

Tips for Managers | Ideas from Human Resources

What Is Delegation

“Delegating is the assignment of tasks and responsibilities to help employees make their best contribution to the overall productivity of your department. When you delegate you become a teacher.... Delegating takes time, patience, and follow-up to ensure it is done right.

“A supervisor must learn how to evenly distribute tasks, tap the special creativity of each individual, and, when appropriate, rotate responsibilities among different employees. Proper delegation keeps employees motivated, increases productivity, and frees the supervisor to perform [other] activities.” (Reference: Elwood N. Chapman, The New Supervisor, 1992)

What Delegation Is Not

- Being bossy, controlling, or overly critical
- Merely giving permission or handing out assignments
- Giving employees “dirty work” that you do not want to do

Why Supervisors Fail to Delegate

- Since supervisors are held accountable for results, some of them hesitate to delegate out of fear that their employees will make mistakes.
- Some supervisors believe that when they delegate, they surrender some of their power, thus decreasing their authority.
- Some supervisors have a personality that makes them want to dominate things completely. We see this trait in the way some parents raise their children.
- Some supervisors do not delegate because of a lack of trust in others.
- Some supervisors do not delegate because they are insecure and are afraid that their subordinates will do so well that they will be recognized and promoted ahead of them.
- In some cases, some supervisors realize that employees do not have the ability or maturity to handle tasks without close supervision.

(Reference: Donald C. Mosley, et al, Supervisory Management, 1993)

Summary Quote

“Remember, you are a manager, not an individual contributor. It is your job to utilize your human resources effectively to accomplish organizational goals.... The more you develop your people, and the more you delegate to them, the more they can help you identify key results areas and meet objectives. Let go of tasks that rightfully belong to your employees. That includes troubleshooting and problem solving in their areas of responsibility. Be sure they are properly trained and help them when they flounder, but by all means give them a chance to do the job for which they were hired.” (Reference: Robert B. Maddux, Delegating for Results, 1997)