

6 Ways to Delegate More Effectively

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For the sake of your company (and your sanity), at some point, you're going to need to let go. Here's how smart owners delegate work effectively.

“The surest way for an executive to kill himself is to refuse to learn how, and when, and to whom to delegate work,” said James Cash Penney, founder of the J.C. Penney retail chain.

When you grow, you have to know when to let go. You have to know when to delegate down so you can rise up. I've learned that people will seldom let you down if they understand that your destiny is in their hands, and vice versa.

The inability to delegate properly is the main reason that executives fail. But managers often mistake delegation for passing off work. So they don't do it--and they wind up wasting their time as well as the company's time and resources.

Personal experience starting and running Mackay Envelope Company, now MackayMitchell Envelope Company, taught me this. There came a day when we had grown to the point where I had to hire a person under me to run the company day to day, while I scanned the horizon, studying our industry and the company's future direction. I learned quickly that delegating often requires a detour outside your comfort zone.

So how do you start delegating successfully?

Don't look for perfection.

Your objective is to get the job done, not create a masterpiece. Establish a standard of quality and a fair time frame for reaching it. Once you establish the expectations, let your staff decide how to carry out the project.

Provide complete job instructions.

Make sure your employee has all the information needed to complete the job. Confirm that he/she understands--and accepts--the requirements.

Stop believing you're the only one who can do the job properly.

Just because an employee does things differently doesn't mean he or she won't do the job right or as well. If you establish expectations of the goal and the standards to follow, then methodology shouldn't be an issue. An important and often overlooked part of delegation is that it helps develop employees for advancement and creates a better work environment.

Focus on teaching skills.

Delegating doesn't mean passing off work you don't enjoy, but letting your employees stretch their skills and judgment. As you hand over greater responsibility, it's important to understand that learning new skills sometimes includes making mistakes. Don't punish employees who make a good-faith effort to do things right.

Check on progress.

Let the employee do the work, but check in periodically on progress. Don't look over employees' shoulders or watch their every move. When you outline the expectations in the beginning, make sure you build in checkpoints for follow-up.

Say thank you to the people who have accepted the responsibility.

Make sure employees know that their efforts are recognized and appreciated.

***Mackay's Moral:** The most successful managers aim to make themselves unnecessary to their staff.*