

Delegation as a Learning Strategy



When so many organizations have to do more with less, it is no wonder that employees react with trepidation when their managers talk about delegation. It is tough for employees to get excited about taking on new tasks when they feel they are working as hard as they can. In the face of such resistance, managers often stop delegating. However, they need to realize that delegation itself is not the problem. Done properly, it can be not only an ideal tool for training employees, but also the key to making room in a manager's overloaded schedule.

Delegation: taking a task from a manager's job description and teaches it to an employee.

It is important to understand what delegation is and what it isn't. It is not a simple task assignment, or dumping or getting rid of unpopular tasks. Rather, delegation is taking a task from a manager's job description and teaching it to an employee. Managers delegate when they need more time for other work, when they want to develop an employee's potential, or when tasks need to change to accommodate a new project.

Delegation Avoidance

So why do managers remain ambivalent about delegation in spite of the obvious advantages? Here are just some reasons:

Poor planning. Too often, managers get so swamped with projects that they wait until the last minute to admit they need help. With thinly veiled calm, they approach subordinates and dump nearly impossible tasks on their desks. No wonder employees run scared.

Ego. Sometimes the climb up the organizational ladder has been such hard work that a manager has a tough time letting go of tasks that seem too important for a subordinate to handle. These managers don't realize that if their department can't run without them, they are not doing their job.

Fear of mistakes. There is a significant amount of risk any time people are left to learn something new on their own. The major fear for managers is that the employee will really botch the job and that they'll be left to clean up the mess.

Fear of intruding. This is particularly prevalent in organizations affected by downsizing. When employees are struggling just to keep up with their current workload, the last thing managers want to do is add more pressure. Instead, they suffer in silence, fearing to ask about how a task might fit into a subordinate's schedule.

It's not always easy to keep people learning and growing in organizations today. With some planning and attention to detail, however, delegation can be a management skill that helps employees to develop and gets the job done too.