

Delegation skills

“Deciding what not to do is as important as deciding what to do.”

– Jessica Jackley, businesswoman

What is delegation?

Delegation is defined as the assignment of responsibility for particular job-related activities from one person to another, usually from a leader/manager to lower levels within an organisation.

Delegation is a key leadership and management skill and is vital for individual and team development, capacity building and succession planning.

Delegation is not the abdication of personal responsibility or the random distribution of work.

Effective delegation requires planning and effort.

Why delegate?

Delegation presents multiple benefits for leaders and teams

Saves time

Enables leaders to focus on strategy, planning, and higher level priorities

Reduces stress

Work is shared within the team, building a collective sense of responsibility

Builds trust

Demonstrates respect for the skills and abilities of colleagues

Boosts confidence

Team members feel valued and empowered

Develops knowledge and skills

Individuals gain valuable professional experience

Enhances productivity

Talents, skills and resources within the team are used efficiently

Improves engagement

Varied and stretching work assignments keep people motivated

Encourages creativity

The team benefits from different approaches to problem solving

Why don't people delegate?

Does any of this sound familiar?

It is too risky to let someone else do it

I enjoy doing this task

They won't want to do it

I'll overburden people

It is quicker to do it myself

I like to be in control of everything

I've always done it

Nobody can do it as well as I can but...

...someone might do it better than me

Are you an effective delegator?

Reflect on the following questions and note down your thoughts

Do you often feel that there aren't enough hours in the day to get work done?

What areas of work could or should you be delegating?

What is stopping you from delegating more?

Do you actively use delegation as an opportunity to develop others?

Having reflected on these questions, on a scale of 1 to 5 how effective are you at delegating?

(1 = I rarely, if ever delegate, 5 = I'm great at delegating)

When to delegate

Consider delegating when...

- New or important high priority tasks require your attention
- Time consuming tasks or project work can easily be divided up and assigned to others
- Someone in the team is better suited or more skilled to complete the task
- It is a valuable development opportunity for someone less experienced
- It is interesting/stimulating and will keep people engaged
- A team member can be trained to take on a routine task
- Unexpected peaks in workload require more team effort
- The situation requires a fresh perspective


When not to delegate

This depends on the experience of team members and the context but avoid delegating when...


- A crisis situation requires your expertise and immediate attention
- The task is confidential and extremely sensitive
- The task is highly complex with a short deadline and too time consuming to explain
- The work is related to your management role and means you're the only one who can undertake it (e.g. performance reviews, budget approval, authorisations)
- It is a higher level leadership task (e.g. relating to strategy development and long-term planning) and cannot be assigned to someone else

What to delegate and to whom

Generate a list of tasks and identify those which only you can do and those that can be delegated to others.



Consider the experience and ability level required, current workloads, development opportunities/interests and time required to complete tasks.



Delegate the right task to the right person. Select someone suitable but have a second option in mind.

How to delegate

Once you've assigned the task, approach the person and follow this 5 step process to help ensure your delegation is successful



1. Introduce the task

- Explain the background/context
- Describe the importance/relevance of the task
- Explain why you are delegating the task to them and why you think they are the best person to undertake it

2. Define outcomes

- Describe the desired results to be achieved on completion of the task
- Be clear about expectations with regard to standard and scope of work
- Provide examples of similar work if appropriate
- Ask if the person is comfortable with the responsibility and feels confident to undertake the task

3. Identify resources

- Discuss and provide necessary resources/information the person needs
- Consider equipment, materials, useful contacts and other support
- Assess if the person needs additional training to undertake this task

4. Agree deadlines

- State when the work must be completed or negotiate a reasonable completion date
- Check timescales are realistic and achievable
- Build in a review meeting(s) to discuss progress and feedback. Complex work may be completed in stages, with several review points
- Encourage on-going communication outside of reviews

5. Summarise and confirm

- Summarise what has been agreed to confirm understanding
- Ask if any points need clarification and invite questions
- Check again that the person feels confident to undertake the task
- Ensure the person feels supported by you

Different ways to delegate

It is important to recognise that there are different ways to delegate and you may need to adjust your style accordingly depending on the task/situation/experience level of the person.

The 6 Levels of Delegation model is useful to think about when considering this (other models identify up to 9). The need for direction, control and authority progressively decreases with each level. Choose the most appropriate level for the task at hand.

6 Levels of delegation

Level	Description
1. Do as I say	Follow instructions. Do exactly what you are asked to do.
2. Look into this	Investigate and tell me the situation. I'll decide.
3. Give me your advice	Consider the situation/options and tell me what you think. I'll decide.
4. Decide and check with me	Let me know your decision and wait for my approval.
5. Decide and go ahead	Let me know what you did and what happened.
6. Take care of it for me	Do what you think is best. You do not need to consult with me.

The next time there is an opportunity to delegate consider these levels, along with the 5 step process, to help plan your approach

Final tips

Start by delegating smaller/less important tasks to build skills and confidence

Choose the right person and the right approach for the task at hand

Communicate, monitor progress and provide feedback to avoid errors

Do not micromanage. This defeats the purpose of delegation and can undermine confidence

Evaluate how the process went and note any areas for improvement