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One of the most complicated responsibilities managers have is the empowerment of their employees. Employees want to be empowered to do their jobs, yet many managers feel the need to control their work. Some managers even withhold the work. For those managers who do delegate work, many then struggle with how to follow up. For good reason, the level of independence granted employees is a common struggle and source of frustration.

Great leaders are great delegators. They effectively empower their employees. They find the right balance between granting employees independence and staying involved. They coach instead of control. They help instead of hinder. They support as much as they supervise. They have the courage to let go, but the adroitness to stay involved.

Being a great delegator is a two-part process. It requires a delegation mindset as well as a delegation ability. The mindset comes first which requires adopting the principle that the team is there to own the work. The manager might own some work as well, but not the work of the team. The team owns the work they were hired to perform. The ultimate responsibility for the team rests with the manager, but not to the exclusion of giving responsibility for the work to the team. Great leaders think and act like coaches, not players. They empower their employees to be the players.

In regard to the ability to delegate, great leaders apply the best practices of delegation as well as follow up. They know that delegation isn't abdication, but neither do they micromanage. They impart ownership, but don't turn their back on the work.

Here are five delegation best practices great delegators follow:

1. Determine the extent which to delegate – Make the choice between delegating tasks, milestones, or outcomes. Based on the importance of the work, the complexity of the work, the capacity of the individual, and the ability of the individual, decide how much of the work to delegate at one time. For inexperienced employees, the work might be delegated one task at a time, e.g. “Scrape the old paint off the shed and report back to me.” For seasoned employees, the work might be delegated to the fullest extent possible, e.g. “Clean up the entire backyard to the point it is a candidate for the front cover of *Better Homes and Gardens*.” Or a milestone somewhere in between like “Restore the shed to like-new condition and then we'll discuss the next part of the backyard to work on.”

2. Describe the outcome – Clearly define the desired outcome, even if the level of delegation is low such as the task level. People need to know the “why” and how their work contributes to the overall outcome. Although they might only be painting the shed or removing dead branches, let them know the end goal for the backyard is to be featured on the front cover of the magazine and that being the featured yard will create many new business opportunities.

3. Jointly create a plan – Jointly discuss and align on the approach, tasks, and timeline for the work to be completed. The higher the level of delegation, such as delegating at the outcome level, the more important it is to have an overall plan. Set up people to succeed from the very beginning by aligning on the key principles and steps to follow. Execution of the plan is the employee's responsibility, but the manager has a responsibility to facilitate, approve, and track progress against the plan. For large projects, the plan should include measurable milestones, key tasks, owners, and due dates.

4. Track progress – Agree on how progress will be tracked. Processes are generally tracked by key performance indicators (KPIs). Initiatives and projects are generally tracked against project plans and desired outcomes. Whether plans, metrics, scorecards, or outcomes, agree on how and when work will be reviewed. The more critical the work or less experienced the employee, the more frequent and in-depth the check-ins. The more able the employee or less critical the work, the less frequent and detailed the check-ins.

5. Coach – As work is being performed and tracked, provide support and encouragement. Praise good effort and attitude as well as results. Take advantage of coachable moments to identify lessons learned and provide constructive correction. Help people overcome obstacles. Help them solve problems. Provide enabling information and resources. Pull instead of push by reinforcing desired behaviors instead of dwelling on past mistakes. Be genuinely interested in people's success as well as the project's success. Take care of the employees and they'll take care of the work.

Article written by Mike Hawkins, award-winning author of *Activating Your Ambition: A Guide to Coaching the Best Out of Yourself and Others* (www.ActivatingYourAmbition.com), author of the *SCOPE of Leadership* six-book series on coaching leaders to lead as coaches (www.ScopeOfLeadership.com), and president of Alpine Link Corp (www.AlpineLink.com), a boutique consulting firm specializing in leadership development and sales performance improvement.

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