

To delegate, or not to delegate, that is the question

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It happens. Especially if you're a true kick-butt performer. You do the work, write the report, manage the spreadsheet, prepare the operation--and you do it better than anyone else. And because of your stellar performance, the office is in great shape, the organization is effective, profits are soaring. But then you get promoted and someone dumps many more pieces of food on your plate. You're now expected to interact with the outside world, lead people, manage operations, and make strategic decisions that require hours of reading, thought, and evaluation.

Initially you do ask someone else to handle your reports, update the spreadsheets, or prepare the operation, but right out of the gate you get frustrated. The reports, spreadsheets, and operations start getting messy. You don't like it so you end up immersing yourself back onto the ground floor, fixing or re-doing everything.

This has happened to me many times over my professional career. When I was promoted to higher positions with greater responsibility, I held on to the important asks I did well as if they were helium balloons without a string. I wouldn't delegate those tasks because I didn't believe anyone else could do them in the same manner as I did. As many people can testify, I was a meticulous and relentless administrator of programs and correspondence, whether it was an organizational report, an award citation,

an evaluation report, a strategic plan, an article, or a professional review, I had to put my personal touch on it to make sure it was accurate, well written, clear and concise, and effective.

However, my broad shoulders could only carry the team for so long. All of the hours I spent editing or re-writing correspondence led me to mental burn-out. As my ship was sinking, it was clear I had to change my ways. I was not setting a good example for other up-and-coming leaders. I had not properly prepared them to replace me.

My consumption of self-appointed tasks caused me to ignore or miss the bigger picture at times. While my head was buried in the sand, I couldn't see what was looming on the beach. I became incapable of noticing key problems that were impacting my organization, especially when it came to morale. I either failed to detect low morale or worse, the factors that were causing low morale.

On one occasion, my team was not ready for an important mission, and it was embarrassingly costly. While I was busy crossing the T's and dotting the I's, everyone else was waiting for me to finish crossing the T's and dotting the I's. When it came time for the team to go, there was no motion. The engines had no gas. But even if they had gas, the trucks weren't properly loaded. Epic failure on my part as a leader.

After the hammer hit me in the head a few times, it became apparent I had to empty some of my plate. It was

difficult at first to block out time in my schedule to teach and explain things to others. I had to do more than just show someone how to do a task--I had to spend time talking about my philosophy on various matters--how I approached, dissected, organized, or created things--and why it all mattered so much to me. I enrolled people in training courses, college classes, and subject-specific seminars. In time, they did acquire the knowledge and capabilities to do what I demanded at the level of effectiveness and efficiency I expected.

These short-term investments in people paid huge dividends in the long run. Eventually, others began doing what I used to do in the manner I did them. It was then that my ability as a leader drastically improved. That's when I was able to officially pull my head out of the sand.

With my head clear and free from the sand, I could see what was going on. I could see the high tide coming, the sun rising or setting, feel the wind, and smell the air. Translated: I could see threats and opportunities, observe strengths and weaknesses, notice high or low morale, and move about for verification.

So to answer the headline question: *delegate to willing and capable people*. It's not easy but necessary if you want to lead at a high level. Delegation gives others the opportunity to gain experience and grow, paves the way for proper awareness and insight, and is key to effective organizational leadership.

~ The End ~