

Strength-Based Delegation

When many people hear the word “delegation” they may think of dumping work on someone else. While it is true that some people treat delegation this way, it is not an effective way to view delegation.

Delegation that people love is strength based delegation. Delegating to people’s strengths is empowering and energizing to others, develops others, gets great work done, and allows you as a leader to focus on your personal areas of strength which keeps you energized.

The importance of delegation really hit home to me as we were planning our Western Europe Regional Conference. There were just too many tasks and things to do for me to do everything. Even if I could have done them, the quality would not have been the best. Also, many of the things were outside my gifting. So those things were a drain to me and zapped my energy. When I invested time to 1. figure out what needed done or what COULD be done (requires us to think in a visionary way to imagine what could be done by someone with gifting), 2. find people with strengths and giftings to accomplish the task, 3. give clear directions and deadlines upfront, 4. have a way to monitor progress, and 5. release people to do great work...my stress went down and people thrived because they were using their strengths.

In the words of Ronald Reagan: “There is no limit to the amount of good you can do if you don't care who gets the credit.”

According to John C. Maxwell, author of *Developing the Leaders Around You*, “If you want to do a few small things right, do them yourself. If you want to do great things and make a big impact, learn to delegate.”

As leaders, don't see delegation as dumping the stuff you don't want to do on someone else. See delegation as an opportunity to fit people's strengths with an opportunity. To do this, you must think through what needs to be done and you must get to know your team members strengths. To find their strengths, consider having team members go through StrengthsFinder 2.0. To help you notice strengths in others, read through it yourself so that you can notice those strengths in others AND so you can be especially aware of your weaknesses where you need to delegate to others.

Coaching Questions to Identify Strengths

Below are a few coaching questions that can be used to help identify people's strengths and giftings. These questions are found in the book "Coaching Questions: A Coach's Guide to Powerful Asking Skills" by Tony Stoltzfus.

Roles

- "What kinds of roles or responsibilities do you enjoy and feel good at? What sucks you dry?"
- "Of all the roles you've been in, which ones were the best fit? Why?"

Affirmation/Feedback

- "What do those who know you well say about what you are made to do?"
- "What have you done that has been the most successful or beneficial to others?"

Strengths

- "What are you great at? What are your best talents or natural abilities?"
- "What are you most effective at? Where do you have the most impact?"
- "What are at least five of your key strengths? How about three weaknesses?"

- "What do others who know you well say that you are good at or not good at?"

Experience

- "What has your whole life prepared you to do?"
- "What experiences have most shaped who you are as a person? How have those changes prepared you for what you most want to do in life?"

Failures

- "At their point of need, people are most open to being influenced by someone who's gone through what they have. Given that, who has your life prepared you to serve?"

Work Experience

- "If you were hiring yourself, what job would your experience best qualify you for?"

Skills and Abilities

- "What are some of your key learned skills?"
- "Name your top five skills and abilities, in terms of how useful they are to you."
- "What kinds of things are people always asking you to do for them? (In other words, which of your skills do others consistently recognize as valuable?)"
- "What can you do, or do in a unique way that almost no one else can?"

Destiny

- "Give me an example of a time in your life—a specific day or single experience—where you felt like you were doing what you were born to do?"
- "Describe an experience where you felt fully alive, you were firing on all cylinders, and it seemed like everything you'd done in life equipped you for that moment."

Below are 3 articles that have been very helpful to me in thinking through the steps of delegation. The link where the original article is found is below each article.

To Be a Great Leader, You Have to Learn How to Delegate Well

One of the most difficult transitions for leaders to make is the shift from *doing* to *leading*. As a new manager you can get away with holding on to work. Peers and bosses may even admire your willingness to keep “rolling up your sleeves” to execute tactical assignments. But as your responsibilities become more complex, the difference between an effective leader and a super-sized individual contributor with a leader’s title is painfully evident.

In the short term you may have the stamina to get up earlier, stay later, and out-work the demands you face. But the inverse equation of shrinking resources and increasing demands will eventually catch up to you, and at that point how you involve others sets the ceiling of your leadership impact. The upper limit of what’s possible will increase only with each collaborator you empower to contribute their best work to your shared priorities. Likewise, your power decreases with every initiative you unnecessarily hold on to.

