



How Can I Become Better at Delegating?

by Marshall Goldsmith

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How Can I Become Better at Delegating?

Delegation is one of those Management 101 skills that, like giving constructive feedback, can be surprisingly hard to master. My first suggestion is to keep in mind that your goal should be to delegate more effectively, rather than to delegate more frequently. My good friend and mentor Paul Hersey, founder of the Center for Leadership Studies (Escondido, Calif.) and coauthor of the classic book *Management of Organizational Behavior: Leading Human Resources* (now in its eighth edition), showed me why more delegation was not necessarily better delegation. If we delegate an assignment to a person who lacks the motivation and ability to do the job, we do a disservice to both the person and our organization. We need to delegate only to people who are ready to handle the challenge.

To get this right, begin by scheduling a one-on-one conversation with each of your direct reports. Ask each to list her key areas of responsibility. Then ask:

1. Are there areas where I need to delegate more to you?
2. Are there areas where I need to get more involved or provide more help to you?

If you are like most leaders, you will find that your direct reports want you to let go of responsibilities in some areas and provide more support in others. Tailor your delegation strategy to fit the unique needs of your staff members.

After getting input from your direct reports on how you manage them, get their ideas on how you manage yourself. Ask:

1. Do you ever see me doing things that I don't need to be doing?
2. Can I let go of some of my work and give it to my staff members?

You will likely find that you are wasting time on activities that a manager at your level doesn't need to do. By delegating these activities to staff members, you will simultaneously free up some of your own time for more strategic work and help develop staff members' skills in the process.

After getting input from your direct reports, don't promise to do everything that everyone suggests. Just promise to listen to their ideas, think about all their suggestions, and get back to them. And then do what you can. ☐

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