Delegation

Many leaders and managers can find delegating tasks difficult. Relying on your staff to do a good job takes trust, skill, care and patience. Nevertheless, delegation is important for both efficiency and team development, ensuring increased flexibility and performance.

How you delegate a specific task will depend on both the nature of the task and the skills, experience and qualities of the person to whom you delegate. There are four approaches to delegation – according to Hershey & Blanchard’s situational leadership, adapted from Landsberg (1997) – that depend on a staff member’s skill for the task and willingness to do it (see Skill-Will matrix below):

**Guide**

*Use for:* Staff who are enthusiastic about a task, but lack the skills or experience needed.

*Approach:* Assign the task, but help ‘George’ take small steps. Check his results and give him feedback to help him develop. As he gains competence, you can start to release control.

*Tip:* Be sure that the task is neither too challenging nor too easy; you are aiming to grow your staff member’s skills, not overwhelm them.

**Classic delegation**

*Use for:* Staff members who are highly skilled in and willing to take on a task.

*Approach:* Discuss the goal, set a deadline and leave ‘Paul’ to it. His skill is sufficient and he is willing and able to do it.

*Tip:* Do not micromanage staff; let them complete the task their way using their skill and judgment.

**Direct**

*Use for:* Staff lacking both the skill and will to take on a task.

*Approach:* First work out why ‘Ringo’ is unwilling. Fear or lack of confidence is often a factor: Address this by breaking the task down and showing him he can do it. Once he is willing, use the Guide approach to increase his skill.

*Tip:* You need to take small steps. In the long run, this investment is worthwhile, as you develop a qualified member of staff.

**Excite**

*Use for:* Staff who have the required skills, but are unwilling to take the task on.

*Approach:* You need to identify why ‘John’ is unwilling. Does he have too much to do? Does he feel the task is beneath him? You need to find a way to excite him about the need for the task, or perhaps compensate him in kind for doing it.

*Tip:* As leader, it is your prerogative and responsibility to delegate tasks; you do not have to take ‘no’ for an answer, but you will gain in the long run if you can persuade rather than demand.

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