While it may seem difficult, elevating your impact requires you to embrace an unavoidable leadership paradox: You need to be more essential and less involved. When you justify your hold on work, you’re confusing being *involved* with being *essential*. But the two are not the same — just as being busy and being productive are not necessarily equal. Your involvement is a mix of the opportunities, mandates, and choices you make regarding the work you do. How ancillary or essential you are to the success of that portfolio depends on how decisively and wisely you activate those around you.

This means shaping the thoughts and ideas of others instead of dictating their plans, having a sought-after perspective but not being a required pass-through, and seeing your own priorities come to life through the inspired actions of others.

On the surface this advice may sound like common sense; it's what motivational leaders should do. Yet too many of us are in a constant state of overextension, which fuels an instinctive reaction to "protect" work. This survival instinct ultimately dilutes our impact through an ongoing, limited effect on others.

To know if you're guilty of holding on to too much, answer this simple question: If you had to take an unexpected week off work, would your initiatives and priorities advance in your absence?

If you answered no or if you're unsure, then you may be more involved than essential. To raise the ceiling of your leadership potential, you need to extend your presence through the actions of others. Regardless of your preferred methodology for delegation, here are four strategies that I've found work for leaders at all levels.

Start with your reasons. When people lack understanding about why something matters and how they fit into it, they are less likely to care. But if you give them context about what's at stake, how they fit into the big picture, and what's unique about the opportunity, then you increase personal relevance and the odds of follow-through. Instead of giving just the business justification, make it a point to share your reasons. You can't motivate somebody to care when you can't express the reasons why it matters to you, so this essential step sets the table for effective partnering. Otherwise, you leave people to come to their own conclusions about what you're asking them to do and why. The risk of misalignment is highest during the first conversation, so make sure you articulate your reasons from the start.

Inspire their commitment. People get excited about what's possible, but they commit only when they understand their role in making it happen. Once you've defined the work, clarified the scope of their contribution, and ensured that it aligns with their capacity, carefully communicate any and all additional expectations for complete understanding. This is crucial when you have a precise outcome or methodology in mind. They can't read your mind, so if the finished product needs to be meticulous, be equally clear-cut in the ask. Once

clarity is established, confirm their interpretation (face-to-face, or at least voice-to-voice, to avoid email misinterpretations). “But I told them how I wanted it done!” will not be the reason the ball got dropped; it will simply be the evidence that you didn’t confirm their understanding and inspire their commitment.

Engage at the right level. It’s essential to stay involved, but the degree matters. You should maintain engagement levels sufficient for you to deliver the agreed-upon mix of support and accountability. However, there are risks when the mix is not right: Too involved, and you could consciously or inadvertently micromanage those around you; too hands-off, and you could miss the critical moments where a supportive comment or vital piece of feedback would be essential. To pick your spot, simply ask people what the right level is based on their style. This not only clarifies the frequency of touchpoints they will find useful but also gives them autonomy in how the delegated work will move forward.

Practice saying “yes,” “no,” and “yes, if.” This is the art and science of being selective. Successful investors don’t divert their money into every opportunity that comes their way, so we should be equally discerning with our time. Start by carefully assessing every demand that comes your way, and align the asks with the highest-valued contributions that you’re most skilled at making. For those requests that draw on this talent, you say *yes* and carve out the time and attention to be intimately involved. But for those requests that don’t align, you say *yes, if...* and immediately identify other people to accomplish the goals through their direct involvement. You may still consult, motivate, and lead — but you’re essential as the catalyst, not as the muscle doing the heavy lifting. This discerning approach may mean delegating some tasks to others, negotiating a reduction in your direct contribution, or just saying *no* while making the business case for why your effort and attention will have a greater impact elsewhere.

To illustrate these strategies in action, consider Anika. The word *no* was not in her vocabulary, and as a result she involved herself in every team priority. As demand continued to rise, Anika could no longer remain credibly engaged in everything. But since she staked out her territory in the middle, various

initiatives began to stagnate. As members of her team stood idly by waiting for some of her precious time to consult on, review, or approve various items, their frustration grew. Anika found herself on the edge of burnout, while confronting a potential loss of credibility with her team.

