



# THE SUPERVISOR/HR NEWSLETTER

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18

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### Schedule

February 23rd, 26th: *Preparing to Lead Effectively*  
April 20th, 23rd: *Relationship Excellence for Managers*  
June 15th, 18th: *How to Motivate Employees from Different Generations*  
August 17th, 20th: *How to Effectively Delegate Tasks & Responsibilities*  
October 19th, 22nd: *How to Become a Better Coach*  
December 14th, 17th: *Strengthening the Team*

Links to sign up for each session are provided on the Supervisor Excellence Webinar Series & Leadership Certificate Program Flyer.

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# Delegating to Whittle Down Your To-Do List

## Why delegate?

So your boss has just asked you to evaluate whether the company needs a new sales office in the southern region. You're flattered by her vote of confidence. Trouble is, you were about to start planning the budget for the next quarter. Now there's too much on your plate and not enough hours in a day. Something's got to give, and you're afraid it might be your stomach lining. Don't reach for the antacids. Instead, reach for one of a good manager's most important tools: delegation.

Delegating means assigning a person to do a task for which you'll be ultimately responsible. That means you'll want the job done well. The trick is to choose the best person and then give your delegate the right mix of freedom, authority and supervision to ensure the finished job meets your standards.

No manager can succeed without delegating. You'll always have more responsibilities than you personally can carry out. Effective delegating will streamline your workload so you can focus on the most important things. It will boost the experience, confidence, and enthusiasm of your staff. (Delegating works outside the office, too. Who knows—you may succeed in delegating to your kids the chores of mowing the lawn or taking out the trash.)

## Steps of Skillful Delegating

1. First, set priorities for your tasks, identifying responsibilities you should delegate and responsibilities that must remain under your control.
2. Pick the right delegates. Ask yourself: "Who can handle the job?" "Who will benefit most in growth and development by taking on added responsibilities?" "Who deserves a reward for a previous job well-done?"
3. Communicate the task clearly to your delegate. You can't hold people responsible for failing to carry out a vague assignment.
4. Finally, decide how much freedom you can give to your delegates and still keep a comfortable level of control. Give them enough freedom to suit their working style. Give them enough decision-making authority to get the job done. But monitor the project with regular progress reports. Remember that you're ultimately responsible. Balancing autonomy and control can be tricky, but it gets easier each time.

## Key Tips

### **Don't expect delegating to come naturally.**

Working by remote control is difficult, especially when we think we can do the job better or faster ourselves. Also, be prepared to delegate some work that you enjoy. The tasks only you can do may not be the most fun ones, so delegation often means letting go of enjoyable tasks. Just remember that even though delegating may seem somewhat stressful at first, you'll soon find it wonderfully liberating.

**It pays to start out small.**

The first time you take the plunge; don't delegate preparing your department's annual expense budget (no matter how much you hate doing it). Design a discrete task that shouldn't take too long and that won't spell disaster if things don't go quite as expected.

**Focus on results, not methods.**

You're delegating, remember? So stay calm if your employee formats documents differently, or prepares his plan in an unfamiliar way. Remind yourself that the results are the most important aspect of a project.

**Resist reverse delegation.**

Reverse delegation is when an employee tries to shift responsibility back to you for the delegated task. The delegate may say, "I ran into a problem here. What should I do?" Coming to the rescue would defeat the purpose of delegating. Gently tell the delegate that finding solutions is part of the task.

## Specifics

**Selecting the Best Delegate**

If you've surrounded yourself with good people, selecting a delegate should be easy. Match the person's interests, experience, and skills to the task. Make sure the person understands why you're delegating the task. Some delegated work is bound to be boring or trivial. Be honest about it. But never overload good employees with dirty work. If they know you'll also reward them with valuable assignments that advance their careers, they'll willingly accept their share of menial jobs. The best incentive for accepting added responsibility is the chance to learn new skills and prove oneself.

**Managing the Assignment**

You can fail your delegate just as he or she can fail you. Live up to your end of the deal by giving your delegate the basics for success.

- Make your expectations clear and provide a model of the results you expect that your delegate can use as a guide.
- Make sure your delegate has the time, resources, and authority to do the job.
- Clearly delineate the limits of your delegate's authority.
- Explain the nature of any problems that must be referred to you.
- Let your delegate know what you require in terms of reporting, how frequently you plan to touch base, and by what means (e-mail, telephone, face-to-face meetings, etc.).
- Reassure your delegate that your door is always open for questions or brainstorming.
- Don't micromanage! This is the opposite of delegating. You may learn something by watching a talented subordinate do things another way.

**Sharing the Success**

When delegated tasks are successfully completed, both you and your delegate look great. Always—always—sing the praises of employees who complete assignments successfully. Don't just tell them how well they've done, tell their peers, senior management, anyone you can find. You may be grooming your successor so that you both can move on to better things.

