

Mastering the Fine Art of Delegation

Effective delegation is one of the essential tools of world-class leadership.

To begin with, it is central to your leadership “leveraging” because it multiplies your impact by “getting things done through other people.”

Delegation also multiplies your rarest resource—*time!* The time you save by delegating work to others can be redirected and used for more productive and impacting pursuits at your level.

Delegation also develops your people and saves them from the boredom of getting stuck with a job description that never changes! This is why every job description has the same final clause: *And other duties as assigned by supervisor.* Delegation enables a leader to continually expand a team member’s assignments, to keep pace with their continued growth and development. One of the most important examples of this is the process of grooming a team member for their future promotion. The delegation of certain parts of supervisory tasks helps prepare a worker for what they will have to do at the next level.

In short, leaders *must delegate* in order to have the impact they envision for themselves and for their people.

But delegation comes with a risk—to *get 'mo*, you must *let go*. Delegation requires you to share your authority and responsibility with others and relinquish total control. Here’s the hitch—*you will always be ultimately responsible for outcomes, no matter who on your team produces them.* This may be one of the main reasons so many leaders balk at delegation (and why so many *people balk at leadership!*). How does a leader balance these two essential elements of team-work—quality control and individual contribution?

Overcoming the Barriers to Delegation

Let’s start answering that question by addressing the barriers to delegation raised by both leaders *and* the people they lead. Look at the chart that follows. Each of the 5 major objections to delegation are raised and addressed, with solutions that match both perspectives—the leader’s and the team member’s. Use the chart provided to reflect on your own questions, as well as those raised by your team members.

The Personal Trainer is a resource for growing leaders produced by “The Boss Doctor™,” Dr. Jim Dyke, the Founder and Director of **Corporate Leadership Initiatives, Inc.**—an organization dedicated to equipping men and women with skills and principles pertinent to the role and life of a transformational leader of the 21st century. This is a specially-designed tool for personal reflection and discussion that will help you and your team apply the ideas and principles presented in the matching edition of the **Leadership Tracks** newsletter. Log on to www.CLIonline.com to discover more ways **Corporate Leadership Initiatives, Inc.** can bring its resources and expertise to your organization and help your people become better leaders and better followers. Copyright 2020 James R. Dyke — all rights reserved.

Objections—OVERULED

THEIR Objection	How to address it...	YOUR Objection	How to address it...
THEIR Lack of time	You may have to intervene in their time management. Be prepared to (1) review their workload; (2) assess their true availability; and (3) set work priorities for them.	YOUR Lack of time	Be strategic. Temporarily ignore low-priority tasks (unimportant/non-urgent or even unimportant/ <i>urgent</i>) in order to get the time you need to start delegating other tasks that are more important.
THEIR Fear that they will fail	Start by choosing an assignment that matches the team member's level of skill, ability, or expertise. Express your confidence in them! Provide training, coaching, and support as needed.	YOUR Fear that they will fail	Start carefully with low priority tasks where potential failure isn't critical. Limit the risk of failure by limiting authority (e.g. Level 1 or Level 2 delegation). Use checkpoints to monitor progress. Be prepared to provide training, coaching, and support.
THEIR Reluctance to accept control and added responsibility	See all previous information above and right. Also... become their safety net—give them your assurance of support and your acceptance of ultimate responsibility.	YOUR Reluctance to <i>surrender</i> control and responsibility	Design appropriate limits of authority; set limited boundaries for decision-making; and create feedback mechanisms like checkpoints to assess quality.
THEIR Aversion to exertion: ending up with more work to do (LAZINESS)	See <i>Lack of time</i> (above). Also, connect the assignment with the organization and team goals; explain how the work will benefit them; issue a challenge for them to grow and develop. A CAVEAT: they may not be the right person for the assignment!	YOUR Aversion to your own obsolescence: ending up with no work to do (INSECURITY)	More time means you have the availability take on a new assignment; help your boss with one of theirs; even take something off your boss's plate. This is the pathway to raises and promotions!
Too eager to take on the task to please you (and take on too much)	They may need help managing their time and their work. (See above at top). If they're not engaged with their job, it may be because their current tasks aren't a good match with their gifts and strengths—take a closer look and find out. A CAVEAT: they may not be the right person for the assignment!	Too eager to keep and enjoy the task yourself (and keep too much)	(a) You may have a problem letting go of work you used to do before you got promoted—work that you enjoy; or (b) You may be over-stressed with the work you now <i>have</i> to do that you really don't like. In any case... See previous rationale above. Your time is way too valuable for you to waste on low-priority tasks you keep for your own enjoyment. Let your team have some of the fun so you can free up time for more important priorities—like your own career advancement.

The 8 Steps of Delegation

If you have reviewed the material on the barriers and objections to delegation, you will already have a basic understanding of effective delegation. Let's pull all of that information together, and put it into a logical, step-by-step approach that you can use effectively with *any assignment you make!*

Step 1 – Identify the Assignment – The WHAT

BEFORE YOU EVEN BEGIN...be crystal clear about what you CAN delegate and what you CAN'T.

