



# Book The Busy Manager's Guide to Delegation

Richard A. Luecke and Perry McIntosh  
AMACOM, 2009  
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## Recommendation

Some managers don’t manage. Instead, they try to do everything themselves. This never works, because most supervisors have too many tasks and too little time. The solution is to learn to delegate, a basic managerial skill, like planning or budgeting, that you can develop. Business experts Richard A. Luecke and Perry McIntosh offer a simple, straightforward five-step plan you can use to delegate job assignments. The authors outline their approach to delegation in clear language backed by numerous helpful examples. Additionally, they detail typical delegation problems and supply practical solutions. This short, basic manual is smartly laid out, easily accessible and immediately practicable. *BooksInShort* recommends it to anyone who manages others and wants to elicit their best work through effective delegation.

## Take-Aways

- Managers and supervisors are always short of time.
- Therefore, they need to delegate tasks and jobs.
- Assigning tasks to others enhances your teams’ capabilities.
- Plan and control delegation to make it effective.
- Allocate the right tasks to the right people.
- Retain some of your team’s “dirty jobs,” because reassigning all of them is sure to anger your subordinates.
- Show your employees how to execute their new tasks and explain what results you expect.
- Monitor how they perform and supply them with feedback.
- Provide coaching, time management training or other assistance if required.
- Delegation is a managerial skill that you can develop methodically.

## Summary

### Do You Delegate?

As a manager, time is your most precious commodity. Phone calls, e-mails, meetings, business lunches and all the unforeseen events that require your immediate attention rob you of the time you need to perform your actual management duties, such as planning and controlling activities, as well as organizing employees and directing their efforts on primary tasks. These tasks are, of course, why you are on the job. How do you get through your busy day-to-day agenda so you can manage proactively? The answer is clear: delegate.

“Delegation is a process through which managers and supervisors assign formal authority, responsibility and accountability for work activities to subordinates.”

Think not? Take this quick quiz to determine whether you delegate enough. If you answer yes to any of the following questions, you need to reassign more of your tasks:

- Are you so busy you barely have time to blink, but your direct reports seem to have lots of breaks when they can chat, goof-off and browse the Internet?
- Are your tasks pretty much the same as they were before you became a manager?
- Do your managerial colleagues seem less pressed for time than you are?
- Is the idea of taking a few days off a dismal joke?
- Do your subordinates confer with you before making any decisions on their own?

“Delegation is rooted in the essential purpose of management, which is to produce results through people.”

Besides protecting your time, delegation helps your employees upgrade their skills and competencies. People learn best through executing tasks, and delegation gives them opportunities to build and showcase their abilities. Additionally, it identifies the best candidates for promotion. Despite these benefits, some managers don’t delegate. Their (flawed) reasons include:

- **“I can’t trust anybody to handle this. I’ll look bad if the job isn’t done right”** – Your direct reports are not idiots. Give them the necessary instructions and supervision, along with the chance to take on more responsibility, and they won’t make a botch of things.
- **“I can do this better than any of my people.”** – Yes, you are a competent employee. Does this mean you should also do the filing, fact checking, client contact, research and all of the other jobs that your subordinates handle? Your organization pays you to be a manager – not to execute tasks that others can, and ought to, carry out.
- **“I’m responsible for what happens here. I cannot delegate that responsibility.”** – As a manager, you remain responsible for the quality of your direct reports’ work, but you also retain control and authority regardless of who does what chores.

“In principle, you should delegate as much as possible.”

Delegation goes with the territory of being a professional manager; it is an essential “managerial competency.” Proper delegation involves five distinct steps. Follow them to free your time for management, to develop your staffers’ skills and to build your department’s broader competency.

### Step 1 – “Determine Which Tasks to Delegate”

Delegate all the tasks, processes, decisions and projects that your subordinates can handle currently or could perform in the future with training. Start with tasks that do not require your special expertise, knowledge and experience. Then, reassign some of your specialist chores to others who share your skills. Allocate each task to a designated individual who can take over the entire job.

“If you delegate often and well, you will build a strong and successful team.”

Transfer to your staff any tasks that require frequent repetition, such as determining levels of inventory and ordering items as needed. To maintain quality when you delegate, of course, make sure the person you select can do a good job.

Do not allocate certain pivotal tasks, such as hiring new employees, to other members of your team. Having your subordinates meet job candidates is fine, but deciding whether people join your team is up to you and your boss.

“Try to delegate tasks to your team members as equally as possible.”

Do not assign direct reports to handle their colleagues’ performance reviews. That’s inappropriate and is sure to cause trouble. Similarly, never delegate “firing and disciplinary actions.” If your boss gives you a job, don’t entrust it to someone else unless the boss suggests it. Keep doing some of your team’s “dirty jobs,” because reassigning all of them will anger your subordinates.

### Step 2 – “Identify the Right Person for the Job”

Delegate to people who are:

- **Able to find the time** – Seek staffers who can devote their full attention to your tasks.
- **Interested in the assignment** – Someone who is eager to do a job will look forward to it and will work hard to do it well. Often, you can generate such interest by explaining their new tasks enthusiastically.
- **Close to the issue at hand** – Choose someone who has the right background to start immediately and seamlessly.
- **Able to handle the job** – Don’t give a task to someone who lacks the knowledge or expertise to do it well. Provide training if necessary.
- **Reliable** – Pick a person you can count on to carry out the assignment in a timely, responsible manner. Dependability trumps expertise; you can coach a reliable individual who needs some new skills, but you cannot delegate tasks to someone whom you cannot trust.
- **Ready to grow professionally by completing the assignment** – Your main goal is to pass along a job to someone who will do it efficiently and well. However, a second goal should be to help your employees develop their abilities through doing jobs you assign.

