



Management and Performance Associates | March 2012

Dumping vs. Delegating Tasks

Picture the following scene: Last month, during the annual performance appraisal, Chris was rated excellent in all leadership competencies except for “Delegating Effectively.” His manager challenged him to delegate more.

Last week, as he was very busy and running behind schedule, Chris told Alex, his only direct report, that he was delegating the new market report to her. Today, Chris was very surprised when the first draft of the report was emailed to him. There was a lot of data, yes, good data, it showed she had worked hard on collecting the information, but where was the analysis? What did it all mean? Where were her recommendations or conclusions? Thinking out loud, Chris said “She was probably too junior for such a task. I should have stayed later every night last week to prepare the report myself.”

It's possible, but not probable. As we read the above paragraphs, it seems that Chris did not follow basic recommendations for delegating effectively. Here they are:

1 | Let go

Most managers think that delegation is too much work. They believe it is easier to do the task themselves. It takes less time to do it themselves than to explain it. Others don't delegate because they don't expect the employees to do the task with the same level of quality that they do. If you're looking for perfection, remember that perfect is the enemy of good. In the short run these managers may have a point. A tiny one. What managers need to remember is that delegating is not about dumping tasks on people, it is about developing them.

2 | Ensure you are clear on what you are delegating and what your expectations are

The employee needs to know what is going on. Alex was not told if she was supposed to collect data, analyze it, decide on a course of action, offer conclusions and recommendations, etc. In the absence of clear and direct communication, Alex assumed what was expected of her. So then, who failed?

3 | Delegate the objective, not just the steps to get there

Employees feel more motivated when they understand the big picture and the implications for overall performance, not only their own, but their department's and their company's. The steps that lead to the task then start to make sense, motivation keeps improving, employees make connections and don't miss opportunities and performance is at its best. In our scenario, Alex was told to prepare the “new report.” Who would read this report? What would the implications be? No purpose was communicated.

4 | Be sure the delegated task is in line with the employee motivational profile

Simply put, different people are motivated by different things. The same task, if delegated to different employees, would be received with different levels of engagement. Let's imagine Alex does not get energized by working with numbers. If this report involves a lot of number crunching, then perhaps Alex is not the right person to delegate it to.

If, however, there is no one else to delegate to, then it is all about how you “sell” the idea to her. A suggestion would be: “Alex, this report will give you an opportunity to interact with some of your colleagues, who do a similar job in other divisions of the company.” Assuming that her motivation



comes from affiliation, it is not manipulation, but pure influencing.

5 | Be sure the delegated task involves a reasonable stretch in the employee's capabilities.

In other words, the employee must have the basic competence to do the task and at the same time the task must involve a certain amount of challenge. This balance is what represents a developmental opportunity and motivation to the employee. The emphasis here is on reasonable and balanced. If the challenge is too much, the employee will be de-motivated from the start.

Delegating is not the same as assigning tasks and projects that are already part of their job description. It is about delegating some of your responsibilities to them. Delegate the task and the responsibility to accomplish it. That is not abdication. You continue to share accountability for the task, the budget, the deadlines, the quality of the job done and the satisfaction of stakeholders, therefore be sure to monitor and follow up, without taking away their entrepreneurship.

We invite you to see the short video highlighted on the left column (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6wMe1NeNgkc&feature=related>).

This short animation describes the consequences of not delegating, and how they become part of a cycle....

See you next time. We welcome your feedback.

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