

Ten Tips for Delegating

The best time-management tool

Anil said his biggest problem was time management. He was overloaded, deadlines were getting missed, and he was stressed.

Managing his team was his biggest time drain.

“When they ask me questions, I get stuck spending time with them instead of doing my own work. And when I don’t hear from them, I usually discover they’ve made mistakes that I need to clean up.”

I replied, “Anil, your biggest problem is you’re a “seagull manager.”

What’s a ‘seagull manager?’

A seagull is usually off flying around somewhere, but every once in a while, it swoops in unexpectedly, makes a lot of noise, dumps a load, and then flies off again.

When you’re bouncing back and forth between being over-involved and under-involved, your team is always on the lookout, not knowing what to expect. And once you swoop in, it’s not always so easy to fly off as quickly as you would like.



What’s a seagull manager?

Delegating is not easy for many of us. It’s hard to let go of authority while remaining accountable for the outcome.

Fortunately, even seagulls can learn to delegate.

Don’t delegate unless...

They have the skills to do the job. Don't assume they know how to accomplish the task on their own. What have you observed that indicates they are competent?

They are motivated to do the job. Do they feel confident to do this on their own? Is this something they actually want to do? Do they believe it is worthwhile?

They have access to the resources they need. Do they have access to the materials, information, people, funds, and time that are needed?

Ten tips for delegating effectively

- 1. Involve your direct reports in deciding what to delegate.** Allow them to participate in determining what and when tasks are delegated to them, and then get acknowledgement that they understand and agree to the assignment.
- 2. Communicate expectations clearly and completely.** Be specific, clear, and complete in clarifying the tasks, the goals, resources, constraints, what good performance looks like, and when and how the results will be shared with you.
- 3. Balance your involvement.** Don't disappear, but don't over-supervise. Hovering is counterproductive. Agree in advance how often you will be updated and under what conditions you need to be informed of issues that arise. Don't swoop in unexpectedly.
- 4. Push decision making and authority to the edges of the organization.** Delegate to the lowest level at which the task can be successfully accomplished. Do not bypass your direct report, but encourage her to delegate the task when appropriate.
- 5. Grant authority.** Grant enough authority to do the job, enough power and control over resources to get the job done. Make sure that everyone who is involved knows that you have delegated the authority to your direct report.
- 6. Provide resources.** Provide all information that is available and relevant; pass on other information as it becomes available. Ensure they have access to all types of resources needed to be effective.

7. **Give credit; withhold blame.** Give public credit when they succeed. If something goes wrong, withhold blame so they don't become defensive, and instead help them debrief mistakes and learn from them.
8. **Don't take it back.** Require them to first propose their own ideas for solutions when they come to you with a problem. When they ask you for the answer, it is tempting to take on their work. If they have the skills but are lacking confidence or motivation, coach them. Don't take it back unless it is absolutely clear that the situation has become too complex.
9. **Maintain accountability.** Although your direct report has the responsibility for seeing the job well done and the authority to make needed decisions, remember that the ultimate accountability remains with you.
10. **Delegate consistently.** Delegate consistently, not just when you are overloaded or when tasks are unpleasant.

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