Delegation and Empowerment:
What, Why, When and How

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Course Summary

There are many management topics that will teach you about coping in a world of rapid change, managing productivity, tips on goal setting, and the need for dividing the existing work among employees via delegation. It doesn't take a rocket scientist to realize that a shared workload gets accomplished quicker with less wear-and-tear on each participant.

There aren't as many resources, though, that will help a manager (or "manager wannabe") understand the strategy of delegation that attempts to match the required work tasks with the available talent for maximum results of productivity. And, taking that view of delegation a step farther, the *empowerment of* employees to do the tasks also provides an opportunity for higher quality of results, the employee's development for the future and the chance for them to do bigger and broader tasks leading to career advancement. Empowerment can create an employee mindset of "I GET to do this" resulting in increased productivity instead of "I HAVE to do this" usually producing minimal results – i.e., "what's the least I can do to get by" – associated with delegation.

Unfortunately, many view the concept of empowerment as a term coined to make people feel good about their assignment but really adds no value or specific meaning to the task at hand. Consequently, for many then, delegating and "empowering" are interchangeable: it just means getting someone else to do what you want them to do.

This course will help the student understand there is a BIG difference between delegation and empowerment that goes way beyond feel-good concepts that can reap great rewards for the manager – especially in times of rapid or pending change in the organization.

Learning Outcomes

As a result of taking the course, the student will be able to:
1. Define and differentiate between delegation and empowerment.
2. Identify who controls the width of the employee performance gap where they can work at commitment or compliance levels.

3. List six advantages of effective delegation.

4. List at least three reasons why some managers do not delegate.

5. List the five components required for an employee to work successfully in an empowered delegation assignment

6. List eight actions required from an authority figure for successful delegation.

7. Define the term 'motivation' and give examples of it.

8. Develop a strategy for preparing an employee to function successfully within an empowered assignment.

9. List at least four factors necessary for a manager to assume a "hands off" attitude toward a delegation assignment.

10. List at least five factors necessary for determining when to delegate an assignment.

11. List at least three factors necessary for determining to whom an assignment can be delegated.

12. Identify seven undesirable outcomes associated with organizations unprepared to deal with the winds of change in today's business environment

Intended Audience

This course is designed to teach existing managers and those who want to manage others how to analyze the existing work and match it to the talent available to do it in order to achieve maximum quality, productivity, and employee development.

Today's Organizational Reality

"The Times, They Are a Changin'"
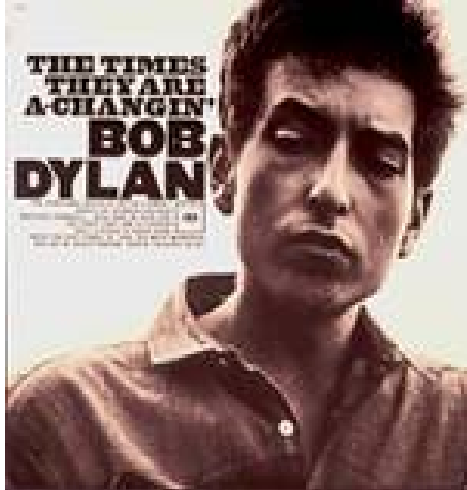
Come gather 'round people wherever you roam,
And admit that the waters around you have grown,
And accept it that soon you'll be drenched to the bone.
If your time to you is worth savin',
Then you better start swimmin' or you'll sink like a stone
for the times they are a-changin'.

Come writers and critics who prophesize with your pen,
And keep your eyes wide the chance won't come again
And don't speak too soon for the wheel's still in spin,
And there's no tellin' who that it's namin'.
For the loser now will be later to win
For the times they are a-changin'.

Come senators, congressmen please heed the call, don't stand in the doorway, don't block up the hall
For he that gets hurt, will be he who has stalled,
there's a battle outside and it is ragin'.
It'll soon shake your windows, and rattle your walls
For the times they are a-changin'.

Come mothers and fathers throughout the land,
and don't criticize, what you can't understand
Your sons and your daughters are beyond your command
Your old road is rapidly agin'.
Please get out of the new one if you can't lend your hand
For the times they are a-changin'.

The line it is drawn, the curse it is cast
The slow one now, will later be fast
As the present now, will later be past
The order is rapidly fadin'.
And the first one now will later be last
For the times they are a-changin'.

-Bob Dylan, 1964

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Take a few minutes to read the lyrics of this song carefully. It was published in 1964. Why was it appropriate for that time in the US? [It was a time of great social and political turmoil in the nation. Events like these were changing the national landscape:

- ✓ The Civil Rights Movement was gaining momentum – M.L. King's "I Have a Dream" speech in 1963
- ✓ The escalating Vietnam military involvement was getting more and more headlines
- ✓ President Kennedy had been assassinated 2 years before – politics were more news than before
- ✓ The Cold War was heating up – the Cuban Missile crisis was less than 2 years old
- ✓ Music was changing radically into "sex, drugs, and rock and roll"
- ✓ President Lyndon B. Johnson's "Great Society" was created and massive social programs began
- ✓ College students were becoming more involved in social issues which were covered by more news which stimulated more protests which drew more news coverage…]

Are any parts of it ageless?   Why or why not?

What parts, if any, of it relate to our workplace today and why?

List a few changes that have occurred within your employer's organization within the past five years that have also had an impact on you.

List a few changes that have occurred within your employer's market within the past five years that have also had a subsequent impact on you.

