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SMALL BUSINESS RESOURCES

Succeeding with Others

One of a leader's most important responsibilities is to get work done through other people, and the single most effective technique for achieving this purpose is delegation. Effective delegation is the act of giving someone else the responsibility and authority to carry out an assignment or to represent you or your organization in a specific role. In addition to sharing responsibility, delegation involves communication and training. When teamwork is at its best, effective delegation occurs. Practicing the art of effective delegation is a vital tool in your development as a leader and manager because of these key benefits:

1. You improve your personal time management, leveraging your energy and ideas.
2. You provide motivational and development opportunities for others on your team.
3. You maximize the interests, strengths, and contribution of others and increase the team productivity.
4. You make use of a valuable yet easily overlooked training tool – delegation!

The definition of delegation can be expanded to include sharing of responsibilities with team members, other managers, or anyone with whom dividing responsibilities is appropriate and logical. The concepts used for traditional delegation apply with some modification when sharing responsibility. For example, some tasks within your work load may best be accomplished by counterparts of yours. Certain individuals may have special skills or knowledge, information, or relationships that make it more effective for them to complete the work. Keeping in mind the overall goal and being willing to share responsibility, as well as the credit, increases your success as a manager.

Effective delegation multiplies your efforts many times over by using the time, knowledge, experience, and creative power of other people. Effective delegation frees you for the planning, problem solving, and tracking required to build a more productive organization.

Levels of Delegation

Choose carefully the team members to whom you delegate specific tasks, especially those you would like to train for the highest level of delegation. Explain your reason for delegating a piece of work, get a clear commitment from the person to perform the task, and provide adequate training and instruction. Evaluate the time required to perform the task and adjust work schedules or work load as needed.

For technical and non-technical work alike, you may need to inspect results carefully at the beginning. Your involvement at the beginning helps the person succeed and communicates the importance of the task you are asking the person to take over. As the employee learns the task and performs it well, reduce your involvement appropriately. Give the person the freedom to make the job their own. Check results only at stated intervals, and eventually ask to be informed only when a problem arises.

Monitor regularly the responsibilities you have delegated and measure the progress of individual team members to keep them on track, to stay in touch, and to avoid wasted time and effort. To reap the benefits of delegation and also avoid the pitfalls, define the following degrees of freedom according to the situation: 1) Act and report routinely. 2) Act and report immediately. 3) Seek approval, then act. 4) Wait until told.

The levels of delegation require different kinds of support. At level four, provide direction for employees. At level three, support with training. At level two, give coaching. At level one, empower with the responsibility and authority to complete the work independently.

To increase your team's results, set a goal to move as many people as possible to the highest level of

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delegation. Delegation challenges the most promising, capable people on your team to develop their potential and to use more of their abilities. When they do, you and the organization are direct beneficiaries of their growth.

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