance point, start off by providing slightly less authority than you think will be necessary and invite her to come back to you if she finds that her authority is insufficient. It is almost always less problematic to expand someone's authority when it is inadequate than to withdraw authority when it is excessive.

Parameters of Decision-Making

How much freedom should you give Susan in decision-making? You want to give her enough decision-making authority that she is not running back to you constantly to get approvals. On the other hand, you probably do not want to give her absolute freedom to make any decision whatsoever.

So how do you strike a proper balance? You strive to define guidelines and policies with sufficient detail that you can accept any decision that she makes within a reasonable interpretation of your guidance.

Exceptions

Are there any exceptions you want to provide for in the general guidance and policies that you are giving Susan? For instance, you might want to make your own review of any correspondence that goes to a particularly testy or difficult customer. Or there may be certain communication on which you always want to be copied.

Personality Considerations

How does Susan like to work?

- Does she prefer detailed guidance up front on how to get the job done? Or does she prefer to be given general guidance and work out the details for herself?
- Does she function best in settings where she has lots of options? Or does she work better in situations which are highly structured and procedures-driven?
- Is she a good self-starter? Or does she require regular monitoring conversations to keep her on track?

These factors and others like them should always be weighed when determining whether a particular employee is a good match for a duty to be delegated.

Reporting and Information Cycles

How often do you want Susan to update you? And what reports do you want from her? How often? In what form? To the extent possible, avoid dropping these requirements on her after she is well underway in her new duties. Anticipate them in advance and discuss them as part of the delegation conversation.

Budget or Resource Constraints

If Susan is to have control of funding or other resources as part of her delegated duties, what limitations do you want to place on how she utilizes these tools? Again, it is far preferable to discuss these constraints at the outset rather than impose them after the fact in response to actions which she has taken and which fall outside of your preferences.

A few months ago I wrote a blog on [Delegation and Dysfunction](#), in which I laid out four different failures in delegation which limit the growth or even impair the health of organizations. Done poorly, delegation is debilitating. Done well, it unleashes both individual and group potential and enlarges success.

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