Organizational Health and Change
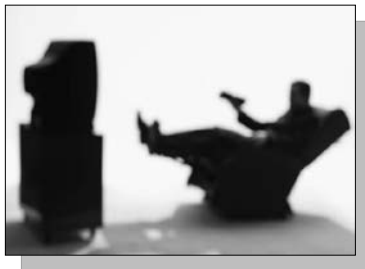
At times, people are a lot like organizations. Sitting inert in a recliner watching television with snacks nearby can be a very comfortable end to a busy day. It feels like a good way to unwind from all the stress we endured between the time we got out of bed this morning and the time we will return later tonight.

Contrarily, exercising our muscles and working up a sweat doesn't feel nearly as comfortable in the short term. Mentally, we know that a long-term commitment to exercise will make us feel better and be more productive but it just doesn't feel as good in the short term as the recliner with the snacks within reach. Unfortunately, we become sluggish physically *and mentally* if we engage in too much "recliner therapy."

Organizations work the same way. As long as things are unchanging and going smoothly, we get into a "recliner mindset" and the workdays become routine. We assume predictable behaviors from the market, our vendors, our clients, our leaders, our subordinates, each other, and ourselves. We finish sentences for each other in meetings. Executives continue to issue

their predictable top-down edicts on a regular basis. This year's strategy is pretty much like last year's with only the milestones updated and the outcomes proportionally increased. "Don't rock the boat" is a common response when the risk of innovation threatens the status quo. The organization has assumed a recliner mindset from top to bottom and operates on virtual autopilot.

However, just as we know intellectually that a challenging physical workout regime is the best thing for us personally in the long term or in the case of an unexpected emergency; the regular flexing of our "organizational muscles" at every level will also help us become healthier and stronger organizationally in the long term as well as prepare us for the emergencies that always seem to happen at the worst possible times.

Unfortunately, we do not do much organizational exercising ("too busy" is the typical excuse) and then act in the worst possible ways when change comes and emergencies begin to disrupt our comfortable routines resulting in some very undesirable outcomes such as:

1. Increasing centralization of decision-making and less sharing of power since we have spent no time developing our workforce at all levels. (Nothing kills morale and productivity faster than making employees think they are merely interchangeable cogs in a machine working at the whim of the executives.)

2. Becoming entrenched *even more* in our old comfortable habits instead of preparing to deal with the emergency facing us. "Doing more of the same that put us into this situation" is common although it does not make sense to someone standing outside of the situation.

3. Increased intolerance for creativity and innovation because it was never encouraged. (*"If we never did it during the "quiet days" when things were running smoothly, why would we consider it now while things are going crazy?"*)

4. Decreasing morale and fear everywhere because no one has ever been taught how to deal with change: they only know how to wait for what's in store for them. It's almost a helpless victim's mindset.

5. Loss of trust in the leaders because they don't seem to be acting proactively. They act reactively by talking about slashing expenses, reorganization, and possible layoffs.

6. Tempers become short and conflict increases among the employees and in dealing with "outsiders" such as vendors or customers.

7. The self-protective attitude of "every man (or woman) for himself" becomes rampant and teamwork and trust between groups disintegrates.

Of course, times of organizational chaos are exactly when you want people to be able to adapt to change, think for themselves, and act as needed without waiting for direction. Although students of this course probably do not have the influence with their employer to schedule and execute "organizational fire drills" to help prepare for the storms of change that are on everyone's horizon, they can still act within their limited world. If they are a manager of an employee group, one of the things they can do to prepare for those chaotic times is to understand the who, why, when, and how of delegating and empowering their employees. In fact, if they thoroughly understand these skills and apply them effectively enough, what others see as a time of disaster may be a time of great career opportunity for them.

Is it Empowerment or Delegating?

THINK ABOUT THIS: When you were in grade school, did you know the *least you could do to get by* and not get in trouble at home? How did you discover this?

Who determines whether you do the <u>least you can do to get by</u> or the <u>most</u> you can do?

THE MOST THEY CAN DO

Who controls the width of this performance gap?

The "authority figure" such as parents, teachers, or bosses can determine the least they will accept but the employee/student determines the most they can do.

Who controls where the employee or student performs within this gap?

The performer decides how much above "the least I can do to get by" level they want to perform.

THE LEAST THEY CAN DO TO GET BY

We mention this voluntary performance concept because that is a key part of empowerment. It creates an opportunity for the employee to decide how much above the least-they-can-do-to-get-by level they want to perform. The employee feels they "get the chance" to perform the task and are driven to perform by something *within them* regardless if the task is something seen as undesirable.

Empowerment requires the manager to know the employee well enough to know that something within this task will appeal to them because it contains the opportunity to learn something new, to use a unique skill or knowledge, or demonstrate a valuable competence such as managing a small project, creative writing, public speaking, etc. In other words, something not typically associated with their existing job that they would like doing.

The success of the task completion and recognition from the leader (and maybe their peers) is the intrinsic reward. Evidence from many studies indicates that empowered employees are more productive, satisfied, innovative, and create higher quality products and services than do employees who are not empowered to act.

What Delegating Means

Basically, delegating is breaking a large task down into components and assigning their completion to others because the time available for completion or the sheer size of the project requires more than one person's skills, knowledge, or involvement. This is how the work within organizations gets done.

We still call it delegation even if the manager offers an incentive to complete the task because the motivation to act is coming from outside of the employee, not from within them. None of the internal motivators of empowerment is present and the employee may feel they <u>have</u> to do something rather than <u>getting</u> to do it. It is more of a *pushing* effort from the manager to the employee while empowerment is akin to a *pulling by the employee* to get the chance to perform.

Advantages of Effective Delegation

There are certain advantages associated with delegation <u>when done correctly</u> (we explain this later in the course [here](#)):

1. <u>Time</u> – It can increase the discretionary time available for the manager.

