

“ARE YOU DELEGATING OR DUMPING?”



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In business, delegation is a word that is frequently used but infrequently well-executed. Horror stories abound about the manager who admonishes, “I don’t care how you do it, just get it done!” or “You’re a smart person, you figure it out,” as he/she runs out the door. This can be a disappointing and unwelcome response to an inquiry from an employee who may not know the general direction in which to start, who wants guidance in order to be time efficient, or a person who is wanting to please his or her manager by better understanding the parameters and expectations of the assignment.

The manager who continues to “dump” rather than delegate, without offering necessary guidance, support and feedback, will create havoc on the team, as this behavior negatively impacts both productivity and morale. Here are some guidelines to start delegating more effectively:

Be clear about the desired results or outcome, and the time frame in which it is needed. Put the task or project in context for the employee, so that they can see who and what is impacted by this assignment. Decide beforehand whether the priority is the quality or the timeliness of the task. Of course, we always want both, but sometimes one or the other may need to be compromised, depending on the circumstances, and the employee should be guided about this.

Delegate to the appropriate person. Is there a particular person’s skill set that is required for this project? Or is this an opportunity to let someone else develop new skills in this area? If the most available person is not the best fit, can other assignments within the team be re-distributed? Wherever possible, try to delegate both the challenging and the mundane assignments equally among your team members.

Decide whether or not how the project gets done matters. If this requires a particular set of industry or company protocols, then be sure that the employee knows those standards and procedures. If not, then evaluate your own preferences. If this is something you have done in the past, you may be stuck in a bias that your way is the best way. Where appropriate, consider delegating only the results needed, rather than how to get it done. Having some creative leeway will energize the learner, perhaps finding a better or faster way to get the same (or better) results.

Be available for guidance as needed, while understanding and adapting to the personality of the employee. If he or she is one who is comfortable coming to you and asking for help or clarification, then go ahead with your other priorities, and know that he or she will approach you if required. If, however, the employee is not one who would tend to be forthcoming, check in from time to time and ask how it is going and if any assistance or any clarification is needed.

Remember that delegated projects are a shared responsibility. You are ultimately accountable for the end result, but you should also acknowledge the efforts and contributions of the employee. Once completed, have a debriefing conversation about what each of you could have done differently or better to assist the other.

As in other employee-manager interactions, effective delegation does take more time initially, but the return on your time investment will clearly evidence itself in the long run.