



The Key to Delegation: Believing in Oneself and in One's Employees

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By Mac McIntire

I've been a consultant for almost 38 years. During that time I've noticed a vast majority of managers have a hard time properly delegating tasks to subordinates, particularly those tasks that are of high importance or entail great risk to the manager or company.

Delegation requires a manager's trust, confidence and belief in the abilities of an employee to carry out a task to its successful completion. A multitude of beliefs come into play before a manager will let go of an assigned task.

The manager must believe the employee delegated to is fully capable of performing the task (*competence*) and that the task will actually be done (*predictability*). Managers often don't delegate a task to someone else because they lack the confidence the task will be done as well as they could do it themselves.

Beliefs within the Manager

To delegate a task to another person, a manager must consciously understand the unconscious elements that play into every delegation. Before the manager can "let go" of an assignment one must harbor certain "beliefs" about the person to whom one is delegating.

The first element is a **Competence Belief**. A manager must believe the person is capable of performing the task as directed at the level expected. This includes the assurance that the individual has the skills, knowledge and ability to perform the expected result.

Having the skills to do a task and having a *willingness* to do it are two different things. Consequently, the manager also must have a **Disposition Belief** that the employee is not only able to perform the task, but disposed to perform as expected. The employee must be eager and willing to take on the responsibilities. If the employee is in any way hesitant or reluctant, the manager will be less inclined to believe the task will be completed properly. The employee's eagerness to accept the assigned task influences the manager's willingness to delegate the task.

Hence, the manager also needs a **Fulfillment Belief** – a sense the worker will carry out the action by actually doing it. To fulfill a responsibility an employee must have the ability, disposition, time, and resources to complete the task as expected. Delegation is not merely assigning a task to another person; it also is giving that person the information, tools, resources, incentive and training necessary to perform the work successfully.

Additionally, the manager must believe the employee will persevere until the task is completed. This **Persistence Belief** gives the manager the added sense that the employee will stick to the task and do whatever is necessary to get it done in a timely manner. This belief also entails the manager's assumption that the employee has the ability to successfully circumvent any obstacles that may be placed in their way while performing the work.

Beliefs within the Employee

There are three additional beliefs that the *employee* must harbor in order to accept the delegated responsibility. Managers should consider these additional beliefs when delegating to an employee.

First, the employee must have a **Confidence Belief** in his own abilities to perform the task as expected. He must confidently know, or believe, he can do it.

Second, there must be a **Benefit Belief** regarding the delegated task. The employee must perceive there is a personal benefit from her performing the assigned action. Some type of personal payoff must be predicated upon the satisfactory completion of the task and have significant enough appeal to the employee to generate her commitment to the task.

Finally, the employee must consciously or unconsciously possess a **No-Harm Belief**. He must feel the task is within his scope of responsibility and that no harm will come to him, his boss, or his company if, for some reason, he fails in the successful completion of the task. Risk aversion is one of the primary reasons why employees fail to take on greater responsibility. Managers who can tolerate failure on the road to success have a greater propensity to delegate effectively.

True delegation might be better understood by using the term *reliance* in place of delegation. To delegate effectively a manager must be able to rely on another individual to perform the task as expected. A manager can only delegate to an employee when she feels the employee is reliable enough to do it right. §

Innovative Management Group teaches managers how to delegate effectively. We offer two- and four-hour training sessions that take managers through an introspective process where they confront their delegation hesitations and learn how to let go and delegate effectively to achieve productive results.

Mac McIntire is the president of Innovative Management Group, a Las Vegas-based training and consulting firm specializing in strategic visioning and alignment, organizational effectiveness, quality improvement, and teamwork. He can be reached at 702-258-8334 or e-mail mac@imglv.com. His website is www.imglv.com