

Delegate to develop, you and them

Everyone could delegate more, but who has time to delegate, right?! How many of these excuses have you used?

- It's easier to do it myself.
- It would take more time to delegate than to do it.
- It will only take a minute to do it.
- If I do it myself, I know it will get done right.
- If I delegate more, then people will wonder what it is that I do all day.
- What if I delegate something and that person leaves?
- I've tried delegating, but I end up having to redo it anyway.

Those may all be true, but consider some of the other realities in your world:

- All I ever do is put out fires.
- If there were only more hours in a day.
- I can't tell you when the last time was that I took a day off.
- My boss keeps asking about succession planning, but there just isn't anyone who could do my job.
- When I go on vacation, I'm still working; someone calls me every day.
- I took this job because I wanted to learn and grow and do interesting work, but who has the time.

Delegating is one of the hardest things to do as a new manager. And it's an old habit that more seasoned managers have a hard time breaking. Often the first step to learning how is to learn why.

We become managers because we were good at doing the tasks. So not doing what we got promoted for in the first place--the task--seems like a bad idea. And there is great comfort in doing what you already know how to do well. Plus, as an individual contributor, you were rewarded for what "you" did and delegating seems to be the antithesis of that. So nothing about delegating seems to be the best way to succeed. But it is the only way to succeed as a leader.

Getting work done through people--the very definition of leadership--means you have to give them the work. But you also have to give them the responsibility and not just the task. Otherwise, they'll not be able to handle exceptions to whatever rules you've given them. And let's face it, most of life is the exceptions.

Delegating responsibility means you don't monitor them and you don't critique their work if what you are saying is "this is how I would have done it". You need to provide information, direction, tools, training, and feedback if they are getting off track. Then let them do it in a way that is different from you if the results are acceptable. Perfectionism in a leader is toxic! You really have to pick your battles and bite your tongue.

You can't be part of every workflow, responsible for every decision. Good people will leave. Those who stay will do just enough to get by because that's the message you are sending them by not engaging their full capacity. And you won't have time for your own development so you stagnate, minimizing your chances of future promotions.

Start small. Make a list of the things that someone else should be able to do (then add a few that you are uncomfortable delegating!). Use these tasks as development opportunities for your staff. Challenge them. Support them. But you can't delegate tasks alone without also delegating the responsibility. Resist the temptation to do it for them.

Sidebar:

Leading ideas on . . . **delegating**

Put yourself out of a job

Sometimes people are afraid that they'll delegate themselves out of a job. The more likely scenario is that by not delegating, you are not developing new skills and that's a far greater risk for your overall longevity.

But it's my responsibility

Delegating responsibility when ultimately the responsibility lies with the manager can be a tricky balance. Rather than monitoring tasks, develop people so that you can be confident in their ability to deliver and comfortable in the knowledge that they will come to you before trouble hits.

Delegate what you love

If you only delegate the tasks you don't like, then how motivating would that be to employees who probably won't like them either? If you delegate what you love, then people will see that you are interested in giving them interesting work and challenges. And it's a sure sign that you've begun to master the ability to delegate.

Help others delegate

Delegation isn't just from leader to employee. Help your more senior team members delegate tasks and responsibility to junior members of the team. Senior team members are often faced with some of the same challenges you face as a leader. Not only does this serve to grow your whole team, but it also prepares senior team members to step into leadership roles with greater ease, having already mastered the art of delegation.