

Delegate Like a Pro

When and Why to Delegate



Leaders who **fail to delegate** pay a high price. Failure to delegate can lead to:

- Overwhelm;
- Low levels of engagement;
- High employee turnover;
- Lost productivity and revenue;
- Inability to effectively lead.



Effective delegation can have profound and compounding benefits. By delegating, leaders:

- Ease their workloads to think better, lead better, and be more strategic;
- Create powerful learning opportunities for their team members;
- Realize higher retention rates and higher levels of workplace engagement;
- Achieve greater well-being.

Excuses for Failing to Delegate

Some leaders fail to delegate because they are control freaks who can't let go of the reins of power. In most cases, the reasons for poor delegation are more complex.

1

I can't find the time, energy or focus I lack bandwidth (i.e., I can't get my own head above water in time to see what needs to be done and identify who can do it best).

2

I don't know my team members well enough to delegate (i.e., I either lack the rapport to delegate and/or don't know who on my team is best positioned to take on a specific job).

3

My team members are already overwhelmed, and I feel badly adding anything else to their already full plate.

4

I'm not sure where to start, and what I need or how to ask for it

5

Trust is already low on my team—asking for more will likely result in negative blow back;

6

Team members don't know how to get the job done—delegating and training would take as long (or longer) than doing the job myself (i.e., I haven't had time to mentor, grow, or develop my team members to take on different responsibilities);

7

If I ask my team members, they will think I'm lazy or incompetent (i.e., I am afraid that delegating to others will expose a lack of knowledge or make me appear weak);

8

I'm too far behind (i.e., whether you call it procrastination or pressure prompted, I am too much of a last-minute person to delegate to others).

The Ten Key Tenets of Effective Delegation

Effective delegation is a learned behavior. To get started, follow a few simple rules of thumb:



Prepare proactively

Effective delegation necessitates preparation. What is coming at me, when, what are the outcomes, and who can help me?



Avoid only delegating “down”

Efficiencies in time and scale can happen by sharing a task with a peer who might be more appropriate and better equipped to tackle the task at hand.



Be clear on the outcome, flexible on the approach

First, clarify your constraints. What must happen, in what timeframe, and on what budget? What can't happen? And, what needs to happen for success (and how will you measure success)?
Next, open your mind. Don't assume that there is only one person for any job. Don't assume that there is only one way to do the job. You might be surprised to discover who is best equipped to take on a specific task or project.



Delegate at the right level

Create learning experiences and engagement by delegating to the right individual at the right level. Experienced team members can feel undervalued with low-level tasks. Delegating high-level projects to team members not yet ready to rise to the occasion can put your reputation and their reputation at risk. Break tasks down into smaller units to promote effectiveness.



Foster relationships

Familiarity breeds comfort (we like people and things we know). When you don't know who to ask or what to ask for, it is difficult to delegate effectively.



Amplify your impact by creating a culture of delegation

As you delegate, model effective delegation practices and encourage your team members to delegate as well.



Make clear asks

This is simple and hard. Before you delegate, know what you are asking, why are you asking for it, and be prepared to offer clear guidelines on when you need to see the deliverables.



Express specific gratitude

Proactively, publicly and frequently expressing appreciation is a powerful motivator and relationship builder. It promotes engagement and positively reinforces behavior outside the performance review. Effective delegators recognize the value of expressing gratitude. Be certain to clearly state what you appreciate, why, and its impact on the team/organization.



Foster buy-in

It is imperative that team members take ownership of their work. When they are invested in the outcome and see why it is important, they will give it the attention it merits.



Track metrics and build on past successes:

Track your delegated tasks and the outcomes. Develop a keen awareness of who on your team is best positioned to respond to specific types of requests. Reflect upon what worked, didn't work, and could work better next time.

Delegation Checklist

- Create a timeline of upcoming projects:** Look ahead--at least a week in advance and better yet, a month in advance or quarterly--and list upcoming projects. Map out what needs to happen.

- Define Success:** Clarify what needs to happen by when. Also outline your constraints in terms of budget, timelines, etc. Finally, ask yourself who needs to be involved and at what level (e.g., Can the job be outsourced for less or do you need to do the work internally)?

- Build on Past Successes:** If you've successfully delegated on a similar project in the past, to whom did you delegate? Are they available? What, if anything, would you change this time around to ensure even greater success?

- Assess Assumptions:** What might you be assuming about your team member's knowledge or skillbase? If you're having doubts, ask for assurances to ensure they have the knowledge/skills to complete the job.

- Gain Alignment:** Once you've delegated, ask project owners to create a plan with a timeline. If the relationship is new or there is less established trust, ask for a more detailed timeline. Ensure you're aligned on the outcomes and timeline.

- Anticipate Obstacles:** What might pose an obstacle to success? What needs to come off your team member's plate to ensure he or she can successfully execute the delegated project on the specified timeline?

- Establish Communication Guidelines:** Specify how often you want or need updates (favor more frequent communication if the relationship is new or there is a lack of trust). Invite questions. Identify how the project status/progress should be communicated (e.g., in weekly on-site meetings, emails etc.) and measured (i.e., how the owner of the project will collect and share metrics).

- Embrace the Learning Edge:** What do you need to learn to ensure you're delegating effectively (e.g., if you're overseeing a technical project but don't have a tech background, do you need more knowledge to effectively supervise the work)? What additional training, coaching, and mentorship might be needed to ensure your team member's success?

- Post-Project Actions:** Schedule time to debrief to discuss what worked, what could have worked better, and what the team member learned. Based on the experience, assess how the collaboration could be improved in the future (e.g., clearer expectations, increased mentorship etc.).