2. <u>Workforce Development</u> – It provides a hands-on laboratory for subordinates to learn and practice new skills.

3. <u>Trust Development</u> – This is an excellent way to show employees how much they are trusted.

4. <u>Morale</u> – Giving employees a chance to develop their skills and trusting them to do a good job can boost their morale and strengthen their commitment to the manager and the employer.

5. <u>Decision making improves</u> – The work of the department gets done by the employees, not the manager. Therefore, the closer the decision making gets to the actual work being done means better decisions can come from increased knowledge about the situation.

6. <u>Productivity</u> – More people working together to accomplish a common goal can mean a leap in productivity because the integration and scheduling of work can funnel through a single source of authority and delegation which is closer to the work.

Why Some Do Not Delegate

There can be as many reasons why managers do not delegate as there are managers in a given organization. Also, even if a manager wants to delegate some of the available tasks, there must be some competent employees to whom those tasks can be given. (We will cover the "WHO" and "HOW" of effective delegation later in this course.)

Even though there are specific advantages to delegating (see the previous section) and there are competent subordinates available, many people still do not for reasons such as:

1. Their View of Subordinates

In the 1960s, a well-known organizational theory thinker, Douglas McGregor, of the MIT Sloan School of Management developed his **Theory X & Theory Y[1]** concept and suggested that the management culture of many organizations favored one approach or the other.

A "Theory X" manager, he stated, has a negative view of employees assuming they are lazy, untrustworthy, and incapable of assuming any responsibility. He or she thinks all prospective employees are only out for themselves and the sole purpose of the employee's interest in the job is money.

Their counterpart, a "Theory Y" manager, looks at employees differently. He sees them as being trustworthy, responsible for accomplishing their own work objectives, and capable of assuming high levels of motivation.

Many people interpret Theory Y as a positive set of assumptions about workers and that a close reading of *The Human Side of Enterprise*, the book from which this theory comes, reveals that McGregor simply argues for managers to be open to a more positive view of workers and the possibilities that it creates.

He based his work on Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs[2], grouped the hierarchy into "lower order" (Theory X) needs and "higher order" (Theory Y) needs, and suggested that management could use either set of needs to motivate employees.

The discipline of Organizational Development has grown a great deal since he published that work. We now recognize many variables between the two X-Y extremes but this classic still serves as a useful beginning about manager/mentor/developer approaches to their employees/trainees.

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[1] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Douglas_McGregor

[2] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maslow%27s_hierarchy_of_needs

2. Personal Insecurities

Some managers fear they would lose the rewards and recognition associated with successful task completion if they shared the tasks with someone else. They feel they have spent many years "paying their dues" getting to their current positions and have learned many "trade secrets" that they are unwilling to share with others.

Also, they may not be very adept at defining measurable expectations (we will talk more about these later) which makes it difficult for subordinates to achieve success if their managers cannot define what that success looks like.

Past experience with subordinates having difficulty with the manager's vague, incomplete, or inconsistent expectations may have led to uncomfortable confrontations as the assigned tasks missed schedules or failed to meet expectations. (Of course, the managers would never consider they had anything to do with the problems!) So now their attitude is, "if you want it done right, you have to do it yourself!"

3. A Need for Control

Some people just cannot let go of control even if they are ordered to do so. It is reasonable to consider that many managers with a strong need for control may subconsciously provide insufficient direction or project latitude so as to insure failure and prove their point that "only they can do the job right!" It is an example of a self-fulfilling prophecy[3]. (Many times, it is these very same managers who complain that they can never get a day off or take a vacation because they can't trust anyone else to "get it right".)

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[3] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Self-fulfilling_prophecy

What Empowerment Means

"Empowerment" became a very popular word in the late 1980s business world. Unfortunately, it was used so broadly in management topics with any employee-related practice that it became a meaningless cliché. Even today, if a student of this course were to mention it to their employer, there is a strong possibility they would hear, "Oh, we tried that long ago and it was another one of those fads that didn't offer anything substantial."

This is a classic example of the phrase "a little knowledge is a dangerous thing" because it sounds like such a simple concept that everyone immediately assumed they understood it. So when they tried to apply what they think it meant, the result was very likely much less than they expected and they blamed the concept (naturally), never their lack of understanding it.

The concept of empowering someone means the subject (the person being empowered) has a sense of these five components:

- ➤ **PERSONAL COMPETENCE**
- ➤ **PERSONAL CHOICES**
- ➤ **HAVING AN IMPACT ON THEIR SURROUNDINGS**
- ➤ **SEEING VALUE IN WHAT THEY ARE DOING**
- ➤ **SECURITY**

We will develop each of these components sufficiently to allow the student the best chance to create an environment of empowerment in their world.

Risks and Rewards of Empowering Employees

If the benefits of empowering employees are so positive, why doesn't it happen more often? The answer will become obvious after we explore the elements of empowerment a little farther. Meanwhile, please consider that empowering someone requires these actions from the authority figure:

1. Giving someone the responsibility and <u>authority</u> to act independently ("Here's the outcome I want. I'll allow you this much latitude and authority to figure out how to get that outcome.")

2. Giving up a measure of control if the other is to act with confidence and independently.

3. A willingness to allow the empowered person to fail. (We mean enough failure to provide a learning experience but not so catastrophically that the employer or employee is at financial, physical, or career risk.)

