

The Three-Phase Model of Delegation

PHASE 1: THE ASSESSMENT

The predelegation phase is the leader's opportunity to plan and organize the distribution of work within the organization. This step too often is foregone in the interest of expediency. However, it is the quality of this diagnosis and planning that will largely determine the success of delegation. Leaders who are too busy to prepare to delegate usually are those who "hoard" unreasonable quantities of work themselves or, alternatively, "dump" assignments on members without providing them with sufficient notice to allow them to be successful.

The predelegation phase is the responsibility of the leader and primarily is done alone. The key questions in this phase are:

Content Questions

1. What work needs to be done?
2. What can/should be delegated?
3. What is the best match of work with individual members' abilities and interests?

Process Questions

1. What is the best approach in delegating to a specific member?
2. What is the leader's relationship with the member – is there a problem with communication or trust that needs attention?
3. How does the member feel about the work in question?
4. What is the member's current work load and level of performance?

PHASE 2: THE INTERACTION

The interaction phase is the heart of the delegation phase; it determines, more than anything else, the outcome of a delegated function. The face-to-face discussion of and assignment of work are central to the process. The extent to which it is managed well will give meaning to the preparatory and follow-up work done in Phases 1 and 3. The key questions in Phase 2 are:

Content Questions

1. What work is to be delegated?
2. How can this work be described most clearly?
3. What resources will be made available to the member?
4. What levels of authority, accountability, and responsibility will be given along with the work?

Process Questions

1. What is the leader's relationship with the member? What impact might this have on the discussion?
2. How can the leader help to create an atmosphere of trust that will be conducive to better communication?
3. What is the best place to hold the interaction discussion?
4. How much time should be set aside?
5. Is there any information that the leader should provide for the member's consideration prior to the meeting?

PHASE 3: THE FOLLOW-THROUGH

Out of sight, out of mind... Once a leader has delegated a task, the demands and pressures of ongoing work create other priorities, often leaving only a faint memory of what has been delegated until a product or outcome is needed. Expecting results from the delegate without following through with support, information, and resources is unreasonable. It is true that some members will successfully carry out even the most difficult tasks with very little monitoring or follow-up. Most often, however, failure to follow through with what was promised at the time of delegation will undermine and frustrate the efforts of the member. When this happens, the leader fails as well as the member. The key questions in Phase 3 are:

Content Questions

1. Does the member have all the resources and authority necessary to do the job?
2. When will reporting meetings be conducted?
3. When is the task to be completed?
4. How is progress toward agreed-on goals to be monitored? How is it to be measured?

Process Questions

1. What kind of support is most needed in this instance with this member?
2. What is the appropriate balance of freedom, structure, and support?
3. How flexible is the leader prepared to be in allowing the member to make his or her own decisions?

Source: Alex Lowy and Peter Finestone "Delegation: A Process as Well as a Strategy." 1986 Annual: Developing Human Resources. University Associated, San Diego, CA.

DEGREES OF FREEDOM

There are various degrees and styles of delegation. In his book *Management*, Ross Weber lists eight styles varying from very little delegation to complete and total delegation:

1. Look into this problem. Give me all the facts. I will decide what to do.
2. Let me know the alternatives available with the pros and cons of each. I will decide which to select.
3. Recommend a course of action for my approval.
4. Let me know what you intend to do. Delay action until I approve.
5. Let me know what you intend to do. Do it unless I say not to.
6. Take action. Let me know what you did. Let me know how it turns out.
7. Take action. Communicate with me only if your action is unsuccessful.
8. Take action. No further communication with me is necessary*

Before delegating a job, make sure both you and the other person understand which of those styles you are using. It can save you a lot of time and frustration in the future.

*Ross A. Webber, *Management*. (Homewood, IL: Richard D. Irwin, 1975)

Source: Michael LeBoeuf, *Working Smart: How to Accomplish More in Half The Time*. (Warner Books, New York, NY 1979)