



The Art of Delegating

Delegation is an investment of your authority in others so they may act on your behalf accompanied by responsibility and accountability for results. There are three primary reasons for delegating:

- Distributing the workload among the members of a team
- Allowing more people to be actively involved
- Developing members of a team for their personal growth as well as for the benefit of the organization

Some leaders have difficulty delegating their responsibility for a couple of reasons:

- It can often become inappropriate delegation when the leader delegates for the wrong reasons or does not spend the necessary time with the person/people to whom the task was delegated.
- It sometimes seems easier to simply do a task yourself than spend time working with someone and having them do it.

FOUR BASIC DELEGATION STRATEGIES

1. TELLING

The leader designs the job, then delegates it to a member.

2. PARTICIPATING

The leader identifies a job two members might do and gets a commitment that they will work on it together.

3. SELLING (COACHING)

The leader involves members in developing a project and encourages them to volunteer for tasks.

4. DELEGATING

The leader involves members in developing a project and then leaves them to do it ("pure delegation").

The strategy a leader uses to delegate a task depends on the members. A new member may need the leader to explain how to do the task. On the other hand, a committee of members with lots of experience may be more successful if the leader uses pure delegation. Knowing the members of your organization is critical to making delegation work. Have trust in your members, learn to be flexible in your style of delegation, and use the delegation strategy best for each individual.

DO DELEGATE

- When there is a lot of work
- When someone else has a particular skill or qualification which would suit a task
- When someone expresses an interest in a task
- When a member might benefit from the responsibility (i.e., an emerging leader in your group)

DON'T DELEGATE

- Your own "hot potatoes" (items with serious consequences, emergencies, etc.)
- Things that are usually your specified responsibility
- Things you would not be willing to do
- To a member who may not possess the skills necessary to do the task successfully

For more information on organization and personal development skills in the SOAR series, stop by or call UNL Student Involvement, 200 Nebraska Union, 472-2454; or 300 Nebraska East Union, 472-1780. Staff members will be happy to assist you and answer your questions.

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<http://involved.unl.edu>

BEFORE YOU DELEGATE

• DECIDE IF THE TASK NEEDS TO BE DELEGATED.

Do you want to give it away? Do you enjoy it? Is it so important that true delegation will not take place? Be true to yourself and delegate those tasks which ought to be handed over.

• CHOOSE THE RIGHT PERSON FOR THE JOB.

Try to give members tasks they can do best or are interested in. (If members truly are not interested in a task, they might not do a good job.) Sometimes members who could do the job extremely well may be insecure about their abilities. Communicate your trust in their skills. Their motivation will be higher when they know they are trusted.

• DEFINE THE JOB AND SET MUTUAL EXPECTATIONS.

Give detailed explanations for what the job involves, including all key points. Try to focus on the results rather than the method. Also, work with your members to set mutual expectations. Members are more likely to back a decision if they were involved in the decision-making process and understand how the decision was reached.

• SET A DEADLINE.

Members will usually feel more responsible for a task when they are held accountable. With no deadline, it is much easier to procrastinate and lose motivation. Work with members to set deadlines. (Make the deadline reasonable so they are not pushed too hard.)

• DETERMINE METHODS FOR FOLLOW-UP.

Work with your members to set a time for review of performance. This could be a meeting to check progress or a phone call to see if they have any questions. The follow-up should be mutually determined at the start. This way, members know you are not trying to hover but instead are trying to learn how work is progressing. Criteria for evaluation at this point should also be predetermined so the leader will not be overly critical of progress. Also, let your members know that if they need clarification of the task or have questions, they should ask.

• TRAIN YOUR DELEGATES.

Make sure they know how to do the task. Take time to train them, if necessary. Initially, training someone may take more time than doing it yourself. But in the long run, training others will improve your efficiency and allow others to develop their skills.

• DELEGATE YOUR AUTHORITY.

This ties in with setting times for follow-up. As a leader, you need to allow your members the responsibility to make day-to-day decisions. Sometimes, their decisions will not be the same as yours. That's okay. Everyone needs the opportunity to try new approaches. Just because it is different does not mean it's wrong. Members can easily lose motivation if they have no room to think creatively and act as they see best. Have trust in the members and try to give them the freedom to work without you looking over their shoulders.

• EVALUATE PERFORMANCE.

After the task has been completed, evaluate the task based on the expectations and criteria set when the task was delegated. If certain aspects were left out when setting the initial job definition, the delegate should not be criticized for leaving them out. Work with the delegate to determine how you and the delegate feel the performance turned out, and also how the performance can be improved.

• ACKNOWLEDGE ACHIEVEMENT AND GIVE RECOGNITION.

Almost nothing is worse than pouring oneself into a task, having it turn out perfectly, and then being ignored by the person who delegated it. Give recognition and praise for the work members have done. By giving recognition and letting them know you appreciate them, they will feel a further sense of pride in their work and may be more willing to help in the future.