4. There must be sufficient planning involved beforehand to define the parameters within which the empowered employee can act independently. *("You can spend up to $X on this project and make decisions up to this specific threshold of budget, delivery date, maximum number of participants, etc.")*

5. A willingness to accept an outcome that may be satisfactory but different from what was expected. (When the manager says, "Oh, I never expected THAT" but is willing to accept it.)

6. A willingness to allow someone else to get the credit for a successful project.

7. An understanding this is not a zero-sum situation: i.e., the more responsibility and authority to act that I give to you DOES NOT MEAN that I have proportionally less of each.

8. If something goes wrong, not to blame the employee but to examine first if the authority figure may have contributed to it through:
   a. Providing inadequate resources or directions
   b. Failure to define clearly expectations
   c. Failure to define clearly the limits of authority and responsibility
   d. Or take the blame entirely and use it as a learning experience for the employee and the authority figure

It is evident from these eight actions that managers who focus more on control of

their employees than developing them will have great difficulty adapting to the

concept of empowerment.

THINK ABOUT THIS

When you have received tasks from your manager, how many of the eight actions above do you think were present? What makes you think so?

If you are currently a manager, how many of these eight actions are part of your typical assignments to employees?

How satisfied are you with the typical results of those assignments?

Do you see any correlation between the average outcome of those assignments and the number of those eight actions you typically include?

Understanding Motivation

Before an enlightened manager can consider empowering a subordinate with an assigned task, there must be a subordinate who is willing to take it on. So if there is no guarantee of success, what elements must be present to create an environment in which an employee would be willing to assume the task and work in an attitude of commitment ("doing all I can to be successful") rather than compliance doing the least they can do to get by (page 8).

What is "Motivation"? Essentially, It is the unspoken answer people hear when they ask themselves **"Why would I want to do that"**, or **"What's in it for me?"** If their internal answer gives them a good reason to act, they will. If not, they will not.

The unspoken answers to internal questions are typically something like this:

Situation	Internal Question	Internal Answer and Action (the motivation)
Seeing new clothes for sale at the mall	*"Why would I want to spend that much for a suit?"*	"*Because it will make me look so good!"* and buy it *or "I need the money for something else that I want more"* and not buy it.
Your boss asks for volunteers to work late	*"Why would I want to do that?"*	"*Because I want to get off early next week to see my child's game"* and volunteer or "*I don't like him/her – why should I help?"* and not volunteer.
You see a charity asking for donations	*"Why would I want to donate to that?"*	*"Because it makes me feel good to help others"* and donate or "*Nobody helped me when I needed it"* and do not donate.
You see a potential problem coming up at work that no one else sees.	*"Why would I want to tell the boss about this?"*	"*Because I like my boss, and this is a good place to work"* and tell someone or *"If my boss and this company doesn't care about me, why should I care about them?"* and stay quiet.
What have you seen recently in your work?	*What would be the question?*	What are the choices of actions?

There can be as many reasons why people are motivated to act (or not act) as there are people. Some of the more common reasons include:

 ➢ I *materially* gain from it (money or property)

 ➢ I *emotionally* gain from it (it makes me feel good)

 ➢ I *spiritually* gain from it (it heartens my soul)

 ➢ I *psychologically* gain from it (enhances my reputation or self-image)

If you are planning to empower someone to complete an assignment, ask yourself first "what's in it for them to do it?" Then use that answer as part of your presentation of the assignment.

Personal Competence

The foundation for empowerment from the *subject's viewpoint* is they must be able to say confidently**, "I AM CAPABLE OF THIS!"** The foundation from the *manager's viewpoint* is "what do I need to provide so they will feel capable of doing it?"

The easiest way to explain this is to use a work example. Suppose you know that your department will be updating some of its drafting equipment in nine months. This project is very important from a business perspective (we must maintain productivity) but not very large in terms of expenses, materials, and scheduling. You know that you could easily handle it along with your other duties as the department manager but you see it as an excellent opportunity to develop project management skills in Logan, one of your high-potential employees. Since you have just completed this delegating and empowerment course, you realize a critical component of empowering someone is *they must feel they are capable of doing it.*

Now the question becomes, *"What can I do to help Logan believe she is capable of managing that project?"* Some possibilities could include:

➢ Send her to a Project Management Introductory class to help her get a feel for the 'big picture' of the project and understand its component parts

➢ Send her to a Negotiating Skills class so she can learn how to deal effectively with vendors and any other stakeholders in the project

➢ Send her to a Meeting Management Skills class so she will learn how to hold effective meetings as the project moves along

➢ Send her to a Presentation Skills class so she will learn how to put together and make effective presentations to groups – especially the executives if you are trying to groom her for more responsibility.

➢ Spend time teaching her your employer's budgeting process so she understands where the money came from to purchase the equipment and what accounts are included in the on-going operations

➢ Suggest she work with the training department and the equipment vendor to develop and schedule any training that maybe required insuring a smooth transition from the old equipment to the new.

What else would you do in your organization to help Logan become capable of managing this project for you?

Personal Choices

This is as much about the manager's ability to maintain a "hands-off" approach on project planning and execution as it is about Logan's desire to put her own stamp of ownership on it.

The manager's obligation to maintain a hands-off approach assumes these four conditions exist as a minimum:

1. **The expected project outcomes are clearly defined in measurable terms of quality, quantity, and time.** (The greater the potential for ambiguity means the greater the risk of failure. A supplemental section on this important concept begins on page 23.)

   Suppose the project is about replacing 10 old drafting workstations with 10 new ones and training the users on the new equipment and software. Since the workstations are much smaller than the older ones resulting in a smaller footprint per workstation, you also want to reconfigure the department layout into one that is more traffic-friendly and will also allow you to add some storage.

