



Getting Things Done

– by Delegating

There are not enough hours in the day for us, as entrepreneurs, to do everything we have to do. Despite this we do not delegate work, because we feel it is quicker to finish the job ourselves and that we do not have the time to train others. So how do we get out of this vicious cycle and start delegating more work to employees?

All entrepreneurs will at some point reach the stage where it will become necessary to delegate certain tasks to others, both if the business is to continue its development and grow and if it is to become better at what it is already doing. Regardless of whether you are about to hire your first employee or you already have several employees, the problems you face are the same when you as the business owner become a “bottle neck.”

The main problem is that you waste both money and possibilities, when spending time on tasks that are really not worth your time. It makes more financial sense to pay others to do certain tasks, so you can spend your own time on more important things. So how do you become good at delegating so that you can make time for it all?

Emotional barriers

Entrepreneurs may tell themselves that they are too busy to delegate and that it is not worth the time it takes. “Why should I spend fifteen minutes explaining to someone else how to do a task that will take me five minutes?”

However in reality, not delegating is not just about time. There are much deeper, emotional reasons why entrepreneurs hesitate before delegating.

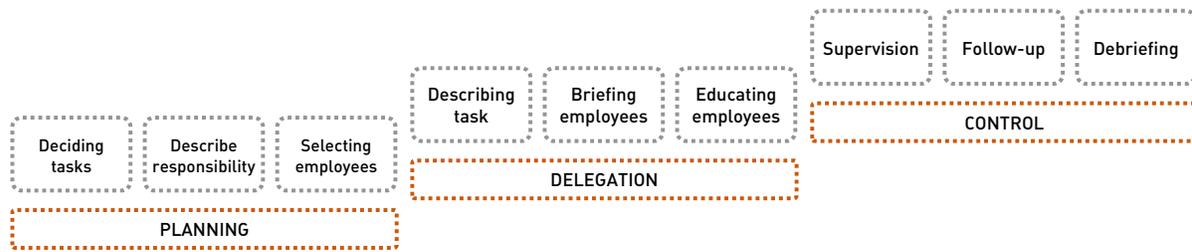
The first and biggest emotional barrier to delegation is the feeling that you are the only person who can do the job properly, and deliver a quality product on time. This may actually be the case, as long as no description of the job or the responsibilities has been formulated, you are the only one who really knows precisely how the task needs to be completed. Thus it is not a question of accepting that others will do a worse job, but rather of training others to do the task in the desired way and in the right manner.

“It takes time to delegate, but in the end it saves you time.”

Another related barrier can be that you feel uncomfortable about loosening your control of the business as the activity level rises and an increasing number of employees are performing more tasks daily than you can manage to oversee. There are many very good reasons to be a “control freak” in a startup business. In the fragile startup phase, minor details can become crucial to a business’s survival and success. However, there are ways of keeping sufficient control of operations, without you having to control the work that is done.

A very different reason for not delegating may be that you feel it is not fair to delegate a specific task to an

The Delegation Steps: 9 tasks for delegation



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employee. Perhaps you feel the task is too boring or you are worried you will be perceived as trying to avoid work--an image most entrepreneurs are not comfortable with. This attitude may sometimes lead to an “office democracy” in which the entrepreneur and the employees share the many clerical tasks in the office. In reality, the employees would perhaps take on more of the administrative tasks if they had a boss, who focused on the task of management.

A last emotional barrier to delegation is that you think that it is more fun to do the job yourself. You probably started your business because you were good at producing a product, or at delivering knowledge or a service, and it is not really satisfying just to leave this work to others. Meanwhile there are often many even more satisfying tasks waiting out there if you had the time, for example, courting potential customers, developing new products, or training employees to be able to take on more tasks.

Mastering the art of delegating

It is no easy task to overcome your emotional barriers, but being conscious of what is holding you back is a good first step, along with the awareness that delegating is necessary if you want to go from being a good entrepreneur to becoming a good business manager.

Another step in the right direction is to gain an overview of how well you delegate – one of the most important management skills, which you, as an entrepreneur, may never really have been trained in. In order to become really good at delegating you need to master the nine steps, shown in the illustration The Delegation Ladder. Of course, it is fine if you can just go ahead with delegating right away. However, it usually takes very thorough preparation and a systematic approach to delegate some of the most difficult tasks.

The Delegation Steps illustrates three main phases in the delegating process. Planning, Delegation, and Control that

each have three smaller steps, which we will look at in more detail in the table on the next page.

Delegate the right tasks to the right person

The first phase is the planning phase, which involves deciding which tasks to delegate, a decision that demands an overview of both your own tasks and those in the company at large. In addition, a description needs to be made of how to solve the tasks in relation to different processes, procedures or methods. This can be done in a number of ways, for example by making checklists with commentaries, guidelines, standard templates, or project descriptions, which can support the employee when solving a task. It is important to include the right amount of detail so that the employees are motivated to think creatively about the solution to the given task. The final step is to determine which of your employees is the right person for the task, considering both the individuals skills and interests. During this process, you may discover that you need to recruit a new employee instead, with the right profile for the business.

