

# Media Article



Vocational Guidance Services

## Why you have to delegate

I don't know about you but I'm a bit of a perfectionist. It frankly is a weakness, not a strength. It means I agonize over every little detail, and if I could check everything sent from my office I would. Seeing a mistake in an email or report from a member of my team is like torture to me. But you know what? There are just not enough hours in the day to do it all myself, and I've had to learn to let go of things, after all, it is also the only way others will have a chance to learn, as well.

For many managers, delegating a task is like taking a gamble: Will the person you are delegating to be up to it? What if they fail to deliver – won't that mean you have failed too? Easing control on every task is sometimes as difficult as easing off an addiction. But if you don't do it, you'll either truly go mad or never advance within management. So, how should you go about delegating? First of all, take it slow, especially with those members of staff who are 'unknown' quantities. Delegate parts of the projects, one at a time, and see how they cope – learn what they are good at, what they are not, what they enjoy (which is work they put effort into) and what they hate.

When delegating tasks, be specific – communicate clearly what needs to be done, in what sequence, and what you expect the end result to be. Don't forget to be very clear on when you expect the work to be done by – don't just say 'as soon as possible' – give an exact time. If the person you are delegating to already has an important task to do, explain which task is more urgent, what to prioritize, and why.

Encourage those to whom you are delegating to ask you questions; use phrases such as 'is that clear?'; 'are we together?' There is nothing worse than delegating a task only to realize days later that the person you delegated to misunderstood what was needed, or has not even started the work because they are confused. Equally frustrating is the scenario where the person you have delegated to has hit an obstacle, but has not had the initiative to think their way around it or seek your advice. In that instance, it is important to keep an 'open door' environment going in the office in order to encourage regular feedback from staff who are working on tasks for you.

If someone you've delegated to does make mistakes, don't explode and revert to the 'I'll do it myself' attitude. See this as a learning for both of you, and appreciate that the situation has shown you that your team member most likely needs some training or mentoring before they try the work again. Unfortunately, this will mean you'll need to spend some time with them, time you may feel you could use to just do the work yourself – but that is quite short-sighted as once they are trained on a particular task well, you'll never have to do it again, yourself. Once you have trained or guided someone through a task, but still need confidence on whether they can cope, ask to see a plan of work, or sample section of their report, before you give them a full go-ahead. If there are future mistakes, point them out, as they point out where improvements can be made. If the person you delegated to does something well, don't forget to thank or praise.

It may take a little while; but those who work around you and those you delegate to will come to understand what is expected of them and what standard of work you seek from them. Hopefully that will mean they too, will become perfectionists and you will be increasingly able to leave them in control.

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