

## How to Delegate for Improved Productivity

### Your mission should you choose to accept it

We estimate that fewer than forty percent of managers know how to successfully delegate. In fact, delegation is one of the most underutilized management skills, especially in smaller businesses. There are many reasons why we don't hone this essential skill. But the fact is that in order to increase productivity for any business—delegation is essential.

Look at it this way. Let's say that you make ten decisions a day. If you delegate to just ten staff members, and each makes the same number of decisions—that's one order of magnitude more decisions. Not only does that free up time for more important considerations, but it is a great way to engage your staff, and have each associate step up to the plate.

### **Why is it so Hard to Delegate?**

When we fail to delegate, we create a perception of mistrust in the minds of those who feel confident to perform the tasks. Failure to delegate often leads to resentment toward the manager who retains responsibility and control; places unnecessary stress on the leader; and it prevents team members from learning new skills and being able to handle increased responsibilities.

Delegation is easy to understand but harder to carry out. So why is it often so painful? In order to delegate more effectively, it would be helpful to understand the most common reasons why we don't delegate. Some barriers to delegation are:

- Refusal to allow mistakes and the fear of reprisal
- Lack of experience in the job or in delegating
- Lack of confidence in subordinates or co-team members
- Viewing the development of subordinates as a threat
- Failure to delegate authority commensurate with responsibility
- Fear of taking calculated risks
- Not aware of subordinate or co-team capabilities
- The "I can do it better" syndrome

## A Roadmap to Successful Delegation

Effective delegation increases productivity, builds trust, develops and engages your staff, and motivates. And it goes a long way to build a culture of accountability. So, now that we appreciate that delegation is a leadership skill worth honing, here are eight steps to ensure success:

1. *Define the task carefully.* Not all tasks should be delegated. Once you decide that the task is suitable to be delegated, clearly define it. Use the SMART acronym—specific, measurable, agreed, realistic, and time bounded. You can't delegate an unclear task.
2. *Match the associate to the task.* The individual selected should have the skills and competencies needed to complete the task. Also, delegate to an associate that is also willing to complete the task (that's the "agreed" in the SMART acronym).
3. *Communicate clearly.* The leader must have a clear understanding of the task objective, required deliverables, completion dates, and any special skills that may be needed. Requirements (needs and expectations) must be clearly communicated and mutually agreed upon.
4. *Explain the big picture.* Not only is it important to clearly explain the task at hand, but it is equally important to explain why you are delegating it to your subordinate, and its importance to the organization. The big picture is as important as the task itself.
5. *Transfer responsibility and authority.* Responsibility without authority will surely set your subordinate up for failure—at best. Nothing is more frustrating to a willing subordinate than to have to check back with his or her manager, only to navigate one road block after another.
6. *Set your subordinate up for success.* Inform other stakeholders to ensure cooperation. This is critical and cannot be delegated. Also, provide support throughout the assignment. Once you delegate a task, you cannot walk away. Discuss progress at key milestones.
7. *Don't micro-manage.* Once you have delegated the task and the big picture, let the associate carry the ball. There are always several ways to complete an assignment, and your way may not be the best. If you second guess—you may not get a second chance.
8. *Give constructive feedback.* Give your subordinate essential feedback once the task is completed. It should include positive reinforcement as well as constructive feedback. This clearly demonstrates your interest in the outcome, while grooming your subordinate for more important assignments.

## In Conclusion

There is a finite amount of work that any manager can accomplish. Failure to delegate effectively is one of the leading causes of low productivity. The stark reality is that three out of every five important tasks that a manager must tackle should be delegated. If you want to free up more of your own time and improve group productivity, master the techniques of successful delegation.

**About the Author**

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Stan has more than three decades of business and consulting experience, in both the private and public sectors, in the United States and abroad. Stan specializes in building high-performance teams, and working closely with senior leaders to achieve breakthrough financial, organizational, and operating improvement. He has been quoted in many business publications, including *Fortune*, *Business Week* and the *Wall Street Journal*.

**About Change Management Consulting, Inc. (CMC)**

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