



Leadership Deep Dive — Delegation

Being effective as a leader requires many different attributes. The ability to delegate to subordinates is one of the most critical.

When we think of leadership, it is easy to list the attributes that an ideal leader needs to have — anticipation, knowledge, gratitude and humility come to mind.

Anticipation. If leaders don't anticipate, they aren't leading, they are just coping.

Knowledge. Leaders need to understand what they know and what they don't.

Gratitude. Leaders need to recognize others for their work. Gratitude builds and sustains a team's coherence.

Humility. Leaders must understand that taking credit for the work

of others demotivates their subordinates and makes leadership impossible.

In addition to these, one might argue that having empathy, being honest and having discipline to maintain

accountability are also important for true leadership. But I would argue that it is the ability to delegate that is most critical to being a successful and effective leader. Delegation is the difference between effective leaders and those that fail to inspire followership in their direct reports. Delegation is also very difficult to master.

The Excuses

Over the course of my career, I have found the following seven "excuses" that explain why managers fail to delegate, and thus fail to lead:

1. I like to do this. I am good at it. It's what I do.
2. I don't have time to train/explain. I'll just do it myself.
3. They don't like to do this. I'll just handle it.

4. I'm the only one that knows how to/can do this.

5. They'll just make a mess of it.

6. I can do it better/faster.

7. No one else is available.

If you are an owner, manager, supervisor or team lead — any level or leadership — ask yourself, do I fail to delegate? Do I use any of the above excuses and which are most frequent? How much operational efficiency is failing to delegate costing our company? Which of these are contributing to poor morale among our performers?

Let's look for some common themes, so that we can address these "implied objections" to sharing/delegating responsibilities.

Excuses number 1, 4 and 6 all come from a place of personal pride and security on behalf of the leader.

The pride and reward of being competent at

that task is a worthwhile personal accomplishment. So why prevent others from gaining the experience needed that they too might share that same pride and feeling of being an important contributor to the company's important work?

Excuses 2, 3 and 5 are not so much about how the leader feels about their ability and value as they are about dodging the real work of training the team and getting the work done by others. An important principle to me as a supervisor was to ensure that all tasks were performed at the lowest level that was capable of performing them. By assigning work in this way, all performers are working at (or close to) their highest and best use. No waste of human talent. Assigning the right tasks to the right performers is how leaders add value to our shops.



And what of excuse number 7? This is truly a failure of leadership. Failure to provide the resources needed (human resources) to accomplish a task. Perhaps it is fitting that the leader themselves finds themselves doing a task that should be delegated. Their failure to provide adequate resources not only causes them to perform at a lower level of performance than they are qualified, it also is creating waste in the organization by devaluing their contributions as leaders as well as not allowing others to perform at their own higher better use.

Fear

What are some of the possible fears that a leader may be feeling?

- I want to maintain control.
- Performers will outperform me.
- Insecurity.

When these three possible fears are examined, the root cause is clear. Also knowing that leaders have the “secret knowledge” often makes them feel more valuable and less replaceable. Those are natural feelings; however, by not transferring the knowledge, the business can suffer. Leaders

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- Miles Free

not only need to recognize the fears or excuses in themselves, but in their subordinate supervisors, because helping them overcome their personal fears will help make


them more effective delegators and leaders.

Training

One of the attributes of effective leadership that was not included above is the ability to train and advance the capabilities of the entire team. Training is not just about training — it is about continuous improvement of our individual performers. And as they improve and grow in knowledge, so too does our organization grow in its capabilities, reliability and quality, since more people can contribute to lessons learned and processes reduced in variability. Clearly, a leader’s duty is to improve the people and processes under their authority. This “leads to” (pun

intended) continuous improvement, improved quality performance, less waste and improved profitability.

Leadership requires many attributes to be executed correctly to be effective. Leaders must have the discipline to hold themselves to the standard of ensuring that all performers are performing at their highest and best use. And that means training them to upgrade their skills and performance, as well as holding themselves accountable for not wasting the human resources under their authority and responsibility. The obligation of leadership is to effectively marshal, the resources available in order to meet the organization’s mission, vision and purpose. How does failing to delegate work help achieve success?

Effective leaders — delegate! 

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