



Delegating with control

In our roles as productivity trainers and coaches, our team often have people jokingly say that they don't need to be more organised, they need a 28 hour day!

The fact is, time is the most precious and limited resource that we have, and the best managers of time manage their work according to a simple but powerful philosophy - in order to focus on the most important work, you need to let go of the less important work. Every time that you are devoting energy to something that is not a good use of your time, that is time and energy that you are not devoting to high importance work. So, how do we get rid of the lower value work that comes our way each day? Delegate. Delegate. Delegate.

Now most of us do delegate some of our lower value work by necessity, but we also often hold on to work that could be delegated because we don't trust the outcome if we hand it to someone else, and we want to maintain control, especially over more complex, higher risk pieces of work. The following article will cover the Why, What, When, Who and How of delegating work effectively, and strategies for maintaining the appropriate amount of control over the work.

Why delegate?

For managers, professionals and supervisors, delegation is one of the most critical skills needed to help us achieve our goals and objectives in a balanced way. If we don't delegate lower value work, our schedule and task list soon fills up, and the only way to get everything done is to work longer hours. I see it time and time again, managers working unnecessarily long hours to keep across everything. Effective, clear and timely delegation can help spread the load and maximise the use of all of the resources in a team.

Delegation is also a great way of growing the skills of team members. Delegating work to others forces them to step up and work at a higher level. Over time, as their experience grows, more complex work can be delegated, while leveraging your time to focus on more important work.

What to delegate?

Every day, a constant stream of work will come our way. Much of it has come to us as we are the appropriate person to deal with it, but some of it has come to us with the expectation that we organise to have it done, but without the expectation that we do it ourselves. This is work that we should wholly or partially delegate to others within team or within our influence.

As work comes to you, ask yourself the question - *Is this a good use of my time?* If no, consider dumping or deleting it. But if it is work that does need to be done, but not a good use of your time, delegate it. Even if you cannot delegate the whole task to someone else, consider delegating a part of it and finishing the task yourself. For example, you may be able to delegate drafting the agreement, and you can review and put the final touches to it.

When to delegate?

As soon as possible! Too often I see people who do not manage their incoming work well, and end up leaving emails in their inbox for a week until they become urgent. If that is when you delegate the work, you are asking for trouble. Work delegated at the last minute just puts pressure on the delegatee, leads to mistakes and rework, and causes resentment.

A key principle for managing your deadlines effectively is to process your incoming work regularly, and decide what needs to happen with every piece of work. By delegating this work in a timely way,



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you will avoid becoming a bottleneck, and will make it easier for your team to do the work well. It will also give you more time to check on the quality and jump in and help if necessary.

Who to delegate to?

First of all, whoever you have within your sphere of delegation influence. That would often mean your team and support staff, but could also involve people in other teams, external contractors or consultants, or project team members who may not directly report to you. Ask yourself the question - *Whose time is this a good use of?*

Within your group of possible delegates, you then need to consider who is the best fit for the job. Who has the skills to do the job well? Who has the capacity to do the work in the timeframe? Who would find the work stimulating? Whose skills do you need to grow in this area?

How to delegate the work?

We normally need to delegate most often when we are busy, but when we are busy, we tend to take shortcuts and delegate poorly. A little time spent delegating clearly will save time in the long run. Here are some pointers to ensure an effective delegation:

- ✓ Delegate face to face when possible - this allows you to check for understanding and provides room for questions and negotiation by the delegatee.
- ✓ Consider the complexity/risk involved with the task, and the experience of the delegatee. See the delegation matrix further on.
- ✓ Clearly outline what needs to be done, by when, to what level of quality, and what your expectations are about reporting and decision making. In what circumstances should they check with you before proceeding?
- ✓ Check what capacity they have to do the work in the required timeframe. There is no point overloading an already overloaded resource. Allow them the room to negotiate.
- ✓ Leave them to it, but check on progress at the agreed times. Don't micro-manage as it just slows them down and increases pressure.

Delegation matrix

The delegation matrix is a useful framework to help you to choose the best way to approach the delegation and the progress reporting, depending on the complexity or risk involved with the work, as well as the experience of the delegatee.

High Complexity / Risk and High Experience: In this situation, it is critical that the work is done well and / or on time, but you are confident of the skills and experience of the delegatee.

Use a CONSULTATIVE delegation style, working in partnership with the delegatee to decide on the best way to do the work, and keep a reasonable level of input to ensure the quality of the final product. Regular updates should be scheduled, and clear guidelines put in place about what decisions need approval by you.

High Complexity / Risk and Low Experience: In this situation, it is critical that the work is done well and / or on time, but you are less confident of the skills and experience of the delegatee.

