

A FIVE-STEP PROCESS FOR DELEGATING WORK EFFECTIVELY

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Introduction

Many an article and survey point out the significance of the relationship between a manager and his or her subordinates. They all lead to the conclusion that one of the main reasons people leave a work place or are unhappy in their job is the relationship they have with their boss.

People are unhappy when they don't feel valued or trusted. Maybe the boss is too controlling or too detailed-oriented. Staff feel they can't make a mistake and often are made to feel incompetent. They don't believe they can learn or grow under that leadership. Or they like the person they work for well enough — he or she is 'okay' — but the boss just can't seem to manage, or doesn't know how to get the best from the staff.

All these comments suggest that, at the time work is being delegated, the interaction between the boss and the employee is flawed. To put it another way, most managers have never learned the fine art of delegating work and don't realize that doing this poorly leads to strained relationships with staff.

A Proven Process

Managers often struggle with delegation because they fear losing control of the work: for example, not being sure that the work will be done well and on time. Here is an effective five-step process for delegating work to subordinates. It is designed to deal effectively with this root cause.

1. Define the assignment

This is the crucial first step. If the assignment is not clear, the outcome will disappoint the manager and create friction between manager and employee. Clarity is rooted in agreement on a clear outcome.

First, what are you, as the manager, expecting? For example, what do you envision as the length of the report, the style, the depth, the research? Communicating these expectations is essential to defining a clear outcome. Second, set the timelines and make sure they are realistic. Third, develop an action plan. How is the employee going to get to the outcome? Be sure to consider which stakeholders need to be consulted, what important factors need to be considered, and what the approval process is.

2. Assess skills

After you have determined the nature of the assignment, the next step is to assess the skills needed to carry out the assignment and then evaluate the individual against the skills needed. In this process, you will have identified any gap between the skills needed and the skills possessed by the individual. You must then develop a plan to deal with the gap. Is training required? Will a mentor or coach be the best answer? If time or internal resources are not available, what external resources could be hired to fill this need?

3. Determine resources

The next step — and it's a big one — is to determine what resources are necessary. Resources fall into five main categories: financial, people, space, technical (e.g., appropriate software), and support from leaders and/or key personnel in other areas of the organization.

Look at each of these five areas with the following questions in mind. Will the individual have access to the necessary resources? Are external resources necessary? Have barriers such as budget approvals or support from external resources been dealt with? Is special space and technical support needed and available?

4. Monitor progress

Monitoring is a crucial step in effective delegation. Without it, one cannot hold the individual accountable for completing the delegated task. Depending on individual styles and the nature of the project or task, the frequency of meetings between the manager and the employee will vary.

However, the key is to agree at the outset to hold meetings according to an established timeline in order to review the progress being made. The following items should be on the agenda of these meetings:

- Review the progress
- Determine what is helping and what is hindering the progress
- Determine what assistance is required, if any, and determine who is going to be responsible for obtaining that help
- Review the timelines and either reconfirm the stated timelines or develop new ones, based on what needs to be done and the assistance needed

Continue these monitoring meetings until the project or task is completed.

5. Evaluate results and process

This step is invaluable in continually improving your delegation skills. After the project or task has been completed, look at more than the final product. Take time to review the process to reinforce what you have done well and to determine what needs improvement.

For example, were the roles of delegator and staff clear and well understood? Did everyone accept accountability for their various areas of responsibility? Did the participants complete their work in a timely manner? If the answer to any of these questions is no, what can be changed to remedy this in future?

Meet with the employee and get his/her feedback on the process and its effectiveness. This is a perfect opportunity to develop and strengthen the manager/employee relationship.

Lastly, the evaluation process provides an excellent opportunity for the manager to provide feedback to staff on their performance: what they did well and what they can take away as lessons learned.

Conclusion

Effective delegation contributes positively not only to the organization's bottom line, but also to the relationship between manager and employee. These are essential outcomes if an organization is to be successful.

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