   Some of your clearly defined measurable expectations may be something like these.

   The project completion date is 5:00 PM, Friday, October 15 of this year [this is a time specification]. 'Completion' means:

1. As of the completion date & time, all new equipment and software has been installed, tested, and certified by the vendor and the PM as ready for the next business day.

2. All [a quantity spec] users are 100% proficient [a quality specification] in the skills they must have to complete their work assignments on the new equipment/software

3. There is 0% drop in productivity [quantity] during the transition that can be attributed to the project

4. There are $0 cost overruns (quantity) unless tied to an approved (quality) change order

5. There is a minimum of 50 cubic feet (quantity) of new storage available in the department

6. There are no 90° corners (a specific measurable) in the new traffic flow for ease of moving future equipment.

If these are the clearly-defined expectations, then it is Logan's decision about:

o How to apply the skills learned in the various training classes to the execution of the project

o How and when to schedule the training of the users

o When to schedule project meetings, what to discuss, and who to invite

o Working with the layout designer to decide where the storage should be and what it looks like. (Will it be one 50 c.f. space, five 10 c.f. spaces, ten 5 c.f. spaces or some other combination?)

It is essential that you as the manager remember that, ==*although her way of doing it may not be just like you would have, you must be satisfied with the outcome if the results meet your requirements.*== (Besides, there is always the possibility she may discover a better way of doing something. That can only make you look good, too, because you allowed her the opportunity to discover it!)

> **Your job as the manager is to specify WHAT you want done (using quality, quantity, and time terms) and to allow the employee to decide HOW TO DO IT.**

2. **The employee has expressed confidence in their capability of performing.**

   If you tell her about the project and then send her to the training classes mentioned on page 16, she will know what questions to ask in class as she looks ahead to using the skills on the job. After each class, spend some time asking her what topics were covered in class that she expects to encounter on the project. This way, she is seeing herself in the future role and knows she has received some preparation for it.

   You do not have to ask specifically, "do you feel confident in your ability to do this?" Her comments about the classes and the learning that occurred will convey all you need to know.

3. **The manager and employee have agreed upon a monitoring process.**

   It is essential that you both realize that although she is the project manager, you as the department manager are ultimately responsible for the success of the project because it was your decision to select her to do the job.

   Since you are ultimately responsible, it is reasonable that you would require some feedback process that would allow you to monitor the progress without standing over her shoulder and micro-managing each step.

   Take time to identify and put in place various methods of monitoring the project from a distance well before the assignment starts. This may be regular activity reports, being copied on communications to team members, vendors, and stakeholders, and receiving copies of minutes from project meetings.

   Working together with the employee to set this up before the project begins provides several benefits:
   - o She knows you are still watching although from a distance. This helps to keep her focused on the tasks at hand.
   - o This is a tacit agreement saying to her, "As long as you keep me informed via our agreed methods, I'll stay at a distance and allow you to run it as you see fit."

o   You are assuring her of the latitude to make decisions and act within the boundaries you have established without interference from you. When things work well, she gets the credit. When they do not work so well, she also gets the credit and must take steps to resolve the problem.

o   You both understand the purpose of the particular monitoring method and (may) have worked together to devise a method to collect the desired data. This collaboration reinforces her feeling of being competent.

4. The manager has identified a "safety net" that will prevent catastrophic outcomes

Even though you as the department manager are ultimately responsible for the outcome of the project, it is essential that you allow Logan sufficient latitude to explore new opportunities, to try different methods, and to follow her developing instincts when dealing with project issues. As a rookie project manager, there will be many times when she does something differently than you would have, in a sequence that's different from what you would have done, or in a way that is completely wrong for the situation.

Although it may be tempting to jump in and correct as soon as you see what is happening, it is also important to remember how people learn. For many of us, the trial-and-error approach provides the best learning experience (have you ever touched a "wet paint" sign to see if the paint is still wet?) This is why we put training wheels on bicycles and insist that our children wear helmets and, in some cases, elbow and knee pads in case they fall off.

The trick here is for the manager to establish some 'safety net' conditions for the project that will allow enough latitude for Logan to fall, maybe get bruised a little, but not sustain any serious injury to her career, your career, or to the employer.

As an example, suppose you are monitoring the schedule. You know that you could allow it to slip as much as 2 weeks and still recover with a little bit of focused effort on your part. However, you also realize that a little embarrassment is a good teacher so you are willing to set a slippage safety net of one week before you call Logan in to discuss the problems. Since you and she know you have given her as much preparation to manage the project as could be reasonably be expected, and that you have kept your

hands out of things, it would be a little uncomfortable for her to explain that there are schedule problems, where they came from, and why they happened.

From a teaching standpoint, let me assure you that students making **new** mistakes as they learn are a sure sign of progress. It is when they keep repeating the old ones that learning stops.

So when you have a meeting with Logan about problems that have come up, be sure you always ask, "**What do you think LED TO THE PROBLEM?"** Phrasing it that way reinforces the cause-and-effect relationship inherent in all problems and forces her to look back upstream to the problem's source. She should realize that she cannot do things the way she always did and expect different results.

Never ask, **"What did you do wrong?"** because that always leads to excuse making and little learning takes place. People become so caught up in avoiding blame that the conversation quickly deteriorates into finger-pointing and responsibility avoidance.

Having an Impact on Their Surroundings

This is obvious and does not require much explanation here. Basically, it means the empowered employee wants to feel their project will make a difference in their surroundings. "Making a difference" doesn't always mean the same thing for everyone. It may mean leaving a legacy by initiating a new procedure or practice. Someone else may think making a difference means how you have touched the lives of others. A bottom-line oriented person may think it means a financial gain, getting a bonus, or establishing a new product or market.