Delegate with all the available information

When you have clarified, which areas of responsibility need to be delegated and to whom, you have laid the foundation for the next phase in the delegating process. This phase involves describing the assignment or task, briefing, and possibly training the employee if the task at hand requires it.

The first step; to describe the assignment to be performed, needs to be accomplished in a way that allows the employee to complete the task satisfactorily. In order to express your expectations adequately, it is particularly important to explain the intention behind the assignment. The intention and the expected result will usually be obvious to you, but not necessarily to the employee. The same applies to the actual, concrete result expected from the assignment. If you clarify both, the employee will be able to determine, which method needs to be used to solve the

PHASE	ASSIGNMENT	DESCRIPTION OF THE ASSIGNMENT
PLANNING	DECIDING TASKS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> List your own assignments List other assignments in the business that need to be performed Determine what needs to be delegated
	DESCRIBE RESPONSIBILITY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Checklist with commentary Guidelines Standard templates Project descriptions
	SELECTING EMPLOYEES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Clear sense of employee's skills Clear sense of employee's interests Job profile for new employees
DELEGATION	DESCRIBING TASK	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Describe the intention behind the assignment Describe the concrete, expected results Describe methodology to be followed Determine time line and deadline
	BRIEFING EMPLOYEES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> E-mail with written assignment description Telephone call Briefing meeting with several employees
	EDUCATING EMPLOYEES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Plan internal training Buy books and courses for employees Develop training plan for employees
CONTROL	SUPERVISION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Survey the employee's work on an assignment Partake in the solving of a task the first time Agree that employee periodically reports back
	FOLLOW-UP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Keep lists of delegated assignments Ask for assignments past deadlines Make priorities clear
	DEBRIEFING	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Receive or check final results Give feedback Agree on future areas of responsibility

assignment if necessary. An internal training session is often all that is needed, where you or a coworker spend a number of hours with the employee and pass on the required knowledge. Another option is to buy the employee books or courses. If you are in a situation where many assignments need to be delegated, you may have to create a training plan for all employees, which may include everything from IT skills to customer understanding, or handling of documents in the business.

The right amount of control

The last phase in the delegating process is the Control phase. Control can sound rather negative, but it is an important and necessary part of delegating and something the businesses employees need and expect. How much control is needed in the next three phases, fully depends on the situation and how experienced the employee is in relation to the assignment.

The first step in the checking and evaluation process could be helping the employee by supervising i.e. keeping an eye on the employees' progress on the assignment, possibly by helping him/her complete parts of it the first time. You could also arrange for the employee to reports back to you in the form of an email or a statistic in a spreadsheet and thereby regularly inform you how the process or the results are progressing.

Another necessary step in the process is to follow up and chase up a task, a deadline has passed. When a deadline is not met, it is not always because the employees are not sufficiently responsible. It can also be due to unforeseeable events or that the employee is still unsure about the assignment or what needs to be prioritized. Following up will solve this problem and it is therefore important that the manager keeps a list of delegated assignments.

The final step in the optimal delegating process is to hold a debriefing where you as manager are able to survey the results and comment particularly on the parts that are not up to your expectations. Without this step, you deprive the employees of the opportunity to do better next time and thereby earn a new assignment or a bigger area of responsibility.

Make employees feel responsibility

There are many small things you have to do if you want to successfully hand over your responsibilities to others.

assignment. If, on the other hand, the task requires a specific approach, or perhaps the involvement of specific people, this too should be clarified in the work description, just as the employee needs to know the priority and deadline of the task.

The next step is briefing the employee about the assignment. This can be done by email, in a phone call or meeting. Each of these methods has its advantage. For example, it can be really good to have a written description of a more complex assignment, while a briefing in person can be useful to highlight various details. A combination of the three ways of delivering an assignment is often the best approach, if there is time. This will also allow you to check whether the employee has understood the assignment with questions such as "How do you plan to approach the assignment? What do you need input on? Which parts of the assignment are unclear?"

The last step in the Delegating phase is to find the right way to educate, train or instruct an employee to perform the

Therefore it takes time to delegate, but in the end it saves you more time, and lays the foundation for development both for the entrepreneur and for the business.

When you successfully delegate it is always satisfying, not just because it takes the burden off your shoulders, but also because you can take pleasure in seeing employees develop in line with the assignments and responsibility they are given.

For the same reason, the entrepreneur does not have to shoulder responsibility alone for the delegation functioning. Employees can also be made responsible for ensuring that the delegating process functions, by making sure that they ask for assignments and ask questions to ensure that they are clear on what they are working towards. If a manager still lacks the trust needed to delegate an assignment to an employee then it may also be the responsibility of the employee to gain the necessary trust from his/her boss.

When good delegating becomes a shared responsibility for the entire organization, it increases the chances of creating an environment where you accomplish a lot and have time for it all.

Suggestions for the next step

- Make a list of what needs to be delegated and what does not.
- Describe the assignments that have to be delegated, including the intent, the expected results, and specific demands as to method.
- Take initiative in training and briefing of employees who are to take over the responsibility for a task.

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