



Reprinted from the August 2010 issue of BIC

Management 101: The art of delegation

Are you overloaded and stressed? Do you regularly work late? When you return from vacation, do you find piles of unfinished business waiting for you? Do you feel you are the only one who can do the job right? Or, do you feel it would take too much time to show one of your staff how to complete a task you normally handle?

The more “yes” answers you give, the more likely you are having trouble delegating. One of the most common strategies for overcoming these situations is to learn how to delegate. Bottom line: delegation is a key management skill you absolutely need to master.

Simply stated, “Delegation is giving another person the authority and responsibility to carry out a task.” Delegation allows you to make the best use of your time and skills as well

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as help others on the team to grow and develop.

There are three basic steps to delegation: what, who and how. In addition, there are a few other guidelines to keep in mind to ensure you are delegating effectively.

What. Delegation is a win-win for all when managed properly. Though, that does not mean you can delegate just anything. To determine what tasks to delegate, consider the following questions:

- Is this a task someone else can do?
- Does this task provide an opportu-

nity to grow and develop a staff member’s skill?

- Do I have enough time to delegate the job effectively? Time should be available for adequate training, for questions and answers, for opportunities to follow up and for rework if necessary.

- Is this a task that may reoccur, in similar form, sometime in the future?

If you can answer “yes” to at least a couple of the above questions, then it would be well worth delegating the job.

Who. This step is one of the most important and, probably, the most difficult. First of all, you must trust the staff member. Consider the individual’s skill set; will the delegated task require some additional training on your part? What is the person’s overall ability and performance history? Based on the individual’s work load, is there adequate availability to effectively handle the delegated task? An important caveat to keep in mind is as the manager, you are ultimately responsible. The only person you can blame is you — for not effectively delegating the task at the outset.

How. To enable someone else to successfully complete the delegated task, you must ensure they (1) know what you want, (2) have the authority to achieve it and (3) know how to do it. Using the following guidelines effectively will lead to delegation success.

- In getting buy-in, it’s helpful to explain to the employee why he/she was chosen for the job.

- Begin with the end in mind; communicate expectations, time lines and what success will look like (desired

results).

- Clearly identify the lines of authority, responsibility and accountability.

- Delegate responsibility, not just work. Many managers confuse delegating with simply “dumping” work onto someone else.

- Explain task specifically and thoroughly.

- Instead of asking, “Do you understand?” Ask questions such as, “What ideas do you have as to how you’ll proceed?” As the manager, you will get a better sense of whether or not your explanation was clear.

- Provide adequate support, and be available to answer questions and provide guidance as needed.

- Give the employee enough space to use his/her abilities to best effect. Yet, as the manager, you still need to monitor to ensure the job is completed correctly.

- Provide positive and corrective feedback. (“Glad to see you’re progressing well.” Or, “It looks like there’s an issue here. What do we need to do to get back on track?”)

- After the task has been completed successfully, be sure to commend the employee, and give credit for a job well done.

Initially, delegation may feel like more hassle than it’s worth, but keep in mind, by delegating effectively, both you and your team will come out winners. One more time — to delegate effectively, choose the right tasks to delegate, identify the right person and delegate in the right way.

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