

How To Delegate Effectively

By Ronald P. Smyser

Client question: “How can I improve my delegation skills?”

If someone does not completely understand what you want—specifically what, by when and by whom—how can he or she meet your expectations and help enhance your leadership impact?

Ineffective delegation is a major barrier to leadership success that enables the inexperienced or unskilled leader to blame the delegate for unacceptable performance.

Unfortunately, the best delegating practices are often overlooked or not taught to future leaders. Typically, the assumption is that, with a few words of guidance, the delegate can take on be successful with newly expanded responsibilities. And the delegate is often hesitant to ask instructive questions for fear of looking incompetent, thus he or she may have no clue what, specifically, to do ... and the leader doesn't know it.

Leaders too often think that delegating reduces their importance or that it's easier to do the tasks than to communicate and train others to do them. These thoughts reflect leaders who have reached or exceeded their current capability to meet the ever-increasing complexities and demands of contemporary leadership positions.

Effective delegation enables busy, stressed leaders to focus on planning, communicating and leading—which should be their key job function—rather than focus on the many ever-increasing hours of “doing” things that interfere with leadership impact.

Equally important, effective delegation is *successful empowerment* that magnifies each delegate's motivation, commitment, productivity, and professional growth, while enhancing the leader's impact and value.

Before effective delegation can take place, the person to whom you delegate must have a clear understanding of the responsibilities and assignments being delegated—your specific expectations and required accomplishment level, by when and by whom. And successful transfer of this important information should be confirmed so that the objectives can and will be accomplished successfully and timely.

Starting now, with a personal commitment to do it smarter, practice delegating effectively.

Here's how:

- (1) Prepare a detailed description of your job, with priority on quality over brevity in the document. Specify the key areas of your responsibilities and functions; for example, scope of leadership responsibilities and functions, rainmaking (getting new orders), new business development, maintenance sales, financial planning, financial management, human resource management, marketing planning, community relationships, etc.

- (2) Ensure that detailed job descriptions are prepared for each subordinate position and cascade parts of your job functions and tasks to the appropriate direct report level job descriptions. Your rainmaking responsibility, for example, may fit best in the job description for Sales VP or Manager. Continue this cascading process throughout your organization.
- (3) Remember that it's about getting the responsibility into the logically right job description, not about the person who happens to be in the job at the moment.
- (4) Train—or recruit and replace—as needed to ensure that each job is filled with a delegate who is prepared for and can actually carry out (is personally equipped to do it, has proper resources, scope and level of authority) your expectations to your satisfaction.
- (5) Communicate specifically the what, when and by whom of each responsibility and assignment being delegated, the actions you want your delegate to take, the follow-up you expect to hear about, what you do not want to be involved in, and specific instructions for what, when and how you want to be informed.
- (6) Make the timetables realistic and check in at appropriate intervals. For example, if a completion deadline is in two weeks, get an informal update at the start of the second week so you can guide as needed to ensure the task is done well, on time.
- (7) Monitor how well your delegated job functions are carried out and provide frequent feedback to enhance future results that achieve your objectives without causing jeopardy to the health of your business or organization.
- (8) Over time, delegate more and more of your specific job elements or tasks for increasingly longer, more frequent periods and with increasingly higher levels of responsibility and authority, so you can focus more on the strategic, versus tactical, priorities.
- (9) As this process starts to work well, assist with cascading and the follow-up process through each level to the next lower level. Then, take pride in the increased motivation, commitment, and productivity of your organization and in your enhanced leadership impact.

Effective delegation is productively motivating and straightforward.

But, if you need additional help, seek professional guidance from experienced, successful delegators.

Ron Smyser, Founder and Chairman of Spinnaker Leadership Associates, Inc., is a creative, experienced, straightforward, no-nonsense leadership coach and business management consultant.

www.spinnakerleadership.com