# Delegating FAQs

## **My employees seem reluctant to take on assignments that I want to delegate. How can I make them more open to accepting additional responsibilities?**

Employees can be overwhelmed by the idea of taking on added tasks and responsibilities. You'll achieve best results if employees understand why it's in their best interests to take the new responsibilities. Point out to your employees that delegation gives them a chance to learn new skills and increase their job satisfaction through a variety of successes. It also enhances their career potential. Once employees understand this, you can delegate new responsibilities as a reward for past performance.

Increase your delegate's chance of success by providing clear objectives and regularly monitoring progress. If, however, a particular employee seems very reluctant, it may be better to find someone else for the job. As P.T. Barnum is reputed to have said, "If people really don't want to do something, there's nothing you can do to stop 'em."

## **Things are not going well with an assignment I delegated. I'm afraid I made a mistake. What should I do?**

Pulling back on the reins can be tricky. Review the assignment with your employee again to make sure he or she truly understands the goals. Ask about the problems and discuss possible solutions. Make sure your employee has enough resources and authority to get the job done. Be flexible about deadlines, if possible. Take the assignment back only as a last resort.

## **I'm comfortable delegating, but my boss has a terrible problem with it. I feel like I'm stagnating. What can I do about it?**

Try proposing specific things you could do that would make his or her life easier, such as "I've seen that statistical analysis sitting in your inbox now for the past two weeks. I'd be happy to take that off your hands, if you'd like." Make sure your boss understands that you look upon your relationship as a partnership.

## **I get butterflies whenever I think about giving someone a role in decision making. Any suggestions?**

These things can ease your queasiness:

- Start small. Choose a manageable task with a reasonably achievable deadline.
- Set interim goals and deadlines. This will help you keep abreast of your employee's progress, and give your employee several opportunities for feedback.
- If you're really nervous, create a false deadline. Tell your delegate that the project is due a week earlier than you actually need it. It's known as giving yourself "wiggle room," and it might come in handy for both of you.
- Set clear, definable limits. For example, you can tell your delegate: "Don't spend more than the limit we agreed upon without talking to me" or "I want to see a dry run of your presentation before we go to the board with it." Once you trust an employee's decision-making skills, you can adjust his limits accordingly.

*Source: Workplace Options. (Reviewed 2017). Delegating to whittle down your to-do list. Raleigh, NC: Author.*

# Ask Your EAP!

The following are answers to common questions supervisors have regarding employee issues and making EAP referrals. As always, if you have specific questions about referring an employee or managing a workgroup issue, feel free to make a confidential call to the EAP for a management consultation.

*Q. Sexual harassment prevention has been in the news lately. But I do not know anything about other types of harassment. What other sorts of issues associated with harassment and unwanted behavior should supervisors be aware of so we can confront these issues early?*

A. Behavior that is intimidating, hostile, or offensive to reasonable people is considered harassment. Characteristically, it is unwanted. So, notice and do not tolerate unwelcome or offensive conduct. Harassment can be illegal when it is based on sex (including sexual orientation, pregnancy, and gender identity), race, color, national origin, religion, age, disability, and/or even genetic information. Do you see behavior that can be considered detrimental to an employee's work performance, professional advancement, and/or mental health? Examples include offensive jokes, slurs, epithets or name-calling, undue attention, physical assaults or threats, unwelcome touching or contact, intimidation, ridicule or mockery, insults or put-downs, constant or unwelcome questions about an individual's identity, and offensive objects or pictures. Consult with your manager and/or HR adviser for clarification on matters concerning harassment. Referring employees to the EAP who participate in these behaviors, and documenting corrective actions, are crucial.

*Q. I oversee EMTs and firefighters. Many of them deny being under any stress. Is it a waste of time to have them attend a stress management class? Will they learn anything? I inquired, but most of them seemed to indicate no interest in a class or were noncommittal.*

A. It seems there are two issues common among these employees where a duty to serve requires a selfless commitment to others and a willingness to place others' well-being ahead of their own. It's this: recognizing stress and acknowledging it. With the EAP's help, educate employees about stress, anyway. Include what stress is, how it works, how it harms, how to manage it, and symptoms associated with ongoing stress when it is ignored and the physiologic response of the body when it becomes chronic. They will mostly likely listen despite how it appears. Even if they do not, you've done the right thing.

*Q. This year, I am on a mission to get my employees more engaged. If I do this right, what are the top benefits I am likely to see? Also, can the EAP help me with this project? It's not about counseling employees, but perhaps the EAP's "people knowledge" can assist me.*

A. Yes, talk with the EAP. You will find many research reports and analytical data on this topic to guide you. You can anticipate that the most significant return on your investment of energy with this project will be employees who are willing to do more than expected, are more productive, and get along better with each other. You may also see improvement in attendance, fewer sick days, and higher morale. Hint: Research shows that you will make a big impact by listening to their opinions, being clear in what you ask and expect from them, and recognizing their contributions both privately and in front of peers.

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