Do not assume that the employee shares your view of what it means to make a difference. It would be wise to hear their definition before the project starts because you can use it as a booster during times when the project hits a rough patch and they are feeling a little less confident. "Don't forget, you're blazing a path into new territory when you get this project finished and implemented" can be a powerful motivational tool for an employee that defines 'impact on their surroundings" as leaving a legacy for others to follow.

Seeing Value in What They Are Doing

This is very similar to the previous topic and simply means they don't want to feel as if they are wasting time on something meaningless or that they do not appreciate. The value of most projects are self-evident to those in authority who authorize it but may not be as clear to those assigned to it. Spending some time with the designated project manager explaining the value of the effort assures a greater chance of total buy-in by the PM.

A Sense of Security

Security as it relates to empowerment is about the employee feeling secure in the assignment. In other words, it's about the extent of the trust that exists between the manager and the employee in areas like these:

➢ **"Can I trust you to allow me to work without standing over me and/or second-guessing my decisions?"**

➢ **"Can I trust you enough to be consistent with the latitude you have given me?"** In other words, do not say, "Choose whatever you think is the best choice" today and then tomorrow follow up asking, "Shouldn't you have selected A instead of B?"

➢ **"Can I trust you to keep things I tell you in confidence as confidential?"**

➢ **"Can I trust you to stand up for me if problems arise and the executives are concerned?"**

➢ **"Can I trust you to make sure people who are supposed to deal with me such as project stakeholders or vendors come to me and don't do end-runs around me getting to you?"**

➢ **"Can I trust that you'll give me the credit I have earned on a successful completion of this project?"**

➢ **What other issues of trust can you think of?**

Burn this statement about trust into your memory chip!
People have to learn they can trust

you before they will. Always try to make it as easy as
possible for them to do that.

> *Trust is historic. People have to learn through experience they can trust you.*

Empowered Delegating – The Best of Both Worlds

If **delegating** means we can do more by spreading the available work among competent others and **empowerment** means they have an inner drive to do the best they can on the assignment, then combining the two concepts should give us the best possible situation. (Take a minute to go back to page 10 to review the potential advantages of effective delegating.)

Now that we have defined delegation and empowerment, we will look at things to consider about deciding when to delegate, to whom should you delegate, and how to do it effectively.

When to Delegate

Obviously, a smart manager does not just arbitrarily assign tasks to randomly selected employees; there must be some rational planning involved first as they consider these five factors. (Note: these factors apply equally to work teams or individuals.)

Empowered delegation only occurs when there are positive responses to each of these questions:

1. **Do they have the necessary training or experience to act effectively?**
   In many cases, the employees are closer to the work than are their managers. Therefore, they probably know more about the details of the work, the daily issues, constraints, and opportunities than do the managers. There should be a high probability they meet this criteria for delegation.

2. **To what extent is their commitment to success critical to the project?**
   Look back on page when we talked about where people work within a performance gap. The more that their commitment to success is vital (the "most they can do" side of the

performance gap), the more they must be included in the decision-making process. This helps them develop a sense of ownership in the outcome and they will work well above the "least-I-can-do-to-get-by" level.

Obviously, the more people who are involved in decision-making means more time is spent reaching that decision *but it also means* that less time is spent in execution after a decision is reached and less rework is necessary. The net gain can easily work in favor of project progress if a decision can be reached by all concerned quickly.

3. **How will this assignment contribute to the development of the employees?**
   Take time to show the employees that working on this task will help them increase their value to the organization by learning new skills and getting a chance to demonstrate competencies beyond their existing assignment.

   Note: It is important that delegation be seen by the employees as a normal part of the work that we do routinely and not just when the boss gets backed up and is under some pressure. If that's the case, it will be seen as just dumping excess work resulting in a "least-I-can-do-to-get-by" employee attitude that may include some rework, clock-watching, and minimal enthusiasm.

   The sense of commitment from employees and the associated high quality and productivity only comes as they view the opportunity as "the most I can do" because there is something in it for them in terms of skills development and possible career growth.

4. **Do we share common values and perspectives?**
   Maximum productivity and efficiency only occurs when all involved share a common work ethic, similar values, a clear understanding of the project's expectations and its associated responsibilities and distribution of authority.

5. **Is there enough time available to do a decent job of delegating?**
   Look back to the preparation for our sample employee, Logan, that we discussed beginning on page 16.

To Whom Should You Delegate?

Basically, these critical questions must be considered as a minimum as you decide on the delegate(s) whether it is an individual or a team:

➢ **Do we have the talent available that can be developed to perform successfully**?

"Development of the talent" means:

- o considering the performance level required for successful task execution
- o analyzing the existing skills of the potential delegates
- o determining if adequate training is available to close the gap between the skill level they will need and the level they have currently
- o deciding if there is sufficient time and money available for the training necessary

➢ **What will become of their current responsibilities?**

- o If the new assignment will take <u>all of their time</u> for the duration of the project, what happens to their current work?

  - ➢ Do you give it to someone else? If so, to whom? How do you know they can do it? Can they do their existing work and this work, too? Does this increased work load include additional pay, rewards, or benefits? (Think about the performance gap on page 8 and if you want the least-they-can-do-to-get-by or their best performance.)

  - ➢ Do you put it on hold? If so, for how long? What determines how long it can be set aside?

- o If the new assignment will take <u>part of their time</u>, what part of their existing work do they set aside? If a conflict arises about there being time enough to only perform one task, do they work on the existing job or the temporary project? What are the rules for deciding on what gets done?