### Step 3 – “Assign the Task”

Ensure that the person who takes on a task understands what you want to achieve, knows how to do the job, is enthusiastic about the project and accepts full responsibility. Provide the “authority and resources” the staffer will need, plus a comprehensive overview of the assignment, so he or she understands how it fits into the big picture and into the company’s goals.

“Proven ability always trumps potential when you’re depending on successful execution.”

The way you assign a job should motivate a person to want to do it. Explain how completing the project on time and according to solid standards will garner recognition. Ask leading questions – “What do you think is the best way to do this?” – to empower the individual to get fully involved. Delegate beginning-to-end accountability and provide the authority to make decisions so the assigned person takes ownership of the job. Give specific details of the outcome you want. Be sure you concur on the timeline. Establish planned checkpoints.

## Step 4 – “Monitor Progress and Provide Feedback”

Once work is underway on the delegated job, monitor your employee’s progress, and provide assistance and feedback as required. Touch base periodically according to the agreed-upon checkpoint schedule. Don’t try to take over the job temporarily through micromanagement. Pay close attention to anyone who is on the road, working from home or otherwise not physically present. In such cases, touch points, results and deadlines become even more important.

“When you have an ambitious, career-oriented subordinate with high promotion potential, connect him or her with a mentor.”

When you review a delegated job, provide helpful feedback. Don’t be judgmental, because that will spur the employee to give you only good news. Offer specific, timely feedback on behavior the staffer can modify. Feedback goes two ways. The employee talks and you listen, then you talk and the employee listens. Don’t interrupt. Managers commonly err by “talking too much and listening too little.”

“Anything that involves people usually falls short of being entirely rational, straightforward and simple.”

If your subordinate clearly requires some coaching to do the job, provide it. However, never “take back the monkey,” that is, permit a frustrated staff member to slide out of a job midway by giving it back to you. That defeats the whole purpose of delegation.

## Step 5 – “Evaluate Performance”

When the task is finished, evaluating it objectively takes time, but it is worth the effort. If your staffer did a good job, you have the opportunity to provide a reward, if not monetarily or with a promotion, then at least with welcome recognition and praise. Since people learn from their mistakes, careful evaluation of a poorly executed job may eliminate future errors.

“Delegation always involves some risk of a bad outcome.”

Your evaluation should target results. Did the staff member fully complete the assignment, on time, according to accepted quality standards? Base your evaluation on facts. If a problem exists, critique the issue, not the individual. Avoid these common evaluative mistakes:

- **“The halo effect”** – Just because the person usually performs well does not necessarily mean this assignment worked. Watch out for the opposite bias with people who often do substandard work. Sometimes they’ll surprise you and do something really well.
- **“Isolated incident bias”** – This is similar. If someone performed poorly once in the past, don’t automatically assume that he or she won’t do well at the delegated job.
- **“Personal difference bias”** – Dodge the tendency to give someone a pass just because you share some characteristic, like ethnicity or gender.

## “Typical Problems and How to Solve Them”

Some delegation problems crop up regularly; here’s how to deal with them:

- **“Resistance”** – Your staffer claims to be too busy to assume the job you’re delegating. If this is true (check to be sure), learn why. Maybe you can line up some time management training. But don’t get buffaloed; if your staffer is slacking off, assign the task.
- **“The need to run to the boss with every problem”** – This can drive any manager nuts. Maybe you assigned an employee a job that is too hard. If so, provide coaching. But, if the person simply can’t take responsibility, prod them to “figure it out.”
- **“Biting off more than can be chewed”** – Having a staff member who routinely volunteers for additional assignments is a great asset. But don’t make the mistake of loading that person down with more work than he or she can handle.
- **“The inability to effectively collaborate”** – Some delegated tasks require cooperation. Make sure the person who takes on such a job gets that collaborative support. If he or she doesn’t work well with others, intervene or provide coaching.
- **“The inability to take charge”** – If your staffer is a beginner who hangs back, start by delegating some small tasks. Then work up to more complex, but well-defined, jobs.
- **“Miscommunication”** – Eliminate this problem by setting firm deadlines, explaining the “context” of assignments and delivering instructions in person, not through memos.
- **“The inability to handle the job”** – Avoid this concern by carefully selecting who gets which job. If a problem develops, step in to rectify things as soon as possible.
- **“The task is completed...now what?”** – Having the staffer revert to less challenging, more standardized tasks is demotivating, so assign some even tougher jobs.

## “Five-Day Shape-Up Plan”

Delegation does not come naturally to many managers. If that includes you, start delegating by practicing over a five-day period. First, develop a five-day checklist of the following categories:

- Designate a task you can delegate.
- Select a staff member to whom you can assign the task.
- List the main aspects of the task that you must explain to that person.
- Develop mutually acceptable checkpoint dates and times where you can monitor how your staffer is doing. Supply “feedback, coaching or whatever else is needed” to ensure that your employee will be able to complete the task.
- Arrange a completion deadline.

“Beware the person who can’t say no.”

To improve your delegation skills, reassign one or more of your tasks every day for five days. Fill your checklist with the information you need to delegate the tasks you’ve chosen. Evaluate how your direct reports perform their assigned tasks. Grade them on comprehension, punctuality and excellence on a scale of one to five, five being the best. Then, evaluate how well you delegated. Ask yourself if the delegation exercise went as well as you had hoped. Learn from your mistakes. By following this deliberative process, in time, you will be just as good at delegation as you are at your other tasks.

## About the Authors

**Richard A. Luecke** is an entrepreneur and business writer. **Perry McIntosh** is the co-author of a self-study management-trainee course.

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