Use a TELL delegation style, providing clear instructions on what needs to be done, how it should be done, and when it should be done by. You may get them to do a piece of the



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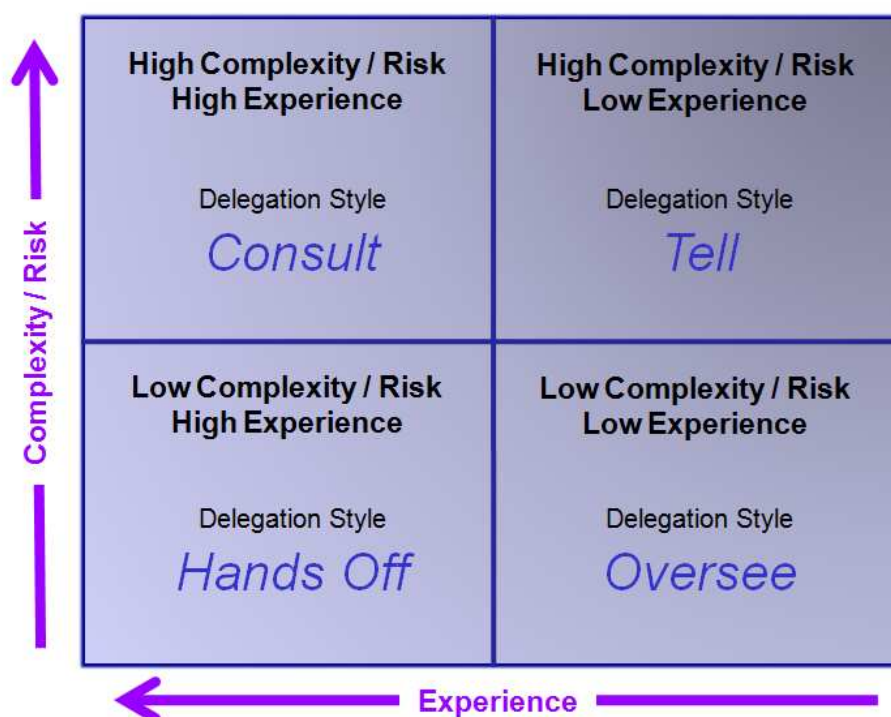
work and then come back for further instructions. The key here is regular check-ins to assess progress and to make adjustments when needed.

Low Complexity / Risk and High Experience: In this situation, there is less risk or impact if something went wrong or there was a delay, and you are confident of the skills and experience of the delegatee.

Use a HANDS OFF delegation approach, delegating the work clearly but quickly, and setting the expectation that no reporting is necessary unless there is a major issue or delay that needs your input to resolve. You are trusting the ability of the delegatee to do the job and problem solve themselves. An e-mail delegation may be appropriate here.

Low Complexity / Risk and Low Experience: there is less risk or impact if something went wrong or there was a delay, but you are less confident of the skills and experience of the delegatee.

Use a OVERSEE delegation style, guiding and helping the delegatee, but getting them to think for themselves. You might get them to come up with some options about how they approach the task, and you advise on which you feel is the best approach. Because there is less risk here, it is a great opportunity to increase their skills and confidence. Only moderate reporting is necessary, and once delegated, you may just need a heads up when it is complete, or there is an issue or delay.



So, whatever your role, have a think about how much you delegate currently, and how effectively you delegate that work. Look for ways to delegate more work where appropriate, keeping in mind the workload of the delegates. This is not an strategy to dump unwanted work on others, but an opportunity to maximise your time, and leverage the resources around you.



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How to track the progress of the delegation?

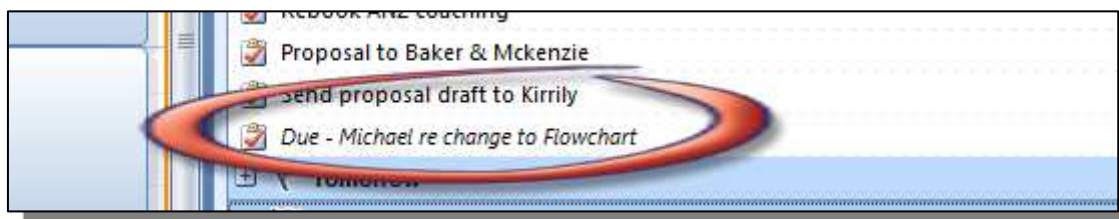
One of the greatest barriers to delegation is the fear that we are letting go of control when we are asking someone else to do the work. This is especially true of less experienced or less organised team members. Here are some tracking strategies that can be used to maintain control.

Progress update meeting: With more complex delegations that may span across days, weeks or even months, a regular progress update meeting should be put in place. The timing and frequency of this should be agreed when the work is delegated, and the agenda should cover the following:

- ✓ Progress to date
- ✓ Estimated time and work needed for completion
- ✓ Barriers and issues hindering progress
- ✓ Input needed by delegator

Request an e-mail status report: With smaller, less complex delegations, an e-mail update may be sufficient. Again, the frequency of this should be agreed up front, and the format. What information do you need to know that things are on track or not?

Date activate a Due from others: If you have delegated a simple piece of work, but need to remember when it is due back to you, it may be worth scheduling a reminder for yourself on the appropriate date in your schedule. We often recommend using the task function in MS Outlook or Lotus Notes to schedule a "Due from other" reminder on the appropriate day.



Assign a task: If your team are using the task function in a tool like MS Outlook or Lotus Notes, you also have the option of assigning a task electronically to the delegatee. This function will send the task, along with priority and due date, as a dynamic email, much like a meeting request. The advantage of this is that once accepted by the delegatee, any change to the status of the task will update in your task list as well as theirs!

So, the mysterious art of effective delegation comes down to a few simple rules. Take a moment to think about the delegation, delegate clearly and in a timely way, and put a strategy in place to track the progress and identify any blockages or issues early. Once you are confident in delegating the work, you will begin to spot lots of opportunities to reduce your workload and focus on the important work you should be doing!

Happy delegation - The Adapt Team