Keep in mind, the one thing you cannot delegate, by definition, is your job.

What, exactly, does that entail?

You can't delegate the aspects of your work that distinguish your level of responsibility from those you lead / manage / supervise. The classic roles of management work belong in this category—planning, budgeting, staffing, directing, coordinating, evaluating, setting policy, and dealing with conflict and crisis. In certain key areas, *you are the one given the responsibility to act.* Certainly, you have also been given the authority to involve your team in different aspects of these important roles—if you are a good leader, you will always be open to gaining their information, insight, ideas, and input. But if there is failure in your sphere of responsibility, higher-ups will come for *your head*, not *your team's*. If you are ever in doubt about what you can or can't delegate, *check with your boss* for a definitive answer.

Now select the task. Here are some to consider...

1. Especially if you are a beginner at delegation, make it easier for yourself by starting *small* and *simple*. Start *small* by identifying tasks or projects that have low priority; limited scope; or a small risk of failure. Start *simple* by finding basic or elementary tasks that can be easily described, defined, learned, and evaluated.
2. Consider a *repetitive* task—something that must be done as a regular *routine*. The first time you assign the task it will take time to train and oversee your delegate. But as your team member starts doing the task on a regular basis, they will develop their skill; require less supervision in the work; and save time *over time—every time they do the task*.
3. Find a *technical task* that your subordinate is better at than you are! If you're not a whiz with spreadsheets, but your team member is—give them the assignment to do it for you and save your time for more important tasks.
4. Think about *parts of managerial tasks*. They are ideal ways to groom a team member for future promotion. Include an ambitious team member in some of the things you must do as the leader of the team—creating a budget; planning a project; scheduling team work; helping with creative problem-solving.
5. *When you are swamped* is an ideal time to start delegating. I recall accepting a promotion and realizing I *had* to start delegating because I simply did not have enough time to do *everything myself!* I was forced to delegate. I had no choice. It was the best discipline I ever experienced as a leader. That's when I discovered some surprising realities about myself and my team:
 - a) I was right about one thing: Nobody ever did things exactly the way I would do them. But...
 - b) I discovered that things rarely needed to be done exactly the way I did them! And...
 - c) I found out that my team members often did things BETTER than I would have done them!

Here is another way to select the right task to delegate

Think in terms of the following different *categories* of tasks:

1. Research
2. Recommendation
3. Decision (to take action)
4. Solution (to a problem)
5. Strategy (to solve or avoid a *series* of problems or make a *series* of decisions)

These are listed (roughly) in the order of *increasing scope of responsibility* and the accompanying *increased risk of failure*. The delegation principle at work here is a simple one:

Manage the risk of failure by limiting the *scope* of the *assignment*.

You can also mitigate risk by delegating authority judiciously. Use the 6 levels outlined in the accompanying newsletter. This applies another delegation principle:

Manage the risk of failure by limiting the *authority* of the *delegate*.

KEEP THIS IN MIND WHENEVER YOU DELEGATE AUTHORITY:

1. Make sure everyone involved is informed of this action.
2. Be prepared to back up your *delegated* authority with your *real* authority and presence.

Step 2 – Define the Outcome – WHERE

Define the destination of this assignment—*where* you want to end up, when the task is finished to your satisfaction. What does that look like? Be specific! If you have concerns about quality, then think about applying a traditional grading system to the end result—A, B, C, D, or F. If you want to have an “A+” result, then be sure you can describe to your delegate *exactly* what an “A+” will look like.

Step 3 – Select the Delegate – WHO

This is definitely where the “art” of delegation begins. *Whenever possible*, fit the assignment to the individual. The better the fit, the greater the engagement and motivation of the delegate. Consider the following categories when you are looking for the right match:

1. Abilities / Skills
2. Personality Style Strengths
3. Intrinsic Motivations
4. Development Goals
5. Gifts / Strengths / Talents

Let’s explore these in greater detail.

1. Match the assignment to the delegate’s level of *ability or skill*

This is the most logical fit—when the delegate has the level of ability or skill that will ensure a successful outcome.

2. Match the assignment to the delegate’s *personality style strengths*

Personality strengths are a person’s performance “comfort zone.” Their personality strengths are behaviors that come naturally to the individual. Familiarity with the team member and their DiSC® profile will be of tremendous help in this regard.

3. Match the assignment to the delegate's *intrinsic motivations*

This requires you to know your delegate's inner motivating desires. The easiest way to do that, of course is to simply ask them. The most common intrinsic workplace motivations are:

- The desire for recognition
- The desire for inclusion—to be “in on things”
- The desire for meaningful purpose or meaningful contribution through work
- The desire for autonomy and freedom in working conditions
- The opportunity for challenging work
- The desire for personal or professional growth
- The interest in social affiliation / interpersonal connection

4. Match the assignment to the delegate's *professional development goals*

This approach is the opposite of the first one listed (matching the assignment with the individual's current skills). This type of assignment will take the delegate out of their comfort zone and demand energy and commitment on their part. The payoff is in the added growth they will experience. This is one of the most profound ways that you can lead (and it is the ultimate form of leveraging)—by guiding your team members into even greater impact of their own! You can't do this, of course, unless you are first, familiar with your delegate's developmental goals. Then you must get their agreement and buy-in at the very beginning. A third essential is making sure your delegates have the resources, training, coaching, and support they need to develop the appropriate skill level, and complete their assignment successfully.

