The Delegation Dilemma

By Dianna Podmoroff

"If it's to be, it's up to me." This was my mother's favorite saying when I was growing up. It says a great deal about her willingness to delegate. She worked non-stop morning to night, and still does, because she somehow couldn't embrace the notion that it's possible to get things done any other way. She certainly would reject the possibility that sometimes, when you delegate a task, it can actually get done better than you could do it yourself.

If you see yourself in my mother's fateful saying, you are not alone. Delegation is an area of personal and professional management that many people struggle with. The difficulty stems from our need to control outcomes and a strongly rooted belief that we know how to do things best. It's hard to let go of control.

As managers, we fear the repercussions when an employee fails to complete something correctly or in a timely manner. The failure might reflect badly on us so we take the path of least resistance. Rather than working on improving our delegation skills, sometimes we simply keep hold of more tasks. Being overworked somehow seems less risky than having things done that might not meet our exact requirements.

Beneath the many excuses for not delegating lies the reason why many of us avoid delegating things:

True delegation means giving up a little of what we would like to hold onto (some measure of control) while keeping what we might prefer to give up (accountability).

Think about it. By nature we love to keep control. That way we can make sure things are done completely the way we want them done. It's often a scary prospect even to think about letting someone else take over a task or duty we've been doing for a while:

What if they don't do it correctly?
What if the outcome is not up to my standards?
What if they don't do it the way I've been doing it?
What if I become less essential to the business?
What if, gasp, they do it better than me?

It's tempting to want to hold onto control. And giving up control is often (wrongly) equated with giving up leadership as well. In fact leadership has much, much more to do with responsibility than authority or control.

How many times have you heard someone say that he or she can handle responsibility or that they thrive on accountability? Many people do, yet what people often mean is that they like to be in control.

Delegation means taking true responsibility and inevitably means giving up some control. If that sounds a bit scary, how can you overcome your mindset and become a better delegator? Here are some tips:

Realize that you just can't do it all. Everyone has limits. If you fail to acknowledge yours, you
will burn out. Maybe not tomorrow and maybe not even next year, but the stress and pressure of trying to do it all will get you eventually.

**Start small.** Delegation is a skill and learning it needs patience, persistence, and practice. Start by giving away small, uncomplicated tasks. As your confidence grows so will your willingness to delegate more.

**Recognize success.** When you have had a few successful outcomes on tasks you have delegated, take time to appreciate the process. Think about the time you saved and how you spent that extra time working on other projects.

**Realize that "Your Way" is not always the "Only Way."** A big part of letting go is the fear that the task will not be done "right." The problem is that your "right" often means identical to you and fails to consider that there are other ways to achieve the same result.

**Work on giving others the tools to do what you do.** Delegation will only work if you help the other person succeed. So make sure he or she has the right resources and then keep communicating, participating and supporting the other person. Remember, delegation means NOT abdicating your responsibility, so you need to make sure you have done everything you can to influence a successful outcome.

**Appreciate others’ accomplishments.** You might be bored with organizing the annual Juggler’s Conference and Exhibition, but if one of your employees has never done it, the challenge can be exciting, invigorating, and motivating. The successful outcome is not just a well-organized conference. It’s the opportunity for someone to shine and you get recognized for their achievements.

**Seize the opportunity to work on more stimulating projects.** The less time you spend on lower level tasks, the more time you have to concentrate on your main objectives. (You know the ones. The really important issues that keep getting shoved to the bottom of the pile because you’re so overloaded...)

**Understand the dynamics of authority and responsibility.** Delegating does not mean giving up responsibility, and this is an essential lesson for true leadership.

**Use the leverage.** Delegation can put the right people on the right tasks. And the better allocated your people are, the greater the productivity, effectiveness and the opportunity for organizational growth.

Delegation, when done well, benefits everyone. You have more time to concentrate on the main responsibilities of your position. Your employees have more opportunities to expand and enrich their jobs. An added bonus is the fact that because delegation relieves your own time pressures, the job gets done better in the long run.

So, cast off your preconceptions about delegation! You were doing a good job before: You can do even better when you delegate more. With a fresh perspective and little courage to "let go", you'll be amazed by what you can achieve!

*Article source: www.mindtools.com*