➢ **What potential new assignment could be waiting with the successful completion of this project?**

If the project works out well, it is reasonable for the delegate to assume that some career enhancement opportunities may open up either immediately or in the near future. Make sure you have identified what the potential rewards of success may be before initiating

the project and make sure you follow through afterwards. (Do you remember the TRUST component of 'Advantages of Effective Delegation' on page 10?)

➢ **What else do you think you should consider?**

Delegating Effectively

Once you have identified to whom you will delegate the tasks, the next step is to make sure the assignment is as successful as it can be. These guidelines will help you make sure that happens.

1. <u>Clearly define the "must haves" for success before they begin</u>. Every project has its share of details that are "must have" as well as those which are "would be nice to have." As we mentioned earlier, focus on the WHAT YOU MUST HAVE in terms of quality, quantity, and time and let your person control the HOW to do it. We separate the must haves from the would-be-nice-to-have because mixing them all together may dilute the sense of priorities in the eyes of some with minimal experience. Don't add to their anxiety on the front end of the project.

   If you have helped them prepare for this opportunity and give them periodic feedback on how they are doing, there is a strong likelihood that you will get everything you want in the outcome.

2. <u>Clearly define the boundaries and expectations of the delegation</u>. Take plenty of time thinking about this before you make the delegation assignment because the more times you have to go back to them with another restriction you forgot to mention, the greater the loss of their enthusiasm and the effectiveness of the development opportunity for them.

   Typical boundaries would include:
   a. Project completion date and interim milestones
   b. Budget and spending authorization level (if appropriate)
   c. Reporting structures of individuals if this is a team
   d. Documentation requirements (what reports, who gets them, and how often)

e. Approval or authorization requirements

f. Organizational ethical standards and policies

g. What else would be appropriate in your organization?

Typical expectations would include:

a. Regular update meetings with superiors

b. Resolving conflicts within the team

c. Making recommendations for action when issue is beyond the authority of the delegate. (For example, if we must choose between 3 software packages for purchase on a part of this project, you expect the PM to make a recommendation for the desired one and not to just drop data about the three products on your desk and say, "Here boss – pick the one you think we need.")

d. You model the desired behavior you want to see in your team mates on the project

e. What else would be appropriate in your organization?

3. <u>Determine the level of delegation before you begin.</u> There are five levels of increasing initiative that you can permit in a delegation situation. Also, you can change the level as the project unfolds but you must be aware of the consequences if you do.

If you go up the scale toward allowing more initiative and discretion based on their performance, you will see increased morale and performance because of their greater self-confidence. They will see this as a gesture of increased trust from you and will (generally) do everything they can to preserve it and earn even more.

If you start higher in the scale and move downward reducing the amount of initiative and discretion you will permit, you will diminish their morale and enthusiasm for the project. They will see it as a reduction of trust in them and have difficulty maintaining self-confidence.

The five levels of increasing empowerment in delegation are:

1. Wait to be told what to do

2. Ask what you are to do

      3. Make recommendations for action but take none until authorized to do so

      4. Take action and report immediately what you have done

      5. Take action as needed and report routinely

4. <u>Allow participation in the delegation of assignments.</u> Let the delegate participate as much as possible in the selection of team members or assignment of tasks within the project. This increases their sense of ownership in the process which builds morale and self-confidence.

5. <u>Match the responsibility with the authority to accomplish what you will allow them to do</u>. (Look back at the five levels of delegation.)

6. <u>Make sure they and you work through the organizational structure.</u> When reporting up to you or you are communicating down to them, make sure communication goes through the chain of command. This also goes for people outside of the project. Insist that any communication with the PM from outside of the project goes through you instead of directly to them unless you have defined that specifically. (See #2 above – Boundaries and Expectations – where you many have agreed the vendors can talk directly to the delegate with a written summary of the conversation to you.)

7. <u>Make sure there is adequate support and resources available for the delegated assignment.</u> In addition to the obvious 'resources' criteria, make sure the delegate gets credit publically and blame privately. Give them as much publicity as you can.

8. <u>Focus their accountability on results, not intentions</u>. This ties back to the clearly defined outcome requirements in terms of quality, quantity, and time. Be as encouraging as possible with them about their intentions but also make it clear that you are expecting concrete results.

9. <u>Delegate routinely</u> – <u>not just when the work backs up.</u> Remember, the two reasons for delegation are to spread the workload so more gets done in the same amount of time and the *development of your employees.* If they see that delegation only happens when your work gets backed up, they will view the assignment as a burden, not an opportunity and their performance will reflect that perception.

10. <u>Avoid upward delegation from the subordinates.</u> There may be times when the delegate attempts to shift the responsibility back up to you. The level of delegation you have selected (#3 in this section) will determine how much of the responsibility you should accept. Remember to match their responsibilities with the level of delegation.

11. <u>Clarify consequences and rewards before the project begins</u>. Define what the delegate can expect in terms of consequences and rewards as much as possible before the project begins. Attempting to do it on the fly as the project evolves will give the impression that you haven't thought this through very much beforehand and will have a negative impact on their morale, confidence, and productivity.

Supplemental Content - Defining Performance Expectations

We have placed this section after the primary material on delegation and empowerment because we did not want to confuse students with abrupt topic changes. It is for those needing a little clarification or guidance on defining measureable expectations for any kind of performance.

What is Performance and Productivity?

