

Delegating



To **delegate** is to assign a specific task to someone else and give them the authority to complete that task. Delegation helps save time and allows more work to be completed faster. Managers must delegate tasks to employees because they often have to focus on higher-level work. Non-management employees also benefit from learning delegation skills. Depending on what type of work you do, you may be able to delegate some tasks. Knowing what and when to delegate is an important skill. Some people resist delegating, either because they want to maintain control or because they want to save money by not hiring assistants. Both approaches ultimately hurt productivity and raise costs.

Delegating tasks is a skill that, like any skill, can be learned and improved on over time. Check out these delegation strategies.

1. Learn to let go. The biggest problem most people have with delegating is the inability to let go of their own work. Sometimes they feel so dedicated to completing their own work that they refuse to let other people help. Other times, they fear that nobody else has the skills or abilities necessary to execute the work effectively.

2. Clearly articulate the desired outcome and always include instructions. Even if the task process seems obvious to you, make sure to include instructions with each task you delegate. If you have specific preferences for how the assignment will be carried out, include that information. If you have a strict deadline or milestones you need to hit, be

clear about them. Including details and straightforward instructions will avoid most communication gaps and will produce a more favorable outcome for all.

3. Play to your workers' strengths. You should know each individual's strengths and weaknesses, including his or her current, and potential, range of skills. When delegating, take a look at your team and assign tasks to whoever has the greatest number of relevant skills for that task. It seems like an obvious choice, but too many leaders delegate to whoever has the lightest workload or is the most convenient.

4. Don't be afraid to teach new skills. Lacking someone on your team with the ability to execute a certain task on your to-do list doesn't mean the work can't be delegated. Most skills can be learned--some more easily than others--so don't be afraid to teach as a part of the delegation process.

5. Trust, but verify. Once a task is delegated, trust your teammate to execute it on his or her own terms. This will allow the person to tackle the work the way he or she feels is best. However, don't be afraid to occasionally step in and verify that the task is moving along as planned. For example, if you assigned a task a week ago that's due tomorrow, trust that your employee is on top of things, but send a quick verification email to make sure the person hasn't hit any snags. Doing so encourages more trust and respect within your team and helps prevent breaks in communication or understanding.

6. Use feedback loops to improve delegation moving forward. Feedback is the most important part of the delegation process, and it works both ways. If your workers have done well with a task you assigned, let them know by publicly thanking them and offering genuine praise. If they've fallen short, don't be afraid to give them some constructive criticism.

Delegating isn't always easy, and the process isn't always clear cut, but the sooner you start, the sooner you'll develop the expertise to do it effectively. Realize that the process will never be perfect but learn from your experiences and make ongoing adjustments for improvement.