

# Six Steps to Productive Delegating

by Sheila Murray Bethel, PhD.

As a leader, you just can't do it all. To be really effective you must be willing and able to delegate the projects and details that others can learn to do.

You can help others accept delegation in two ways. The first is to cultivate their "ownership" of your organization, project, idea, or goal. Ownership comes from taking part in decisions, being part of a team, and being inspired by a leader who can communicate a mission and sense of purpose.

The second way to help others accept delegation is to encourage and allow them to fail in small ways as they build the skill to win in big ways. Take the need for perfection out of the equation of delegation. Replace win/lose vocabulary with terms like "exploration," "observation," "testing possibilities," and "evaluating options."

All delegation involves some element of risk taking and failure. If you will lead others by your own example, if you can tolerate failure as an essential part of advancement, so will they. Let them know that failure is a valuable stepping stone to successful delegating. Applaud when they fail constructively, congratulate them honestly and often as they become more proficient at accepting delegation

Here are six steps that will help you delegate to others in a manner that assures success:

- 1. Clearly define the task.** When you assign work, don't tell people how to do the job. Instead, describe the results you want. Then give them the opportunity to complete the task on their own. The better you can describe the benefits of accomplishing the task, the more interest there will be in seeing it through.
- 2. Give guidelines to begin or follow.** Assuming you have matched the right task with the right person, you can increase your delegating success by giving guidelines on how to begin. Some people have the skills to accept the task and begin on their own, but are open to suggestions. Others can be unsure of how to begin. They are afraid of losing face and won't tell you they don't know how to begin. When you give helpful hints and guidelines you help everyone perform at a higher level.
- 3. Give authority to accomplish the task.** There is nothing worse than being given a job to do but not the authority to get it done. If you don't trust someone,

give the job to someone else or assign it in stages so it isn't overwhelming.

**4. Monitor the tasks, but don't hover.** It is frustrating and discouraging to be given a task and then have someone peering over your shoulder every step of the way. Give people room to operate and the freedom to be creative and use their skills, talents and abilities.

**5. Give feedback along the way.** Ask how things are going, then give people the chance to express themselves. When they feel their opinions count, it is a lot easier to make "course adjustments."

**6. Reward and recognize effort as well as results.** Some folks need encouragement many times along the way to accomplishing the task. Others are self starters and self motivators. When you recognize effort as well as result you keep them all motivated with judicious praise.

Through skillful delegation, you expand your effectiveness and increase your base of loyal followers. When you can accomplish this they'll be right out there on the limb with you, ready to take on whatever you delegate and to live with whatever comes.

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