5. Match the assignment to the delegate's *gifts / strengths / talents*

Consider how the assignment matches the delegate's natural gifts, strengths, talents, and interests. Experts like Marcus Buckingham (author of *Now, Discover Your Strengths*) and Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (author of *Flow*) are good sources to understand the phenomenon of using natural talents in the workplace. Studies have revealed that performance is greatly enhanced when an individual employs a talent in the execution of a task (as much as 200% greater!). Research has also shown a strong link between the use of natural workplace talents and worker engagement. Thus, the identification of talent-linked performance may be as simple as asking an employee, “What type of work do you enjoy the most?” The rationale for matching assignments to the team member's talents is straightforward—the closer the match, the greater the engagement and motivation of the delegate.

Step 4 – Make the WII-FM connection – WHY the delegate will want to do the task

Your delegate will be much more likely to apply themselves seriously to the task if they have a clear and personal incentive. Give them a reasonable answer to the question, “What's in it for me?” One of the easiest ways to do that is to refer them to your rationale for matching them with the assignment in the first place:

1. Abilities / Skill: “Bob, I'm giving you this assignment because I'm confident you have the skill to complete it successfully.”
2. Personality Strengths: “Dave, I'm asking you to give this presentation because you are a natural when it comes to being in the spotlight and speaking in front of a group.”
3. Intrinsic Motivations: “Cheryl, this kind of challenge is not for everyone. But I know how much you *love* a good challenge. So I'm giving this assignment to *you*.”
4. Development Goals: “Victor, you and I are going to work together to create a budget for next year. You said you wanted to be a manager some day. And this is something that managers have to be able to do. So you're going to help me with this so you can learn how to do this when it becomes your real job.”
5. Gifts / Strengths / Talents: “Maria, I'm giving you this assignment because I know how much you *love* this kind of work. And you're soooo good at it. I know you're going to do a terrific job!”

Step 5 – Describe the Rationale – WHY this assignment is important

Be ready to explain why this task or project is important in the first place. In general, be prepared to connect the task with the organization's interests and the team's goals. Use the concept of the Critical Path Contribution (*LeadershipTracks Newsletter Issue #1*). Show the delegate how this assignment will enable you and the team to be more strategic in contributing to the Critical Path of the organization. Even more important, be ready to *personalize* the rationale by showing how it connects to *the delegate's* interests, priorities, values, and goals. This is especially important if you are using the assignment to stimulate the delegate's personal or professional growth. Before you assign them a task that is going to move them into unfamiliar (and uncomfortable) territory, it is wise to be sure they understand exactly *what* they are getting into, and exactly *how* it is going to ultimately benefit them.

Step 6 – Agree on the Plan – WHEN

Meet together and agree on a specific plan—including a realistic deadline—*when* all of this is going to conclude. Be very specific about every element of the assignment—how much authority they have; the exact scope of the work; the desired outcome; any deadlines involved; and the mechanisms for monitoring progress and giving feedback. This is also where you need to be specific about *your* role in the assignment—how much training, support, oversight, coaching, or advising you will provide.

Here's a tip to make sure they understand their assignment:

Don't ask them if they understand what they are to do. Instead, say "Now... tell me what you are going to do." Their response will indicate immediately how well they understand their assignment (and where they still need clarification).

Step 7 – Monitor the Process – HOW [Pending]

How am I doing? This is what every worker wants and needs to know. *If you have any concerns about the quality of their work*, use checkpoints to monitor their progress. Checkpoints are:

- Clear
- Specific
- Agreed-upon
- Moments in time
- When you will inspect the progress of the assignment

Keep this in mind: Checkpoints are optional. *Only use them if you feel you need them because of the nature of the work or the worker.* If you have confidence in your delegate, don't use checkpoints—you can come across as demeaning or lacking trust in their abilities. Here is the delegation principle at work:

Manage the risk of failure by monitoring the *progress* of the assignment.

Step 8 – Provide thorough Follow-up – HOW [Final]

Thorough follow-up requires three elements:

1. Review—Evaluation arguably should be a part of *every* assignment. Your delegate deserves to know how well they completed their task. Review the outcome and let them know.
2. Response—That means providing *both* kinds of specific feedback: *positive* as well as *negative*.
3. Reward—Decide right now that you are going to bake a cake and break out the bubbly when the assignment or project is completed! One of your most important leadership responsibilities is to celebrate success and find ways to reward your team members. Don't shortchange your team by downplaying the significance of positive reinforcement. Begin with simple praise, but don't stop there—create a culture of celebration in your team that is anchored in tangible expressions of appreciation and recognition.