



Delegation and Trust

by Bob Whipple, MBA, CPLP

I work with MBA students every day, and most of them wish they were better at delegating. The problem is not confined to students; I have yet to meet a person who believes delegating is a bad thing to do. Granted, it is possible overdo the technique and get into trouble, just as one can overdo any good thing, but for most of us, we would be far more effective if we did more delegation rather than less.

The reason for not delegating stems from each person's desire to have things done well. We want things to be done the way we would do them, and are afraid that some other person will not live up to the standards we have for ourselves. The excuse often given is "it is much easier to just do it myself than to try to get the other person to understand how I want it done and make sure he does it that way." That thinking sounds like just being honest, but it is not a helpful way to think.

The fear is not just about getting the work done the "right" way. It is also a sociological fear that if we need to have the work redone, then we have made an enemy or at least have to do some coaching to calm the other person down. The dread of having to deal with the consequences of a failed attempt and the rework involved is very real and makes us feel like the time is better spent just doing the job ourselves. That approach will also prevent the time pressure if there is an urgency to the task.

You cannot use the "Law of Leverage" to multiply your good influence in the world until you let go of the idea of perfection and grab onto the concept of "excellence by influence." By trusting other people to figure out the best way to do something and leaving them alone to do it "their way," you unleash the power of creative thinking and initiative in other people. They will often surprise you by delivering work and solutions that are far better and arrive sooner than you would have expected.

To have subordinates perform as you wish, it is first important to ensure you have defined the desired outcome. Make sure they can recite the objective back to you before they go off to accomplish the task. This is also a great time to verify they have

the resources needed to accomplish the work. Many managers fail to provide the time, money, or other resources that will be needed to do the job and then become frustrated when an employee tries to improvise a suboptimal solution.

A typical problem is that we have a preconceived idea of what the ideal solution will resemble. When we see the result of the work done by a creative and turned-on individual, it just does not look like the solution we envisioned, so the "not invented here" syndrome takes over, and we send signals that the work is not good enough. It is hard to admit that the solution we are presented with is, in many cases, a superior one. Here are some ideas that can help you lower this rejection reaction and be more accepting of the solutions others present.

1. Does it do the job? - In every task there are countless ways to achieve a result that actually does the job intended. When you see the work of another person, try to imagine that the solution you see is one of hundreds of alternatives, including the one you had in mind.

2. Did it help the other person grow? - Our job as managers and leaders is not only to get everything done according to some standard. Our primary purpose is to help people grow into their powerful best, which means putting higher value on what the person is learning than on the particular solution to a specific task. Even if the solution turns out to be flawed, it still is a success in terms of helping the person learn and grow.

3. Are you making a mountain out of a molehill? - We often get so intense about how things are being perceived by our own superiors that we lose sight of the bigger picture. By showing high trust and enabling more people to leverage their skills, you are going to be perceived very well, even if there is an occasional slip.

4. Who is the judge for which is the best solution? - Clearly if you have a preconceived idea of what the solution looks like, you are not in a position to be objective. You are already biased in the direction of your vision.

5. What kind of culture do you want? - To have an engaged group, you need to empower people by giving them tasks and trusting them to use their initiative and creativity to find their own solutions. If you want everything done "your way," you will end up getting what most organizations typically do, which is roughly 30% of the discretionary effort that is available in the workforce.

6. What are you really risking? - When you stop and think about it, the risks involved are really quite small. Even if something does not work out, it will be of little consequence in a week or two. The risk is even lower if people are becoming more engaged in the work and more skilled over time through trial and error.

7. What is the best for you? - Realizing that you have a choice to micromanage or not and choosing to be an empowering rather than stifling manager lets you sleep a lot better at night. That is a huge advantage and well worth having to endure a serviceable solution that is not exactly what you had in mind.

The benefits of good delegation are well documented. Few people would vote for less delegation by any manager, so why not learn to set good objectives and trust people to come up with good solutions? You will find it is not as hard as you imagine, and your overall performance will go up dramatically as you leverage resources better.

Bob Whipple, MBA, CPLP, is a consultant, trainer, speaker, and author in the areas of leadership and trust. He is the author of: *The Trust Factor: Advanced Leadership for Professionals*, *Understanding E-Body Language: Building Trust Online*, and *Leading with Trust is Like Sailing Downwind*. Bob has many years as a senior executive with a Fortune 500 Company and with non-profit organizations. For more information, or to bring Bob in to speak at your next event, **contact him at www.Leadergrow.com, bwhipple@leadergrow.com or 585.392.7763**

