



Overcome the frustrations of delegation

The Challenge

Delegating is a delicate exercise, and not only because managers must be careful to delegate the right project to the right person! Very often, the manager's attitude undermines, to a more or less perceptible extent, the efficacy of delegation. Given that delegation impacts the way the assigned work is handled, managers may naturally become frustrated with the process. Ignoring or dealing poorly with these frustrations may easily lead to counterproductive behavior.

Four sources of frustration to avoid

To delegate successfully, strive to understand and address your potential sources of frustration.

SOURCES OF FRUSTRATION

- **You are no longer the one who finds the solution.**

For many a manager, used to being a recognized expert in his or her domain, letting go of responsibility for coming up with solutions is experienced as a loss of legitimacy.

Trap:

Trying to take credit for solutions, at the risk of making subordinates feel "cheated" and demoralized.

- **The solutions found by subordinates are not necessarily those you would have chosen.**

Delegation implies assigning the entire responsibility for a matter to a subordinate, sometimes at the cost of having your own past decisions called into question.

Trap:

Judging the performance of subordinates according to how they tackle the assignment, rather than based on results.

- **You have less control over the quality of results and the speed of execution.**

This perception can be not only irritating, but also very uncomfortable when the rest of the organization continues to hold you responsible for final results!

Trap:

Regularly intervening in subordinates' work to check on the results.

- **You no longer have the pleasure of doing things yourself.**

When you delegate, deriving satisfaction from the work accomplished becomes more difficult.

Trap:

Becoming demoralized and finding fewer reasons to feel satisfied and derive self-esteem from one's work.

ADVICE

- Learn to take pride in the **excellence of your subordinates**.
E.g., in meetings with peers, ask a subordinate to take the floor. Your credibility and influence will be reinforced by demonstrating support from a solid team.
- Evolve from the role of "problem solver" to that of "sage."
E.g., listen objectively and impartially to presented solutions. You will acquire a different, but equally respected status.

- Take the time to **specify criteria for evaluating success** and discuss these criteria with your subordinate. When certain that these criteria are understood and followed, you will be less tempted to micromanage.
- **Avoid interpreting as a personal criticism** the fact that a subordinate may choose to do things differently.
- Focus on the **more important challenges** that you can address with the time thus liberated.

- Define a clear **scope of delegation** in function of the level of risk you are willing to assume with respect to peers and superiors.
- Delegate **tasks that do not require perfection**, over which you can relinquish full control to your subordinates.
- **Accept to take some risks!** By choosing the right person and defining success criteria, you already have a great degree of influence on the results.

- Take the initiative to organize **collective celebrations** of the achievements of your subordinates.
E.g., organize a celebratory gathering; promote the achievements of subordinates within the rest of the organization.
- Take the time to **appreciate the growing skills of your subordinates** as they take on new responsibilities.
E.g., conduct regular updates with each concerned subordinate.