

What are you giving up to go up?

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Most professionals strive to move up in the world. But with each step up on the rung of the leadership ladder, they begin to realize their free time dwindles and the weight in their bag gets heavier. They learn that being a top-level leader requires they give some things up.

First and foremost, as a leader you have to give up some or many of the tasks you previously did. You must begin delegating things to other up-and-coming leaders who are stepping into your old shoes. And along with that delegation, you should share your authority with subordinate leaders so they can decide and act accordingly. Otherwise, be prepared for them to be constantly knocking on your door or buzzing your phone in order to get your “approval” before proceeding with a task or making a decision. But always remember that you still maintain overall responsibility so you can’t wash your hands completely after delegating. I’ve made that mistake a few times over the years. I thought I’d delegate things here and there so I didn’t have to deal with them, only to find myself later on standing in my boss’ office alerting him or her that the train derailed. And the sad part was I had no idea why the train derailed. I failed miserably as a leader during those instances.

When handing off projects, follow the 10-80-10 principle of delegation. This is a time commitment scale of oversight that works this way:

Help the leader you delegate to with the first 10 percent by casting vision, laying down parameters, providing resources, offering tips, and giving

encouragement. Then let them handle the middle 80 percent. That’s the time they formulate their plan, organize details, and execute or direct the activities. Then you can come alongside them again during the last 10 percent to help them verify that everything is on track. If something’s veering off, you can assist, if necessary, in the recovery effort. Will this always be perfect? No. But at least if you’re explaining a failed mission to your boss, you’ll have an understanding of what went wrong.

Along with giving up some of your tasks, you will also have to give up the desire to know everyone. You may feel energized in a room full of people, but you simply won’t have enough time to interact with every single person. This doesn’t mean you shouldn’t have lots of contacts, it just means you can’t dedicate time to anyone and everyone who crosses your path. To compensate for this, you must choose a strong inner circle of people who you trust and are capable of providing you with tremendous professional and personal help when necessary.

You also can’t go everywhere every year. Some leaders are always grasping at the opportunity to travel to different work sites, wanting to see every corner of the organization, or continually speaking at various events, etc. You’re going to have to fragment this into a rotating cycle of visits if you want to put “eyes on” at each location. It’s understandable to want to introduce yourself everywhere and shake everyone’s hands when you get put in charge, but it may only be feasible to do so in an alternate way—like video conferencing or video introduction.

Successful leaders also understand that it’s not reasonable for them to know everything. They have to relinquish their desire to be well-rounded in everything or a “Jack-Of-All-Trades.” Now don’t confuse knowledge with awareness—successful leaders have well-rounded awareness and rely on others to brief them on details below the different surfaces that permeate their organization. Someone once told me: “Ninety-nine percent of everything in life you don’t need to know.” So I try to focus on the one percent that gives me the highest return—someone else can brief me about the other ninety-nine percent when I need to know about it.

So is there anything you shouldn’t give up? Don’t give up your children and/or family members who desire your love and support. Always do your best to make it to your children’s events or to dinner with your spouse or parents. Put your family in your schedule and stick to it. Of course there will be occasions when this is impossible, but take control of the reins and don’t let neglecting family time to become a habit. And don’t give up hobbies, leisure travel, and/or spiritual beliefs if they have important meaning to you. (An annual vacation or get-away is very important to relax and recharge. If you can’t afford it, find a cheap alternative that accomplishes the same uplifting results.)

Being willing to give up some things you love in order to focus on what has the greatest impact isn’t an easy lesson to learn. But the earlier you embrace it, the sooner you can dedicate yourself to excellence in what matters most.

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