Nine Keys to Successful Delegation in Project Management

By Fred Morgan

Successful delegation is crucial to successful project management. Many people involved as leaders in project management are, however, afraid of delegation. They fear that if they delegate, the work won't be done properly. Deadlines won't be met. They cannot trust collaboration and teamwork to others; they have to do most things themselves and directly oversee the rest.

It is the delegation itself that must be done properly, however. Project management depends upon delegation simply because of the law of the division of labour: one person or team focused on one or two specific task(s) is more efficient and more productive than one person trying to juggle multiple tasks. One cannot be all things to a project or a business. As far as successful collaboration and teamwork go, these elements take care of themselves from an "emergent properties" perspective once delegation is done properly. The more laissez-faire project management is, the better. That manager is best who manages least.

What we want to look at are the nine things to be careful of with delegation. To reiterate, successful project management depends upon collaboration and teamwork; and proper delegation makes these elements emerge successfully. What should you be careful of when delegating in the role of project manager?

1. **Don't be vague.** If you are involved in project management and you're delegating tasks, you have to be quite specific about what each task is supposed to accomplish, how soon it should be done, and what those doing the task should expect. Vague descriptions lead to murky results and failure to meet deadlines.

2. **Ensure that the deadlines you set are realistic.** They must be realistic and do-able time-wise, and they must be realistic and do-able for the people whom you select for the task. Obviously, your delegation must involve choosing the right people for the right tasks insofar as their talents and skills go, but you must also ensure from the outset that the people you delegate tasks to won't have scheduling problems or conflicts.

3. **Provide all necessary information to each delegation.** Also point those you've delegated tasks to in the direction of any other resources that they may be able to use to complete their work on time. Collaboration and teamwork might be among these resources.

4. **Ensure that you are available as the project management leader.** Your delegates should be able to come to you with any questions or concerns about the project or their tasks. Furthermore, you must hold them accountable. Require periodic progress reports of your delegates. However, don't be heavy handed about this. A weekly status report should be sufficient, assuming the project will take longer than one week to complete.
5. It is assumed that you are delegating tasks for project management because you don't have the time to do everything on your own. It might be that you are so overwhelmed that you cannot provide explicit instructions for the tasks. If this is the case, you must make sure that you delegate a person as the contact person and the manager of the project. It will be this person's responsibility to be your "right hand" and to provide the specifics to those involved so that there is successful collaboration and teamwork. Sometimes, even the overseeing of a project must be delegated. If at all possible, delegate this to someone with experience managing projects or experience in the type of work that the project requires of the people involved.

6. After you have delegated, remember to keep your hands off as much as possible. Allow those involved in the project creative space. Let them come up with their own ideas, and even make suggestions about how to do things better. What matters is that you get the desired results and project outcome. Of course, you must have the final say in approving changes to things, but there is no need to be tyrannical.

7. In addition to having the weekly status update, have in place a system for reporting on the project. It is important that you have constant access to information on how things are progressing. Make this a non-disruptive system. Those involved in the project should be able to easily record updates without the need to pay you a visit. They are not disrupted by this, and you also don't want to have your own schedule constantly disrupted.

8. Keep a log for yourself concerning who is doing which tasks. Note all status reports and recorded details on progress in your log. Keeping the log keeps your mind fresh about the project even as it allows you to double-check any details.

9. Don't neglect to give praise and credit when tasks are completed properly and on time, or when there is good progress being made on a task. Workers need positive feedback when they are doing things right. Not only do they deserve it, but positive feedback also keeps them focused, keeps them motivated, and helps them to understand what they should be doing.

As you can see, there is much to successful delegation for successful project management. Delegation is not a simple thing. It requires thought, understanding of a project's requirements, and an understanding of those who work under you. Collaboration and teamwork will fall into place if proper delegation is done from the outset. Through proper delegation, you guide a project through to its desired results. You do this without needing to micro-manage or giving yourself headaches. All concerned are happier and the project turns out the way that everyone desires.

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