The first step for Anika was challenging the definition of her leadership mandate. Up to that point, she defined her core responsibility like this: “I’m the one in charge of getting the job done.” As she reflected on this, she recognized it as doer’s mindset that lowered the ceiling of her potential impact. The proof was that in recent months her peers were included in various strategic conversations and business development opportunities with senior leaders, yet Anika, with no energy or space for these endeavors, was dealt out of these opportunities to demonstrate her upside.

She recognized that her focus on executing work was not only holding her back from the big-picture work of leading but also was the source of frustration among her junior staff. Although it was uncomfortable, she wanted to start giving them more rope. As Anika considered her obligation to develop others — upskilling, providing tangible leadership experience, and so on — she redefined her leadership mandate to avoid being involved and not being essential: “I lead people, priorities, and projects — in that order — and the work will get done because the right people are focused on the right tasks.”

With this refreshed vision, her next step was to reassess her portfolio. She looked at her calendar for the two weeks prior and two weeks ahead, then she counted the hours devoted to each effort (for example, through meetings, working sessions, and conference calls). Once she finished the time count, she ranked each item on a 10-point scale to assess how important the initiative was to the team’s overall success.

This two-column exercise quickly revealed a few mismatches where Anika was devoting too much time and energy to priorities that were not in the top five. These were candidates for delegation, so her next step was to consider each team member’s unique mix of skills and development needs in order to make an intelligent match regarding who could take on more responsibility. Some of the initiatives could be completely handed off, while others could be broken

down into a few smaller pieces in order to involve others without a full transfer of responsibility.

With these new assignments in mind, she devoted 15–20 minutes preparing for each conversation. She brainstormed ways to share her reasons for the change, as well as how she could inspire their commitment. With eight team members, this was a significant investment of time on an already overloaded schedule, but Anika recognized it as a short-term cost to create long-term benefits.

Within a short period of time, Anika became considerably less involved in the details, but she remained essential to the purpose and momentum of each critical initiative. Said differently, her influence was ever-present, but the bottleneck dissolved.

Finally, with the additional bandwidth she created for herself, Anika was concerned that her knee-jerk tendency to say yes could quickly erase the gains. So moving forward she made a commitment to apply the strategy of saying *yes, no*, or *yes, if* to new requests in order to avoid diluting her impact through involvement in areas that didn't align with her desired growth and personal brand. And to ensure an objective perspective, Anika asked a colleague to act as an ongoing sounding board for her when the factors were ambiguous and the right answer wasn't evident.

Staying mindful of these four strategies, working out the kinks like Anika did, and becoming proficient at empowering others to deliver their best builds your capacity to get the job done through the contributions of others. With this momentum you'll be able to focus on the secondary potential of your deliberate collaboration: to leverage each delegated task as an opportunity for others' development. Then, over time, they too can be more essential and less involved.

<https://hbr.org/2017/10/to-be-a-great-leader-you-have-to-learn-how-to-delegate-well>

The Art of Delegation

1. Delegation is a key management responsibility, not a luxury to be employed when you have too much work.

Important tasks can, and should, be delegated. Managers who effectively and regularly delegate don't just free up time to focus on critical business tasks, they also groom teams into top performers and future managers.

2. Delegation helps others build new skills.

Not every team member will be perfectly qualified for delegated work; he or she will become a better performer *because* of delegation. Start delegating small tasks, clearly state your expectations, provide regular feedback and allow for mistakes. Once you're comfortable shepherding team members through the delegation process and once they become more comfortable with the tasks you delegate, it's time to trust them with more responsibility.

3. You must address your own barriers to delegation.

A need for control, a fear of failure and a lack of faith in your team's skills all create mental roadblocks that make delegation difficult. Remembering your own training (and how you learned from your mistakes) will help ease you into frequent and effective delegation. It is also useful to delegate tasks that don't have pressing deadlines; these give your team a chance to perform autonomously in a low-risk environment.

