

Delegation Skills



DELEGATION SKILLS

With increasing demands on our time and resources, it's impossible to achieve all we set out to do without the help and assistance of others. Unfortunately, many people mistakenly think that delegation can only be done by people with direct authority over those working for them.

In fact, delegation is more often an individual skill — determining the best way to handle a project or a task, and then discovering the best way to solicit help from others when and where we need it.

We all have to ask others to do things for us — everything from taking messages/phone calls to sitting in for us at a meeting, or even taking over a large or complex project. In these circumstances, when you ask someone to help, you are really delegating part of your job to others.

So, if we can do it on some occasions (even in a minor way) or when we go on vacation or are away from work for any reason, why can't we do it all the time?

This booklet offers some advice on how to make delegation part of your normal work schedule. It will help you identify when you need the assistance of others and how you can learn to trust them with delegated tasks.

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Assign

In an informal organization, delegation does not follow a system of seniority — people delegate tasks to more senior people in the team or the enterprise if they have to. More significantly, people tend to spend more time discussing options and choices about what should be done, how it is done, and who does it. We will return to this subject again later.

More organizations are turning to teams to address their business challenges. Project teams, matrix teams, cross-functional teams, and natural work-group teams are all examples of such efforts to handle a specific work task or goal or a workload peak that can't easily be dealt with in any other way.

These are teams in the truest sense of the word. They are not loosely aligned groups; they work effectively with each other, are open and honest, and demonstrate a high degree of trust.

It is not unusual in a team to ask for help or assistance, as well as to give it. We might not refer to this form of mutual co-operation as delegation, but this is what it is — sharing the work for which you are responsible with others.

We also hear a great deal about empowerment, which involves handing down responsibility and power to people who do the core work within organizations. It expands the skills and tasks that make up a job, and gives team members and front-line workers greater control over decision-making, problem-solving, and goal-setting.

Empowerment is delegation taken to its ultimate stage; others are made fully accountable for what they are doing. However, empowerment is not achieved overnight. The first step involves letting go and learning to trust people. The same is very much the case with delegation.

The first step in delegation is to be ready to assign tasks to others. On the next page is a short questionnaire to help you discover whether more or better delegation can help you.



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Should You Delegate Questionnaire

This simple questionnaire seeks to measure a number of areas that are generally regarded as important in determining an individual's overall need to delegate.

	YES	NO
1. Do you work longer hours than you should?		
2. Do you often feel exhausted with the sheer amount of tasks you have to do?		
3. Do you have unfinished jobs mounting up that you are unable to get to?		
4. Do you spend some of your time doing things for others that they could do for themselves?		
5. Do you struggle to meet deadlines?		
6. Do you often get behind on projects, and have to work harder than you'd like just to catch up?		
7. Do you find yourself working on details, rather than the bigger picture?		
8. Do you back off from asking others for help because of how they might react?		
9. Do you work at things because you enjoy them, rather than because you need to do them?		
10. Do you worry about making mistakes?		
11. Do you hold on to work tasks because you want to stay in control?		
12. Do you lack confidence in others to do a good job for you?		

This is not intended to be more than a very simple assessment. The more "Yes" boxes you checked, the more likely that delegation will provide an opportunity to be more efficient and effective in your work.

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Delegation offers all sorts of possibilities. So, what are the implications for the person delegating and those people on the receiving end?

By delegating you are:

- **freeing yourself up to do the more important jobs in your schedule**
- **developing the skills of others**
- **making jobs more interesting**
- **giving tasks to people who are possibly more skilled than you**
- **demonstrating confidence in others**

For other people, delegation means:

- **they get the chance to do things they wouldn't normally do**
- **they start to take on new skills and responsibilities**
- **they have the chance to prove themselves**
- **they receive training in new skills**
- **they are more interested in the job or in enrichment**

The delegator and the person(s) to whom the work is delegated can together achieve a win/win outcome. As we will discover, this is particularly the case if delegation occurs in a positive and empowering way.

Of course there's always the idea of delegating for the wrong reasons, such as these:

- **not liking the job in the first place**
- **might not be able to do it**
- **to penalize someone you don't like**
- **will miss the deadline anyway**
- **sheer laziness or lack of commitment**

All of these reasons will foster distrust and lead people to feel put upon or taken advantage of. This won't encourage them to take on future delegation tasks willingly or with much motivation to do the job well. Delegation should always be seen as a positive solution, not as a quick way to fix a problem.

