

Set Realistic Timeframes for New Trials

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One of the top reasons people fail to delegate is because they (incorrectly) believe they can do it faster themselves

Do you have any information on delegating work? What should or should not be delegated by a manager? I'm a student, and I'd like to know more about the subject of delegating.

Some managers struggle with delegation. They try to hang on to every task. They are unclear about what they want to accomplish. They pick the wrong people to delegate to. Some delegate too much, or too soon. Or they fail to acknowledge the people who are pitching in to make them look great. When it comes time for you to delegate, make sure you don't get caught in any of those traps.

One person can't do it all. The load has to get spread out. Delegating is about asking other people to carry part of the load, being responsible for completion, quality and reporting back on results.

A manager can delegate any task. It's best to consider the skills and attributes required for success. For example, a task that takes an outgoing personality and experience talking to people, can be very different from a task that calls for detail management and working in a quiet, isolated setting. Match task and people attributes to increase the chance of success.

When preparing to delegate, have manager and recipient discuss how to tackle the assignment. Play it out verbally. See what knowledge gaps exist. Discuss where training might come into play.

Reach agreement on timing and what a successful outcome might look like. Vague timeframes can result in a comment later on, along the lines of, "I didn't know you needed it by then!" Clear objectives can make it much easier for both parties to know how success will be measured.

In the beginning check on progress regularly. Periodically overview the entire process to observe how the task is being handled. Allow for innovation, so long as the outcome is at the desired standard.

If you're the manager and things are progressing properly, back out of the way. No one wants someone constantly hanging over their shoulder telling them what to do. If you're the recipient, ask for feedback along the way. Check that you're on track, and then keep going.

Allow for mistakes and time to make corrections. Double or triple your estimate of the time and resources needed to complete a task. That allows for errors, without putting your schedule and budget out of whack.

Check if the recipient's plate is overflowing. Delegation might add to a host of problems. Increased error rate, lack of cooperation, missed deadlines, incorrect shortcuts are all symptoms that the recipient isn't ready to take on additional tasks.

As a recipient, consider how taking on additional tasks can increase your skills and visibility within the organization. Be ready, willing and able to help out. Execute in top notch form so you look like a superstar. Be aware that to continue taking on tasks, you may have to build your own delegation team and skills.

Make a list of all the tasks you do over a week. Highlight those that are repetitive, that could easily be taught to someone else. Look around for someone to train.

Be sure to share recognition with people who are getting things done on your behalf. It's not fair to ask someone else to do your work and then take all the credit. More importantly, by sharing the cudos, you'll encourage people to help you again next time.

If you find you work for a manager who doesn't delegate, you have a couple options. Ask for a meeting to discuss your readiness to take on additional work. Ask for feedback on what might get in the way of receiving new assignments. Ask for assignment to another manager, who might have more experience at delegating and mentoring.

If you feel you're overloaded with too many tasks, discuss what kind of help you might need, in order to relieve the stress you're feeling. Look around to see if there's anyone you can delegate to. Make suggestions on how to get through the workload in a different way.

Looking for a good book? The Busy Manager's Guide to Delegation, by Richard A. Luecke, Perry McIntosh.

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