

# Delegation - Getting More Done While Building Team Capacity

Article by Jennifer Britton, Potentials Realized

Leaders today often struggle with finding the time to get everything done. Part of unlocking the key to more effective time management is delegating effectively. As leaders it is essential that we shed many of the tactical tasks to allow for focus on the strategic and people issues of business. Delegation can be a challenging activity for supervisors and managers new and seasoned. Oftentimes it is not about the fear of letting go, but simply how do I make delegation work.

Most leaders are already familiar with the Five W's framework of decision making - What, Where, When, Why and How. The five Ws also provides us with a quick framework and checklist around effective delegation. This article explores the Five W framework as it relates to delegation, and also identifies several pitfalls for successful delegation.

First, why is delegation important? Delegation is an important skill set for both leaders and team members. For leaders, delegating effectively does ultimately allow free more time to focus on strategic issues as well as the things that only you can do as a leader. Some leaders feel that delegation takes a lot of time, however, the time invested upfront leads to great rewards later on.

From a team perspective, delegation helps to develop skills and capacity within the team. It can also be a motivational boost for those who want more responsibility and/or learning in their role. From talent management and succession planning perspectives, delegation is an important part of building sustainable teams and organizations.

## The Art of Delegation – The 5 Ws and How

The five W's - What, Who, Why, Where, When - is a very well known framework for decision making. It is just as effective as a framework to set up team members for delegation success. Planning and communication are also critical initial steps in the delegation process.

**What** – A first step in creating successful delegation is defining the WHAT. What are the tasks which you can delegate? What are the things that you could pass off to others leaving you with the time and space to focus on strategic and tactical issues? What activities would be motivational for others to take on?

In general you should not delegate to others key responsibilities tasked to leaders such as team management issues including performance management, feedback, coaching, and conflict resolution.

Some safe tasks to delegate include technical issues and projects which others may have an even deeper skill set in. There may be other tasks which create learning and development opportunities for others. Some of these might include involvement in special projects, coordinating special events, or participation in meetings where they represent yourself and the team. Routine activities such as paperwork and standard reports. While you may need to complete the final version of some reports it may be beneficial to involve others in the draft stage

Once you have decided on the task you want to delegate, you will want to paint a clear picture of what the desired outcome is, and what resources will be needed for the person to accomplish it. Resources may include financial resources, time, people and also the authority to get things done. It is also important to think through what your expectations are in terms of task completion - quality, timeframes and reporting. Using the SMART framework in goal setting can also help you break down the task. A reminder of the SMART framework - Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Timebound.

**Who** –

Just as important to successful delegation is getting clear on the WHAT, the WHO to delegation is just as critical. The Who involves matching the best person to the task or activity involved. Jim Collins' analogy in Good to Great is about getting the right person in the right bus and in the right seat.

Consider who on your team might benefit from, and be motivated by, the opportunity to take on the task. Do they have the skills,(or the ability to stretch, to achieve the goal? What else would be needed to complete the task? What support would they require along the way?

Finding the right match between the person and the task is critical for delegation success. Careful consideration of the WHO contributes to delegation success.

**Why** - The third W is the Why. Once you have decided what you are going to delegate and who is going to take on the task is, it is important to set up a delegation hand-off meeting. During this meeting, communicate clearly what needs to get done and why this task is important. Paint a clear picture of what the end result will look like with the person you are delegating to. Let them understand the **Why** of this project or task? Provide them with relevant information so that they know how this task fits into the bigger picture and why this task is important for the team and/or organization. It may also be useful to discuss with them why this task is important to them and how it contributes to their own career path.

**Where** - The fourth W is about WHERE to Go. Where can the person go for support? What resources are needed to successful completion - from your perspective and from their perspective? It is important to have dialogue around who can they reach out to if they need support along the way. Ensure that the person you are delegating to has the adequate resources, and the authority, to complete the task.

**When** – The final W is the WHEN. In setting a team member up for delegation success it is important to discuss what are the major deadlines and project milestones associated with the task. How will you communicate about how the task is coming? When do you want to hear back from them on this task? Create a common understanding around time frames, success factors and what the final product will look like. Again, the SMART goal setting framework can be a useful framework to share with your team members. Finally, the WHEN reminds us about the importance of feedback throughout the delegation cycle.

### **Avoiding the Delegation Pitfalls**

Regardless of task or industry you work within, there are several delegation pitfalls to keep in mind.

One of the major traps for leaders is the trap of micro-managing. There is a difference between micro-managing and micro-monitoring. Clarifying expectations and the end result at the start of the process, helps to mitigate with micro-management. It is also important to recognize everyone will have a different way to approach tasks, so if certain processes do need to be followed, ensure you specify this at the hand-off.

Another common delegation pitfall is not checking in along the way. These “delegation touchpoints” or mini-meetings are easy to overlook in today's world of **meeting fatigue**. It can be common for the leader to let the person run with it, without check points along the way. Do not assume that everything is ok. Delegation touch points are critical and ideally should be scheduled at the hand-off to build a shared expectation that you are there for support throughout the process

A third delegation pitfall is not developing a common understanding of the end result. During or shortly after the delegation handoff meeting have the person being delegated to re-articulate key milestones, and outcomes. Have them spell out the SMART goals they have set for task completion.

Finally, another very common area of delegation sabotage is assuming that the person delegated to has sufficient authority and responsibility to get the job done. Delegation touch point meetings should cover this pitfall as well.

Through planning, and ongoing communication, tasks you delegate onto team members can be valuable learning and growth experiences. Set up times to check in on progress and identify roadblocks that are emerging. Once the task is completed, review and identify learning and lessons learned. Identify other areas where that team member can continue to use these skills. Take this delegation close out as an opportunity to recognize and celebrate task completion with the team member.

Delegation not only frees up time for leaders, it builds capacity within the team, which is critical in the long-term. What do you, and the team, benefit from delegating today?

### About the Author Jennifer Britton

Jennifer J. Britton is the founder of Potentials Realized, a Canadian-based performance improvement company. An award winning program designer, she works with groups, teams and organizations in the areas of leadership, teamwork and performance. Jennifer is the author of *Effective Group Coaching* (Wiley, 2009), the first book to be published on group coaching globally. Her second book, *From One to Many: Best Practices for Team and Group Coaching* was released last summer, and widens the lens to team coaching, as well as organizational capacity building.

Drawing on more than two decades of experience as an experiential educator and former manager with the United Nations and other international organizations, her global clients span government, corporate and non-profit sectors, from financial services to education and healthcare. She has spoken and trained on the topic of group coaching and coaching skills for groups as diverse as staff teams from UNICEF West and Central Africa, numerous chapters of the International Coach Federation, to national consulting and insurance firms, to international health care organizations.

Since early 2006, her Group Coaching Essentials™ teleseminar training program has supported hundreds of coaches in the creation and implementation of their own group coaching programs. This, along with the Advanced Group Coaching Practicum and Group and Team Coaching Intensive, are all ICF approved Continuing Coach Education programs. Jennifer offers a range of group coaching programs and retreats for the general public in addition to the coaching and training services she offers to organizations. In addition to being a thought leader in the field of group and team coaching, she also is a practitioner herself. Her main areas of interest include leadership development, particularly for team leaders, teamwork and organizational capacity development. She also provides support as a mentor coach.

Credentialed by the International Coaching Federation, Britton was originally trained and certified by the Coaches Training Institute. She has also completed advanced coaching training in the areas of ORSC and Shadow Coaching. A Certified Performance Technologist (CPT), Britton holds a Masters of Environmental Studies (York University) and a Bachelor of Science in Psychology (McGill).

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