4. Focus on outcomes, not process.

When assigning a task, be as specific as you can about the outcome you are looking for and resist the urge to also specify how to accomplish that outcome, even if you know how to get there. Let the recipient work out his or her own approach and the person will take greater ownership of the task, and learn faster.

How to delegate a task

Master delegators go well beyond “do this” and “do that.” Follow these steps to ensure that your direct reports respond effectively once you hand off a task.

1. Define the task.

If you don’t understand a task fully you can’t delegate it well. Think through the task’s objectives and deadlines, the skills required to complete the task, how much time the task might take and what criteria determine success.

2. Decide if the task should be delegated.

As a general rule you should try to delegate as much as possible. But some key management tasks should never be delegated, including hiring, firing and performance reviews. Also, you shouldn’t delegate a task if your boss or a colleague is, for some reason, expecting you to handle the task yourself. And finally, you can’t delegate a task if it requires your unique skills, knowledge or authority — unless you are able to coach someone else to develop that skill or knowledge while he or she completes the task.

3. Select whom to delegate the task to.

For each member of your team, ask yourself:

- *Do they have the time? Will their other obligations suffer?*
- *Will they be interested in and motivated by the task?*
- *Will they do a good job? Do they have the skills needed? How much coaching would be required?*
- *Are they reliable? Can I afford a delay?*
- *Will they benefit from working on this task, by learning a new skill, improving an old skill or gaining recognition, or in some other way?*
- *Will they work well with the other stakeholders?*

With a little luck, at least one of your team members will meet all or most of the criteria. If nobody does, try to develop a list of other people inside or outside your organization who might be able to help you. Ask yourself the same questions about them. If you still can’t find anyone you’ll probably have to do the task yourself.

4. Introduce the task and get initial agreement.

While you may be able to ask for volunteers or take a show of hands at a meeting, most likely you'll be asking someone to do the task directly. Try to frame the work in a way that will appeal to the individual. What motivates the person? Also be sure to talk about how the task fits into the bigger picture and why it is important.

“Rachel, during our last development meeting you mentioned you'd like to develop your interpersonal skills. I think I have the perfect opportunity for you. The marketing firm we hired last week is sending over one of their people to conduct a product review. It's very important they get the right impression since they will be naming each of our products based on what they learn. I'd like you to be their main point of contact and help them get up-to-speed with the company. I'm confident you will do a great job, and this assignment will give you a chance to try some of the interpersonal techniques we discussed. Are you interested?”

If the person refuses, ask why. You may be able to work together to find a good solution.

5. Communicate the details.

After you introduce the task and get initial agreement, you'll want to communicate any additional information, resources and support the person needs to get the task done, including:

- **Additional context.** *“Here's how the task fits into the bigger picture ...”* Understanding the big picture will help the recipient make better decisions and trade-offs while he or she completes the task.
- **Deadline.** *“I'd like it complete by next Wednesday at noon, but if that doesn't work the latest I could accept the work is Thursday at 10 a.m.”* Giving some flexibility helps the recipient plan his or her work more easily.
- **Relative priority.** *“The importance of this task relative to the other things I've asked you to do is very high. If push comes to shove, you can delay the finance project.”*
- **Scope.** *“I'd like you to do a thorough job and take a little longer rather than the quick and dirty version.”*

- **Format.** *“I’d like you to email me your findings in a single-page word document.”*
- **Available resources and authority.** *“I’m allocating you a budget of \$2,000 to complete the task. You can spend that however you want and don’t need to check with me first. Also, Meghan in marketing worked on a similar project last year, so you might want to check with her for suggestions.”*
- **Expected outcome.** *“For this task to be considered successful, I’m looking for ...”* It may be helpful to show the recipient examples of similar finished work. The clearer you can be about the expected outcome, the more likely the person will get there.
- **Monitoring and scheduling check points.** *“Can we schedule a meeting halfway through so you can update me and ensure we’re on track?”*
- **Understanding.** *“Do you have any questions about the task? Just to ensure we’re on the same page, could you summarize the task in your own words?”*
- **Concerns and requests.** *“Do you have any concerns about the task? Or any requests? How can I help?”*
- **Your communication preferences.** *“Inform me immediately by email or phone when you have questions or problems. Don’t hesitate to get in touch. I’m here to help.”*

6. Get clear agreement on the deliverables.

Aim for clear verbal confirmation. *“Then can I count on you to complete all the purchases and receive delivery of the equipment by June 2 at 4 p.m.?”*

7. Monitor but don’t micromanage.

Use progress updates or collaborative software, or simply drop by to keep tabs on how the task is coming along. But don’t get involved unless you absolutely have to. It’s healthy for your team to make some mistakes — that’s how people learn.

