

Why Put Off 'Till Tomorrow What Someone Else Can Do Today?

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Excerpted from *Managing and Leading: 52 Lessons Learned for Engineers*

Revised December 2006

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SUMMARY

Delegation contributes to effective management and overall efficiency. Reasons why delegation is important and suggestions on how to delegate successfully are offered.

WHY DELEGATE

Delegation is legitimately and carefully assigning part of our tasks to someone else. It is different from dumping (getting rid of responsibility when the going gets tough) and it is not about giving orders, which is maintaining authority while giving someone else responsibility.

I've heard all the reasons and rationalizations for why we can't or won't delegate, and I have used many myself. You may convince yourself, but not your peers, nor those who determine your salary, bonuses, and promotions.

The reasons to delegate far outweigh the reasons not to. Delegation

- Frees up experienced people
- Gives others opportunities to learn, grow, and contribute
- Helps you learn from others as you delegate
- Reduces task cost
- Builds organizational resiliency as shared knowledge becomes institutionalized (and the potential for task bottlenecks is reduced)

TIPS FOR SUCCESSFUL DELEGATION

- Understand your responsibility and authority to carry it out, since you are likely delegating parts of tasks that have been delegated to you.
- Explain the context for the delegated task. For example, describe the overall process or project and indicate how the delegated task fits in terms of inputs and outputs.
- Use written procedures, e.g., checklists, tips, guidelines, and best practices. Ask the person

delegated to suggest improvements to the written procedures.

- As appropriate, provide the budget (often denoted in hours) and schedule for the task. If practical; present the schedule as a series of milestone dates.
- Prescribe and illustrate expected outcomes and deliverables. Use factors such as accuracy, format, size, and client satisfaction.
- Provide for the necessary tools and resources.
- Do not overprescribe "how." Avoid giving orders and micromanaging.
- Protect the delegatee from outside intrusions, well-intentioned or otherwise.
- Recognize the three possible outcomes to delegation—work delivered as needed, not delivered as needed but you are notified of the shortcoming well in advance of deadline, or not delivered and no warning—and respond accordingly.
- When the outcome meets or exceeds expectations, give a sincere "thank you." As Samuel Clemens once said, "I can live for two months on a good compliment."
- If the work is unsatisfactory, take action. Critique the work, not the person. Avoid negative "you" messages. Hold the person delegated accountable for meeting his or her responsibility. Look for ways the person delegated can partly or completely correct the unsatisfactory outcome.

SUGGESTIONS FOR INCREASING SUCCESS

- Think of a task that "only you can do." Plan to delegate all or part of it.
- Plan to delegate a task to someone to whom you have never delegated.

- Try one more time to delegate a task to someone who failed in the past. Maybe you were part of the problem.
- Urge one of your nondelegating supervisees to try delegation.
- Identify someone from whom you will no longer accept substandard performance. Hold the person accountable to meet his or her responsibilities the next time they come up short.
- Think of someone who always comes through when tasks are delegated—who does so well that you hardly notice. Say “thank you,” recalling the earlier advice to be very specific.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Stuart Walesh has more than 40 years of engineering, education, and management experience in the government and private sectors. He has functioned as a project manager, department head, discipline manager, marketer, professor, and dean of an engineering college.

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RESOURCES

More Best Practices

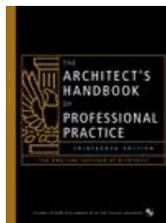
The following AIA Best Practices provide additional information related to this topic:

- 03.02.02 Building Knowledge Through Lessons Learned
- 03.02.04 Mentoring as a Team Sport
- 03.02.10 Laddership: Integrating Leadership and Mentoring

For More Information on This Topic

See also “Managing People,” by Kathleen C. Maurel, Assoc. AIA, and Laurie Dreyer-Hadley, *The Architect's Handbook of Professional Practice*, 13th edition, Chapter 9, page 221.

See also the 14th edition of the *Handbook*, which can be ordered from the AIA Bookstore by calling 800-242-3837 (option 4) or by email at bookstore@aia.org.



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Keywords

- Practice
- Personnel management