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### **Delegation: A Recipe for Leveraging Leadership**

As leaders, we have two major priorities. First is to think strategically, solving our toughest problems. And second is to develop our teams. But you don't have time to do the first unless you're committed to the second.

Last Thursday morning, I was getting ready to host our annual family Thanksgiving – for perhaps the 20th time. With my husband, 20-something daughters and my sister, we were pulling bread, sautéing celery and onions and getting the two turkeys ready for stuffing. Once the birds were put in the oven, we turned to the hors d'oeuvres for my siblings and their families as well as the 15 or so others who would be joining us for a bit but eating dinner elsewhere. And then the girls asked, “How did you ever do this when we were 2, 4 and 6 years old?”

Good question. And a simple answer. My husband and I offered the strategic direction for the day, and we delegated. When the girls were small, other family members pitched in with their specialties. Aunt Janet brought the shrimp and mashed potatoes and Cousin Diane made her sweet potato casserole (complete with toasted marshmallows). Mark brought the award-winning chocolate-chip pecan pies and Alice her legendary carrot cake. (Thankfully, she still does!) Together, the team created some memorable feasts.

These days, our girls are incredible contributors in large part because over the years, they learned and understood the vision. And from their participation, it's clear that we delegated the right way. We shared our vision, let them participate in some of the decision-making (no stuffed mushrooms this year, too tough to keep warm), and taught them the ropes. (Sarah took over the artichoke and crabmeat dip this year to rave reviews.)

Leveraging leadership is all about giving yourself the opportunity to do what you do best, and making sure your teams can do the same. And you can't do either without effective delegation.

So if we know we must delegate effectively to succeed, how can we move beyond thinking “If you want something done right, do it yourself,” “my team members are all too busy to take on more work, or “I'm too busy to teach them the right way?” Had I operated under any one of those beliefs on Thursday, we'd still be in the kitchen today – and dinner would have been an abject failure.



Here are 5 tips that you can use to develop your leadership leverage.

1. **Accept the fact that effective delegation is a leadership imperative and decide to improve your delegation skills immediately.** I've reviewed numerous position descriptions and competency models and completed scores of 360 interviews and assessments. In every case, effective delegation is a skill requirement for leaders at all levels. Don't resist building this necessary skill.
2. **Effective delegation involves understanding the competencies of your team.** Match the skills and abilities of the individual to the tasks to be delegated. Be patient. Know that they will not complete the task exactly like you would but that is the key part of their learning and development. Understand their focus for development. What is it that they want to learn to be more fulfilled? What do they *need* to learn to advance? Know how the delegated task fits their developmental needs.
3. **Invest the time up front to make sure you teach them what they need to know to get them on their way.**
  - **Clearly articulate** your desired outcome.
  - **Clearly articulate** the time expected for completion.
  - **Clearly articulate** the deadline for project or task completion.

Giving blanket orders to “do what it takes” or “get it back to me sometime next week” only sets both parties up for frustration and potential failure. Time spent up front provides greater returns on your investment once the project is complete. And that's the definition of leverage.

4. **Don't get caught in “upward delegation,” which occurs when your staff attempts to give the project back due to time constraints or lack of understanding.** Encourage your staff to focus on solving the problem and taking responsibility to complete the work. This is their time to learn and your time to lead.



- 5. Thoroughly review the completed work and provide feedback, positive if it meets your needs or constructive if the results are less than you expect.** This is not the time to just “let it go” and rework it yourself.

Effective delegation provides a win-win solution for you and your team members. As the leader, you have developed and empowered your team to be more comfortable in taking on additional responsibility. This frees up available time for you to think strategically and work on more complex challenges. It's a win-win and definitely a recipe for leveraging leadership.

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