8. Provide coaching and feedback if needed.

Sometimes your team may need some extra help. For instance, if an individual is struggling to complete a task because he or she is weak with Excel, either

send the person to a training program, show them the skills yourself or ask someone else to help. If the task is getting way off-track, step in with feedback or ask open-ended questions that point the way. For example, you could say, *“How do you think you could make your main point more clearly in the presentation?”*

9. Conduct a post-delegation assessment.

Sit down for a 1-on-1 or gather your team after the project is done. Ask your team members to evaluate their performance and your own:

- *“How do you think the work went? Why?”*
- *“What would you have done differently if you were assigned this project again?”*
- *“How could I have better supported you during this process?”*

<https://www.quora.com/What-is-the-best-book-to-learn-about-the-art-of-delegation-Why-is-it-the-best>

How To Delegate More Effectively In Your Business

For a few, delegating comes easily, maybe too easy. For others who are perfectionists, letting go of even the most trivial task is almost impossible. If you are in this second category, you probably don't like the references behind your back that you are a "control freak" or a "micro-manager."

London business school professor John Hunt notes that only 30 percent of managers think they can delegate well, and of those, only one in three is considered a good delegator by his or her subordinates. This means only about one manager in ten really knows how to empower others.

The challenge is delegating the right things, and not delegating the wrong things. If you don't get it right, you are busy, but working on the wrong things. Almost every entrepreneur needs to improve their skills in this area, so I did some research on the basics.

Jan Yager, in her book "[Work Less, Do More](#)," has outlined several key steps to effective delegation which I endorse:

- **Choose what tasks you are willing to delegate.** You should be using your time on the most critical tasks for the business, and the tasks that only you can do. Delegate what you can't do, and what doesn't interest you. For example, non-computer types should consider delegating their social media, website, and SEO activities.

- **Pick the best person to delegate to.** Listen and observe. Learn the traits, values, and characteristics of those who will perform well when you delegate to them. That means give the work to people who deliver, not the people who are the least busy. This requires hiring people with the right skills, not the least expensive or friends and family.
- **Trust those to whom you delegate.** It always starts with trust. Along with trust, you also have to give the people to whom you delegate the chance to do a job their way. Of course the work must be done well, but your way or the highway is not the right way.
- **Give clear assignments and instructions.** The key is striking the right balance between explaining so much detail that the listener is insulted, and not explaining enough for someone to grasp what is expected. Think back to when you were learning, when you were a neophyte.
- **Set a definite task completion date and a follow-up system.** Establish a specific deadline at the beginning, with milestones. In this way you can check up on progress before the final deadline, without fuzzy questions like “How are you doing?”
- **Give public and written credit.** This is the simplest step, but one of the hardest for many people to learn. It will inspire loyalty, provide real satisfaction for work done, and become the basis for mentoring and performance reviews.
- **Delegate responsibility and authority, not just the task.** Managers who fail to delegate responsibility in addition to specific tasks eventually find themselves reporting to their subordinates and doing some of the work, rather than vice versa.

- **Avoid reverse delegation.** Some team members try to give a task back to the manager, if they don't feel comfortable, or are attempting to dodge responsibility. Don't accept it except in extreme cases. In the long run, every team member needs to learn or leave.

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/martinzwilling/2013/10/02/how-to-delegate-more-effectively-in-your-business/#5d72aca669bc>

Great Quote:

According to John C. Maxwell, author of [*Developing the Leaders Around You*](#), "If you want to do a few small things right, do them yourself. If you want to do great things and make a big impact, learn to delegate."