

Effective Delegation (Adapted from the EMyth)

There are four steps in the delegating process:

1. Identify the work or result you want to delegate, and determine to whom you'll delegate it.

You can delegate almost anything, with the following exceptions:

- You can't delegate the overall result of your position (unless you're leaving your position).
- You can't delegate the work or results of someone else's position (unless you have their agreement).
- You can't delegate work or results that have been delegated to you and that you've agreed to do yourself.

When it's time to delegate, determine which position is appropriate for the task. Not the appropriate person, the appropriate *position*. Unfortunately, many business owners and managers have a tendency to delegate everything to the same person or persons, over and over. They are the ones who have come through for you before.

But not only are you overloading those employees with too much work, you're sending strong messages to your other employees: "I really don't trust you," or "our organizational structure isn't really worth much," or "I can't rely on it to do what it's intended to do." This can lead to business problems such as people dependency, employee turnover, and lack of commitment, which trigger higher costs to you, both financial and emotional.

What's the remedy? First, pay attention to your own habits. Notice if you're stuck in a comfort zone of habitually delegating to the same people. Make sure you're hiring the right people for the job. Invest managerial time in creating systems and training people how to run them. And finally, force yourself to trust people to do their jobs.

Once you've identified the right position for the task, it's time to delegate. If the position you've identified does not report to you, go to that person's manager or use the service system to request the result you need.

If the position does report to you and there's more than one person in the position, choose one of them based on current workload, competence, the importance of the task, time requirements, personal interests, career development, or any other relevant factors.

2. Put the delegation in writing, with the due date.

Once you know what you're going to delegate and have identified the right position and person for the task, you need to write the delegation down with as much detail and specificity as possible.

When you put something in writing:

- It forces you to plan the work better.
- You're more likely to communicate what you really mean.
- Others are less likely to misinterpret what you want.
- It provides a record of the request in case any of the parties forgets.
- It minimizes confusion, disagreement, and misunderstanding.
- It allows people to function more independently.
- People know exactly what they're agreeing to.
- You'll be more confident of getting the right result.
- It gives you a starting point for quantifying and orchestrating the work.
- It saves you time in the long run.

The absolute "musts" in your delegation are: the result you want, the standards that must be met, and the due date and time. Often the employee can determine the actual work needed to produce the result, although in some cases you might choose to lay out the task yourself in a step-by-step fashion.

Don't neglect the due date and time. More headaches arise from this issue than almost anything else. As a manager, you must be clear and specific about when you want the result accomplished. You can't blame people for being late (although many managers try to) when they weren't given the due date.

State the due date and time specifically: "*Monday, July 12th by 3 p.m.*" Not: "*in a few days,*" "*in a couple of weeks,*" or "*pretty soon.*" And certainly not the dreaded: ASAP (as soon as possible).

Usually, the reluctance to give a specific due date stems from uncertainty about how long the task might take. Just use your best judgment; you'll improve as you go. If you and your employee find that it's not realistic, a new one can be agreed upon.

In the worksheets section of this process is a delegation agreement form. Although it's simple to use, it's a complete system for delegating work, negotiating particulars, and reaching agreement. Revise it to fit your needs, if necessary, and set a date for implementing it with your employees.

3. Discuss the delegation with the employee whenever possible.

For new assignments, it's an excellent idea to discuss the delegation with your employee. Even though the delegation agreement form is designed so that a face-to-face meeting is not necessary, a meeting can give both of you opportunities to:

- Discuss the overall objective of the assignment; relate it to the company's or the department's goals.
- Discuss the logic behind the due date and the standards.
- Get clarity and agreement on the relationship of this task to the employee's other work accountabilities; re-prioritize, if necessary.
- Address what might be difficult or challenging for the employee.
- Provide a forum for the employee to ask questions.
- Determine the first reporting loop for you to check the progress of the work

4. Get the employee's agreement.

The final step of the delegation process is to get the employee's agreement to be accountable for the result. Remember: No agreement, no commitment. No commitment, no result.

Anticipate reasons why the employee might decline, or want to decline, the delegation. Maybe they think they lack the time given their other accountabilities. Maybe they feel they lack the training or ability to do the job. The delegation agreement provides your people with an opportunity and a forum to express their concerns.

You'll find that this process allows employees to cooperate with their managers to determine how results will be achieved. It will lead to more agreement, more commitment, and more timely results throughout your company. In addition, it will lead to more satisfying working relationships.