



PEOPLE SCOPE

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Must-do Tips No 70 - Solving The Delegation Dilemma

Almost anyone with a job and colleagues can delegate.....in theory. In practice, the picture is not rosy for many professional service environments. Partners and associates who can't or won't delegate because "it's quicker to do it myself"; directors and managers who enjoy doing the work too much, and the task of efficiently running their departments or work portfolios too little.

If allowed to flourish, the results of these behaviours tend not to be impressive. Overburdened, stressed-out task 'junkies'. Wrongly leveraged and unprofitable work flows. Frustrated juniors who are not allowed to develop and who leave. And in the worst cases, clients who are also dissatisfied and go elsewhere.

The strong desire of professionally-trained people always to want to do the best possible job is perfectly understandable. But there should be no dilemma if this is at the expense of personal, business or staff 'health'. This month we offer three (from the many) tips that can help delegation work properly.

Tip 1 – don't sit on it!

One of the biggest sins in the people management canon is to sit on a piece of work (perhaps for days or weeks), only delegating it at the last moment. This presents the recipient with a double challenge - coping with the work being delegated **and** juggling their often heavy existing workload and commitments. Reluctant delegators sometimes perceive that such a tactic will somehow stimulate the poor recipient into glorious action if "it's an emergency!". It won't. More likely, it will only inspire future dread of the same thing happening again and a 'run for the hills' response.

Tip 2 - be specific (and the rest)

Assuming that a task has been appropriately delegated, nine times out of 10 it will only go wrong if instructions are not made clearly or comprehensively enough. Here, the old management saw of **SMART** needs to be applied. Make sure that you are **Specific** (it is very easy to give vague instructions that can be misinterpreted); that the task is **Measurable** (defining clearly what successful performance will look like and result in); **Agreed** (the recipient contributing to what is 'agreed' rather than being just 'told'); **Realistic** (giving unreasonable targets as in Tip 1 does not set people up for success - and it is what is realistic for THEM not YOU); and finally, **Time-bound** (with clear, specific deadlines and milestones).

Tip 3 - the buck stops....

"You can delegate authority but not responsibility"*

Overcoming the psychological barriers to delegation is the biggest challenge. Doing it is the second. Then recognising that we must still take responsibility for what is delegated is the final achievement - *whether it was a success or not*. If it's a success, we hand out the plaudits; if not, we take the rap.

* This is one of the many useful aphorisms in 'A Good Lawyer: Secrets Good Lawyers (And Their Best Clients) Already Know' (2003) by Stephen W. Cluskey - now sadly out of print.

For full information on us, what we do, and who we work with, go to our website at www.peoplescope.com.

For more details on how to help your firm implement best practice delegation, just hit 'Reply' and type **Delegation Dilemma**.

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Best regards.

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