



CHALLENGE



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A Herff Jones IMPACT Resource for Students

Developing Delegation Dexterity

There comes a time in a busy student leader's life when the things to do list gets too big to juggle and you decide to delegate some of your responsibilities. This is often done reluctantly, even unwillingly. If your leadership style includes the belief that no one else can do things as effectively as you can, so you end up doing it all yourself, you are undermining your effectiveness as a leader. Delegating is not something to be dreaded—it is a tool to be used to build a more effective group. Delegating responsibility is an indispensable concept that must be grasped by any leader who expects to be successful.

Effective delegation does not mean that you hand over a project and walk away from it. To be effective, delegation requires careful planning, communication, and a commitment to follow-through on the part of the person doing the delegating. It involves developing the willingness to let go of some control of a project. It means accepting that most tasks can be accomplished in a number of different ways, and that your way isn't the only right way. It also involves developing patience for those who are learning new skills.

Benefits of Delegating

Delegation can often be time consuming in itself, which is one reason many leaders don't use it.



The time it takes to train someone else to do what you can do in less time often seems to be a waste. But the initial investment of time and energy in training a delegate will pay off in the long run.

Delegation has many benefits:

- It distributes work load and means less stress on any one person
- It gets more people involved
- It trains group members and ultimately strengthens the group
- The group accomplishes more when more members are actively involved.

When to Delegate

Sometimes leaders make the mistake of delegating only the menial work while keeping the appealing tasks for themselves. This attitude toward delegating

will ultimately make members resentful as they will tend to feel used, rather than valued as a contributing member of the group with talents to share.

Delegation is usually a good idea when:

- There is a lot of work to be done in a limited amount of time
- The task can be handled adequately by a group member
- You feel someone else has particular qualifications that would suit the task
- Someone expresses interest in the task
- All necessary information and resources are available for decision making for that task.

Selecting a Delegate

Choosing the right person is probably the most important step in the delegating process. One delegate may move ahead confidently with the project, while another procrastinates or constantly seeks guidance. When you begin to delegate, start by handing off small responsibilities that build on a person's current skills and level of responsibility. Think about who is capable of completing the assignment; you don't need to ask your most experienced member to take on simple tasks. Select people who can accept responsibility, even if it means you'll have to

spend some time training them.

Try to match the person's talents to the task, but beware of always asking a person to do the same type of job. Sally may be a whiz at designing fliers on the computer, but if that's all she's ever asked to do, her enthusiasm will eventually wane and she'll start to feel used. Encourage people to seek new experiences rather than asking them to do the same thing over and over again.

Checklist for Delegating

Once a leader delegates a task, his or her responsibility is not over. Follow these guidelines to ensure a successful outcome:

- Work together with the person to whom you are delegating to establish specific standards at the outset that clearly state what outcome you expect. Don't hand off a job without clear directions and come back later to complain the job wasn't done properly.
- Set up specific dates by which tasks are to be completed.
- Analyze with the delegate any anticipated problem areas and provide advice as to how best to handle them.
- Explain various resources that are available and sources of information that might help to complete the task. For example, is there a project file from the last time this project was done that might contain useful reports? If it's a new project, who in the organization might have information that could help in the planning?
- Don't try to impose your work style and pace on the project. The leader will often have a very clear idea of how he or she wants the project to turn out and what methods he or she would use to make it happen. Watching someone else take it on and do it differently is not easy. Realize that the person to whom you've delegated will have his or her own methods for accomplishing things that may work just as well as yours.
- Facilitate getting things done, but don't take over the job, and don't let the delegate manipulate you into doing it yourself. Don't take the task back unless there's a good reason why he or she can't do it.
- Check periodically to see how the project is going. It may not be enough to merely ask, "How's it going?" You may need to ask specific questions: "Have you found a DJ yet?" "Who's designing the tickets?" "What kind of food is planned?" The delegate's ability—or lack of ability—to answer these types of questions will give a good indication of how well the project is going.
- If things aren't getting done, find out why. But don't be over-solicitous; there's a fine line between checking to see how things are progressing and attempting to control the project. If the delegate feels a lack of confidence in his or her abilities, it may inadvertently discourage the delegate from exercising self control. He or she may feel "She doesn't think I can do it anyway, so it's no big deal if I don't."
- If you have doubts about an assignment being done on time, raise them with the delegate. Saying something like "I'm concerned that the decorations will not be here in time if we order them from the catalog," allows the delegate to let you know if he has the situation under control. If not, discuss the concerns and agree on a plan for getting back on track.
- Hold the delegate accountable. Ignore excuses and other cop-outs, especially those that put blame on others. Let the delegate know that you are counting on him or her to live up to the responsibility.
- Give credit for accomplishments. For most people, praise and acknowledgment that they've done a good job enhances their feelings of self-worth. On the practical side, they'll be willing to pitch in and help again if they feel their efforts have been appreciated.
- After the project is completed, evaluate the delegated task with the person to whom it was delegated. How did it go? What problems were encountered and how were they dealt with? A self-critique on the delegate's part and constructive comments from you as the group's leader will help ensure that appropriate lessons are learned from the experience. Next time, the group member will approach a task with renewed confidence in his or her abilities, and you will feel more comfortable about delegating to a reliable person.