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DELEGATION: **Why We Should But Why we DON'T**

by Andy Masters

Most of us are aware of the positives from delegating—we've heard them before. In theory, it's a great concept: "*Get other people to do your work for you...Awesome!*" We also know that, theoretically, we can get more done in less time if we delegate properly. The results of not delegating include burnout, stress, and getting overwhelmed with mundane tasks that distract us from our most important responsibilities. Yet, why is delegation one of the most underutilized *skills* in organizations today? Why don't we delegate more? Delegation is actually a learned and applied *skill*. It takes an understanding of how to do it correctly, and conscious focus to create a *habit*.

Whenever I present a program on delegation or time management, I always ask the audience if they have ever said this to themselves: "*If it's going to get done right, and if it's going to get done on time—I might as well do it myself!*" What's amazing is that approximately 99% of all attendees raise their hand. Everyone has said this to themselves before. Why? *Because that's the way we're wired.* We all have a default mechanism which causes us to fall back on doing everything ourselves, often subconsciously.

So, let me present this question to you: *How many times in your life have you said that phrase to yourself?: "If it's going to get done right, and if it's going to get done on time—I might as well do it myself!"*

TEST RESULTS:

0-49	That's about normal.
50-99	You've got a problem.
Over 100+	Please attend the next <i>Control Freaks Anonymous</i> meeting in your area.

Now, this article isn't about why we *SHOULD*. It's about why we *DON'T*.

Here are the Top 4 reasons we rationalize not delegating:

1. "*I don't have anyone to delegate to.*"

We often believe we don't have anyone to delegate to. Certainly, if you don't have employees or a personal assistant, you may have stopped reading already. However—don't fret. Delegation, at its' most basic level, is simply having someone *help* you. Help can also come from peers, other departments, friends, interns, or even your children (*please consult the child labor laws in your state first*). There are even examples of those who have mastered the art of delegation enough that they can delegate...*to their boss*. Yes, the concept of "managing your boss" has picked up steam in the last decade or so. Now this doesn't necessarily mean storming into their office, dropping a stack of reports on their desk and threatening "*Get these done by Friday or you're fired!*" (Don't you wish) More subtly, it could be asking for personal help with something they have more experience with, requesting additional resources, or at least managing expectations in relation to other projects you also have on your plate.

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2. *“I’ve tried to delegate and it doesn’t work. I’ve been burned before.”*

You’re right. Something didn’t get done right or on time because you gave it to someone else. You trusted someone, and they didn’t come through. Someone let you down. Someone made you look bad. Got it. It’s happened to all of us.

But, here’s the key: Don’t make that an excuse to STOP DELEGATING FOR THE REST OF YOUR LIFE. Here is a reality check: Will delegation ALWAYS work?....*No, it won’t!* The key here is that, as a leader, you are still on top of what is happening with those tasks, and follow-up on their progress. Don’t get burned. What, perhaps, could you have done more effectively? Were you clear in exactly what was to be performed, and by when? Did the person have the time, training, and resources to perform the task? Was it the right person to delegate to? Did you follow-up before the deadline to double-check in case they got off track? Delegation is a process, and the organized “delegator” doesn’t get burned.

3. *“By the time I explained it to someone, I could have done it myself.”*

Quite possibly, there are things that could take just a bit more time to explain to someone else—the *first time*. However, if we think that way all the time, we WILL be the only person that knows how to do everything—and we will stay in the trap of having to do everything ourselves. But if we *invest* the time to delegate the first time, and that same or related item arises again...wallah! It’s now a time saver from that point on.

The key to this method is the word “habit.” Using the above excuse rationalizes and enhances the habit of doing everything yourself. Avoiding this excuse creates the habit of delegating. Establish the *pattern* of delegating, especially on smaller or quicker tasks, to create a habit. (Also see the “*Disservice Theory*” below.)

4. *“I don’t want to ‘bother’ someone else...they already have enough on their plate.”*

I liken this “*bothering someone*” mentality to asking someone to buy something if you are in sales, or even asking someone out on a date. Psychologically, there is a certain uncomfortable side to delegating. We don’t want to seem as if we are pawning work off on others. We don’t like giving people more work, especially if they, too, seem busy. However, if we are truly overwhelmed, who do we really have to blame if we never even ask for help in the first place? Who do we have to blame that we don’t have time for the important projects that we should be focusing our time on? Delegation often has to do with pushing ourselves outside our comfort zone, rather than “*not feeling like asking*” for help and continuing the pattern of taking it all on ourselves.

The “Disservice” Theory

The next time you start a project where you think to yourself “*This is a pretty big project,*” or “*this is really important—I need to do this one myself,*” consider this: You are actually doing someone a *disservice* by not including them, by not allowing them to share in the responsibility, and not allowing them to grow and develop so that they are a step closer to taking on more responsibility in the future. Perhaps it is a new or younger member in your organization, or an employee wanting to learn for future advancement, or even an intern. If you at least “*take them along for the ride*” with you—next time, they *can* do more. We all had mentors who took us along for the ride. That is how people learn. That is how people grow. Don’t deny someone the opportunity to learn and grow because the responsibility seemed “*too important.*” Take the time to include someone and share.

*******FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE*******

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Like anything else, these tips may not work every time, but give them a shot:

1.) *“Can you help me? I really need your help.”* The number one reason people don’t get enough help is because they don’t ASK. Period. If you sincerely need help, and sincerely ask someone using these magic words—nine times out of 10 they will respond.

2.) *“When do you think you can get this done by?”* Instead of setting deadlines or imposing an order—ask someone when *they* can commit to getting the task done. First of all, they will appreciate the gesture. They know their schedule and other commitments better than you. But, if *they* are the ones who set their own deadline, there is an extra level of accountability—and they are much more likely to adhere to the deadline.

3.) The **FIRST** thing you should do each morning is identify the 3, 5, or 7 items on your “To-Do List” where at least *some* progress can be made by someone else. Ship those items off to sea either in person or via email by asking for help right away. Then get on with your day. A couple will get done, a couple more will at least make some progress, and a couple others may not get any progress. Fine. That is much more progress than if you never delegated any of those tasks at all. The key is that you are now making progress during the day/week on 4 of those items while you spent **NO** time on them at all, allowing you to make progress on more important items on your list simultaneously.

“A leader isn’t the person running around doing everything themselves. A leader is someone who inspires others to achieve the goals of the organization as a team.”

Like anything else, delegation takes focus, and a concerted conscious effort *everyday*—or we revert to our old habits. You have to **WORK** on being an excellent “delegator.” Place a one-word post-it note on your PC to help create this habit everyday. Bring someone along on that next big project. Look at your “To-Do List” and delegate 3, 4, or 5 items before you do anything else. Then devote your time to your big picture goals-- and achieve **MORE**, in less time, with higher quality, and less stress.

You deserve vacation days without your cell phone going off, and you will be amazed at what your organization can accomplish.

About the Author: Andy Masters has written 4 books, earned 4 degrees, and is a member of the National Speakers Association (NSA). Andy presents positive and entertaining programs on professional development and work-life balance topics. Visit www.andy-masters.com or email andy@andy-masters.com for books and schedule availability.

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