

## Delegating effectively

Delegating, or assigning jobs to others, is essential if you're to free up your time enough to be able to manage and grow your small business effectively. Most entrepreneurs are independent and self-reliant and struggle to hand over responsibility and delegate. It can feel like it takes more effort to delegate than do the job yourself, but if you invest enough effort upfront to delegate effectively, it will save you time in the long run.

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### When to delegate

Small business owners generally delegate without planning. In some businesses, delegation happens only when an employee volunteers to take over a task. Delegation also often only happens in crisis mode – when something has to get done and your attention is urgently required elsewhere. Then, the nearest or most responsible employee is cornered, and asked to step in and take over or help out.

However, it is better to plan which tasks to delegate and identify the best person to do each job. There are a few questions you should ask yourself before delegating any particular function.

- Is it a recurring task that will occur again in the future? In the long term, will you be able to reap the benefits of training someone else to do it?
- Does someone have the necessary skills or access to the information they'd need to do the task? Is this a function that someone else can do, or do you need to do this yourself?
- Do you have the time to delegate the task effectively? You'll need to provide clear instructions and training, answer questions and check progress, and have the time to re-do the job if things go pear-shaped on the first attempt.

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### Why people don't delegate

Small business owners are often reluctant to delegate. Some are scared of relinquishing control, while others have the attitude that the only way to get a job done properly is to do it themselves.

If you take a short-term view, it is often quicker to do the job yourself than to invest time training someone else to take over the task. However, you will start to see medium-to long-term benefits once the person is able to do the task with little or no supervision.

If your previous attempts at delegation have left you with the attitude that it is more efficient to do the job yourself, you might need to review how you go about delegating tasks. Are you rushing through handing over the task because you are under pressure? Are your instructions clear and detailed enough? Were you available to answer any questions?

If you learn to delegate effectively, you will build up the core skills and competencies of people in your business, and free up your time to focus on the functions you can't delegate, like the strategic direction and growth of your business.

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### How to delegate

To delegate effectively, you will need to give clear instructions. If you need your staff to follow a specific procedure, you'll need to provide step-by-step, detailed instructions. If the procedure is not that critical, then you need to give a concise but detailed brief, outlining the desired result.

The way you have done the task in the past might not be the only way, or even the best way, to achieve the desired outcome. Where possible, try to give people the latitude to find the best system to implement for your business. People who are closest to the work often have a better understanding of what goes on in their area of work.

It is important to be clear about the amount of latitude and authority that the person you are delegating to has for a particular task. What are the constraints and boundaries? Do they have to wait to be told what to do, should they ask what to do, propose how to act and wait for approval, or act and then give progress reports?

Establish a system of control by providing clear timelines and deadlines, and detailing when you'd like progress reports or feedback. Make sure you are approachable and available to answer questions, and build in a safety net of a few days to allow you to review the work and make adjustments as necessary.

It is also important to motivate your employees to do a delegated task well. An effective way to do this is to explain how success in the task could lead to financial rewards, recognition and future opportunities for growth within the company.

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## Managing the tasks you have delegated

Delegating a task does not mean abdicating your responsibility. You will need to schedule time for periodic or milestone check-ins with the person you've delegated a task to, to ensure the work will be completed as required, by deadline.

Be careful not to micro-manage a task but do make sure you are interested in the progress made, and available to answer questions and give feedback.

Try to avoid taking the task back if the person encounters problems. Instead, suggest possible solutions and give them guidance and enough assistance to solve the problem themselves.

It can be a delicate balancing act to show the right combination of interest and support while allowing your employees enough space to use their own initiative and take ownership of a task.

When work is delivered, take time to review it thoroughly. Give recognition for good work. If the work is not up to standard, explain what needs to be improved or revised and request that the work is done to the required standard. This will set the correct standards and expectations for the job and enable the person to do the delegated job correctly next time.

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## Delegation dos and don'ts

- Do give realistic deadlines. When you first delegate a task to someone, it is likely to take them longer than it takes you to do it. Factor this in and provide achievable milestones and deadlines. In time, they might be able to do it faster and better than you.
- Don't wait for a crisis before you start to delegate.
- Do allocate the necessary authority and resources for the person to complete the task.
- Do exercise patience. The person you delegate to is likely to make mistakes. This is a natural part of their learning curve. Be accommodating as long as they learn from their mistakes.
- Don't only delegate unpleasant tasks. You might need to delegate some unpleasant tasks, but don't limit your delegation to these. Reward people who take on these dry or boring tasks with the odd exciting task too.
- Do say thank you and give recognition for a job well done.
- Don't take the credit for someone else's hard work. If you give them the credit, they will continue to work hard; if you take the recognition for the work they did, it will be counterproductive in the long run.