

Delegation: An Essential Part of Your Company's Success

Carl F. Hicks, Jr.

“A little while back one of my managers asked me to meet her for lunch. I often enjoy taking employees out to lunch to get to know them better. You would be surprised what you can learn about a person over a sandwich.

“During this luncheon she expressed to me some of her concerns that projects could not be completed unless the President, or EVP put their stamp on it. It seemed that many ‘speed bumps’ slowed the process because the managers did not have authority, or maybe confidence, to make decisions.

Well this opened my eyes as an efficiency issue that needed to be corrected. I asked her how she suggested we resolve some of the problems. She replied that we pay managers to manage, but ‘the owner had an addiction to being involved in too many issues that kept him from obtaining clear focus on the direction and growth of the company.’



“We then created a management meeting once a week, for 1 hour, attended by all department heads. We laid out strict rules that the conversation would be high level (20,000 ft), and would only talk about efficiency and expediting the company. Basically we are not there to complain, but to have a solution to make things better.

“We have been doing this for about six weeks now, and it has been a wonderful move. It now holds department heads accountable for their actions, increased communications inside the company, opened eyes so everyone knows the struggles and issues at hand, and enlightened the owner to what people feel about him. I would encourage others in a growing company to see if this strategy would be helpful for them.” - Michael H., Executive Vice President, Beson4Media

Delegation. It’s one of those skills every leader is supposed to master. But it’s a tricky one. How much should you delegate? When? Which employees do you trust enough to delegate to? A lot of the time it is just easier to do the task yourself rather than take a risk.

Assuming your organization has capable people to delegate to, there are plenty of reasons why appropriate delegation of authority and responsibility can pay dividends for a company. Here are just a few.

Eliminating Bottlenecks: In the story above, Michael realized that top executives had created a bottleneck. The managers’ hands were tied when they needed to make critical decisions, and efficiency suffered as a result. The company needed to find a way so the execs would only grapple with the big, high-level decisions and leave more of the day-to-day operational decisions to the managers.

Employee Development: If employees have greater responsibility, over time they will gain proficiency in completing specific tasks. Michael’s lunch buddy noted that managers sometimes didn’t make decisions because they lacked confidence in their own judgment.

Having responsibility and gaining experience teaches employees to trust themselves. Research has also found that employees who have more opportunities to make decisions about their work environments are more productive and happier with their jobs.

“I ask myself every day: ‘Did I make decisions or do things that only I could do?’ If I am doing things others could do, it's not a good use of my time.”

—Ginni Rometty, Chairman,
President and CEO, IBM

Employee Engagement: When employees have more responsibility and more opportunities for growth, they are more engaged in the organization.

Engaged employees are more loyal, less likely to look for another job, and more likely to “go the extra mile.” Less engaged employees take more sick time, costing the organization more money.

When employees are committed to their organization’s goals and success, it *helps* the bottom line. Studies, including one by Gallup, have demonstrated that actively engaged employees have a positive impact on a company’s earnings per share (EPS).

Reduced Business Risk: If a CEO, VP, or manager is

the sole decision maker or is the only one with a particular skill, it becomes a problem if that person is not available. However, if two or more people can now perform that particular task, efficiency doesn’t suffer. If your manager gets a better offer from a competitor or is hit by a bus, you don’t have to spend months trying to re-create what that person knew.

Encouraging Strategic Thinking: Michael found ways to free up the execs’ time to deal with high level issues rather than bogging down in the weeds with daily problems. Their staff meetings became the place where they discussed the important, strategic issues—which so often get forgotten in the rush of daily deadlines. Managers who delegate effectively to employees find they have more time to engage in strategic thinking activities.

Improves Leadership: Delegating more may help a manager who historically has struggled with trust issues to learn to trust others. This type of behavioral breakthrough can help a manager evolve into a more effective leader.

The more employees like their managers, the more committed they will be to the company. So, if a manager focuses on engaging employees, they are more likely to be efficient, loyal contributors to the company’s success.

The Bottom Line: Yes, delegation can seem scary. You’re taking a risk, trusting someone else’s judgment and efficiency. It is taking a bit of a leap into the unknown, hoping that the parachute will work. However, you—and your company—have far more to gain by taking that risk. Make the leap. Maybe you’ll soar!

For more information about this or other leadership topics

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