

THE ART OF DELEGATING

Achieving Employee Responsibility and Accountability

Far too many business owners, presidents, managers, and supervisors lament that they cannot delegate to subordinates, because *“the job just won’t get done properly”*. This either means that a major portion of the world is incompetent or that there are some other dynamics at play that require examination.

What is *Delegating*?

Delegating may be defined as, *“commissioning a person as a representative with power to act for another”*. Thus, *delegating* implies both *responsibility* and *authority*. What has been omitted in this definition, however, are the required *competencies* to carry out the action in an effective manner. And herein lies the basis for the universal lament.

If an employee has the required competencies, then:

- ◆ clearly define the assignment
- ◆ make available the necessary resources
- ◆ assign authority
- ◆ specify deliverables and timelines
- ◆ establish accountabilities and consequences

and let the employee carry out the assignment.

Too often, though, managers erroneously assume that employees know how to perform a task or function, even though they have no related training or experience. Management has failed to *manage* and, in the process, has created the self-fulfilling conundrum – *“It’s easier to do it myself”*. How do we work our way out of this morass?

At The Task Level: A Four Step Process

In order for a manager to delegate with confidence, the employee first will need to be coached in how to perform a particular task. The complexity of the task will determine how in-depth the coaching will need to be. For tasks of a less complex nature, a four step process is used.



Describe

In detail, describe the task in its entirety. The use of written *Procedures*, *Work Instructions* and *Checklists* is highly recommended. Provide relevant related information, so that the employee can understand the task in relation to other activities. For example, if the task relates to manufacturing, discuss the material inputs and their characteristics; explain how the component is used and where it fits in the overall process; identify critical features, such as quality standards, stress points, burrs, etc.

Demonstrate

Show the employee how to perform the task. Take sufficient time to ensure that the employee observes each step of the process. Point out critical actions and identify potential problems and their solutions.

Observe

Have the employee perform the task. Take note of where the employee performed effectively and how any errors in execution can be corrected.

De-Brief

Provide immediate feedback to the employee, positively critiquing the performance. Ensure that the employee has sufficient opportunity to ask questions and to confirm performance standards and operating procedures.

This cycle will need to be conducted several times, because competency is achieved through training **and** experience. Periodic performance reviews also are appropriate.

Complex Functions and Assignments

More complex functions and assignments have a number of additional features. Describing an assignment requires more detail and comprehensiveness. In fact, in some assignments or projects, all the details may not be known at the outset, but dynamically are discovered through the process itself. The nature of this ambiguity needs to be discussed and understood. Stay close to the employee – be available for regular reviews and coaching sessions.

At the outset, determine the skills and knowledge required in order to perform the function. If the employee has skill gaps, formalized training may be appropriate. For instance, if the assignment is to interview and recruit a new employee, a training program in *Behavioural Interviewing Techniques* will be extremely beneficial.



Critical paths, timelines, deliverables, resource requirements, and strategies for overcoming constraints need to be identified. Potential problems must be highlighted and contingency planning conducted. Regular reviews during the life of the assignment need to be scheduled. In complex assignments, expect to spend significant time with the employee, coaching for higher performance.

Job Functions

Job functions are even more complex. Flowing from a detailed *Job Description*, major responsibilities may be re-cast as *competency groupings*. Practical exposure, testing and analysis will determine which training interventions are necessary and appropriate. Employees progressively will mature in their positions, through regular training, upgrading and coaching.

In situations that require *judgement*, remember that wisdom often is the outcome of reflecting on previous mistakes. It is necessary, therefore, to create circumstances that allow the employee to take risks, with the implied recognition that there will be some failures. It is the manager's responsibility to *manage* this process in such a manner that the organization's exposure is minimized, while the employee's growth potential is maximized.

Through a consistent and persistent system of coaching, employees will develop and demonstrate the required competencies to perform a task, project or job. If you have the commitment to invest the time to share your knowledge and experience, you then will find yourself in the happy position of being able to *delegate* with confidence, assured that your employee will perform well.

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