

# Making Delegation Work

## Establish Areas of Freedom

You may be emotionally able to turn over some responsibility or a piece of the responsibility with limitations. For example, you may be willing to delegate if the subordinate has a line of authority that limits losses to \$100 if all does not go well. You may not be willing to delegate if the potential loss would be \$200.

These decisions are important because once you will be emotionally saying, *“As long as the potential for loss does not exceed X, go ahead.”*

Then, you have established an **Area of Freedom**.

***An area of freedom simply means your delegates have full authority to take action, make decisions and commit the company provided they do not exceed their assigned dollar amounts, number of people, etc.***

Consider the confidence you have in the person. Is it sensible to have a smaller area of freedom for a new supervisor or staff member and a larger area of freedom for someone who has been with you for a number of years? Of course. ***Once you have established the limits of authority (area of freedom), step back. As long as delegates are operating within agreed upon limits allow them to make decisions without “meddling.”***

## Responsibility and Accountability

Leaders do not “rescue” those to whom they have delegated something as long as decisions delegates make are within their area of freedom. This can sometimes be a problem when you have a group who has worked with you for a long time.

Some remember you as the one who made decisions on matters you now delegate to someone else. If they don't like what the delegatee is doing, they're likely to come to you. If you make a decision or change a decision the delegatee has made, you'll destroy the quality of the delegation and respect for the staff member to whom you have entrusted the responsibility.

## Anoint and defend

Announce to the staff in a group meeting or through some kind of written communication the name of the person who will be making decisions in regard to the issue you're delegating. You've turned it over. You're not to be thought of as a court of higher appeal when challenges arise. It is now up to the person who owns the responsibility to decide.

I worked for a man who was an excellent delegator. He was very careful to talk with me and explain what he was delegating, why, and how much confidence he had in me to do the job well.

Shortly after I took over the responsibility, some of my employees became unhappy with a decision I made. They went to the boss and asked if they *“had to do what Bill said?”* and he, without hesitation, said yes.

There was a period of uneasiness and learning on my part. I learned that simply owning the job did not mean that I had the support of the staff. I had to earn their confidence and work with them rather than flaunt my authority and demand they *“do what I say.”*

During my learning period, I went to the boss frequently with questions about how I should do this or that. Instead of telling me, he challenged me with questions and got me to make decisions. If the decisions I made (or thought I would make) were potentially dangerous, he was careful to advise me of the risks involved but never once told me not to do something that I thought would work.

Obviously, I was impressed with his wisdom, and when he suggested or advised me of risks, I listened carefully and generally modified my original plans. The point: I felt I owned that responsibility. The weight of making decisions rested squarely on my shoulders.

I knew I would be accountable if things went wrong or if I caused problems within the group I supervised. Fairly soon, I began to learn the processes of guiding others rather than directing.

Again, think realistically about your confidence in the person to whom you are planning to delegate.

- What is the greatest risk you are willing to take?
- How much are you willing to lose? If you go to Las Vegas with the idea that you have \$1,000 you could lose, you can have a lot of fun. If you have \$1,000, and you are hoping to parlay it into \$100,000, you're likely to make some bad decisions.

### Cooperatively define Expectations

The people to whom you are going to delegate something must be active participants in determining what the outcomes will be. Involve them in discussions of what they think can be accomplished given current staff and resources.

Of course, it's fair for you to have opinions about what you want done, but to achieve results, the goal must be set by those to whom you are delegating. If you impose the expected result, delegates can and sometimes do say, *"I knew we couldn't do that from the beginning."* When **they** set the target, they will exert all kinds of energy to make it happen.

This may sound like a potentially torturous process. It sometimes is. It's tough to turn over a piece of the operation to someone else. But, only by doing this do you find the time to do the things you want to do and free yourself to work on new ideas to improve the organization.

### Shut down end runs

In the workshops I conduct, I hear people talk about the problems unintentionally created by their bosses when clients try to make end runs around them on policy decisions. For example, owners and senior leaders **say** employees should make reasonable day-to-day decisions affecting clients.

There are often policies about what to do when clients ask for special attention. In these situations, leaders can be good or poor delegators based on what they do with special requests.

This is not to say that exceptional situations will be overlooked. And, emergencies do arise. But, many times key leaders and supervisors fall into the trap of overturning decisions made by staff members. In most cases, staff works hard to be fair while following policy. They become frustrated when their leaders "cave in" to expectant requests.

### Problems Stemming from "Amending"

If you're the person to whom clients frequently appeal decisions, and they come out ahead, there is no point in asking your employees to handle complaints. Clients are likely to trump their authority by coming to you.

***When does morale drop quickly and frustrations increase rapidly? It is when employees have spent time trying to be fair with clients only to find that their supervisor overturned their decisions.***

### **Support & Defend the Front Line**

A retail store owner I know used a humorous approach to solving the problem of customers trying to get a lower price. After salespeople quoted a price, customers often went to the owner hoping for a better price. He learned to ask what the salesperson quoted and say, "My price is X Dollars (higher)."

Customers then predictably said, "You're the owner. Can't you quote a price lower than your salespeople?"

This owner then explained his time was limited, that he is not working on a commission and gave other reasons why it was impossible for him to quote a price lower than his salespeople.

He then gave the true reason... explaining that each morning he and the salespeople discuss the best price they can offer. He concludes by reporting that the salesman has quoted the best price.

This little procedure does wonders for the confidence of his salespeople.

It also does a nice job of keeping the manager out of the job of selling for which he has competent and talented people.

Most of your staff periodically receives challenges from clients in regard to policies you have told your employees to enforce. What do you do when these challenges arise? Often, the problem with complaints and "non-standard" requests is **not** that there are no policies. The problem is that the policies are not enforced.

Are there exceptions to policies? Certainly! When those occur, make sure to explain to both the client and your staff that it's an exception and why it was made. It is important for employees to know the decisions they make will be supported by you.