One day Alice came to a fork in the road and saw a Cheshire cat in a tree. "Which road do I take?" she asked. "Where do you want to go?" was his response. "I don't know", Alice answered. "Then", said the cat, "it doesn't matter. When you don't know where you are going, any road will take you there." (Lewis Carroll, *Through the Looking Glass or the Adventures of Alice in Wonderland*)

The Cheshire cat's response is a model for much of the difficulty with defining performance in the workplace today as employees hear phrases like these:

- "Make it look very professional"
- "I know you will do a great job!"
- "Make sure they get their money's worth."
- "I will need that report in a timely manner."

The Elements of Performance & Productivity

Nearly every article written about performance always includes the concept of SMART goals (From Paul J. Meyer's *"Attitude Is Everything")* According to this, goals should be **S**pecific, **M**easurable, **A**ttainable, **R**ealistic, and **T**angible.

While that certainly encompasses the overall concept of performance and gives people another acronym to use even when they are not sure what it all means, it leaves out a critical component: *how do we measure subjective items or activities such as:*

- Team work
- Communications skills
- Customer service

- The best cake in a baking contest

- The best picture in a photography contest

In this supplemental, we will not mention performance without associating it with <u>productivity</u> because productivity is why employers pay people for work. They do not pay for just doing things ("performance") but for doing things *with a destination in mind* – productivity.

This goes back to the Cheshire cat's comment to Alice: *when you do not know where you are going (predefined productive outcomes), any road will take you there.*

We will provide a more practical definition of performance than just telling you to set SMART goals and show you how to create your own measurement systems. After we introduce the elements of performance and productivity, we will give you examples of how to create a measurement system in your workplace.

Will they be foolproof and fit every situation? No, not perfect but if you understand the 'why' of what we present, you will know how to create a useful means to measure performance until someone comes along with a better one.

The Critical Trio

Just as there are three critical elements necessary for fire (fuel, heat, and air), there are three critical elements necessary for **productivity** (which is much different from just "being busy'): **quality, quantity, and time.** Occasionally we will abbreviate them into QQT. **Productivity** means people clearly understand how error-free it must be (quality), how many you require, and by when (time.)

Another aspect of performance is **allowing the employee to work alone to master the skill.** You must also be willing to let them fail as part of the learning process as we discussed earlier.

Feedback Loops

People must be to tell how they are doing without having to wait to be told (especially from the boss.) There must be a feedback loop in the work process that allows the employee to self-monitor their progress.
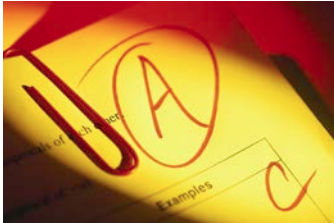
 Think back to when you were in school. Did you have to wait until the report cards came out before you knew how you did that semester or were there ways for you to keep track?

The grades you got back on tests, reports, and homework plus staying out of trouble and making sure you were not excessively late or absent created a "feedback loop" that let you know how you were doing without having to ask the teacher every day.

In addition, the teacher gave you the system for grading at the beginning of the school year. The system may include how many days you be could absent without hurting your grade; the progressive scoring range such as <65 = F; 65-70 = D; 71-80 = C; 81 – 90 = B; >90 = A; a term paper weighted to count as three grades; the midterm test counts half of the final grade; etc.

With that feedback loop, you could track your own progress and had an answer every time your parents would ask, "How are you doing in school?"

Making Help Available
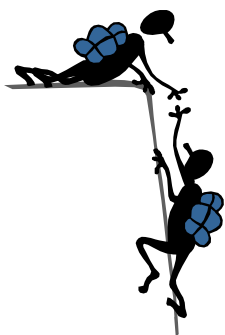
 The next component of performance is being available when your employees need help or guidance. Even something as simple as this can go wrong if not handled with some forethought.

The ultimate goal of developing your employees should include that they can work alone without supervision and be productive. (That level of competence means you can go on vacation with peace of mind!)

That said, the next question is, "How do we get them to that point?"

The first thing would be an effective orientation and training plan for the department that develops new people into productive employees as quickly as possible. (We present that in another course and will not go farther into it here.)

The next thing would be to choose from two basic methods that the leader could use to provide help or guidance when needed.

➢ With one method, the department leaders are reluctant to share information because to them, knowledge is power, and allowing others to become as smart as they are means they are no longer special.

As juvenile as it sounds, many people still act that way. However, if they are the keepers of the knowledge, it becomes difficult to get away from work without having people keep contacting you for information. Of course, to them, that just reinforces their image of self-importance.

"That place can't get along without me!" is a favorite saying as they answer another call from work. What they fail to consider is, once others learn the secrets – as they always do – they will remember that lack of cooperation and the self-serving one will gradually become isolated from the work group.

This can be a problem for the knowledge-hoarding leader because the <u>employees are always more intimately involved with the workflow than is the leader.</u> Employees frequently know when things are not running properly or when there are opportunities to improve the workflow and *they alone determine whether to alert the leader.*

If the leader willingly shared information and helped the employee develop skills and knowledge, there is a strong probability they will alert the leader of the pending problem or opportunity for improvement.

If the leader hoarded knowledge and made the employees always come to him or her thus stunting the employee's development, there is a high probability the employees will not alert the leader and the disaster, when it happens, will be a great source of entertainment for the employees.

➢ The other method is to make available as many learning resources as possible that allow the employees to find their own answers. This leads to their self-development.

However simple this may sound, there are three ways to do this.

a. One is to say, "Look it up! I had to when I was in your situation" and offers no real help to the employees.

b. Another is to say, "My door is always open. Just call me when you need help!" While this is a little better than the first approach, it may cause a dependency on the leader for employees too lazy to do a little research.

c. The last method is the best. Here, the leader says, *"Call me if you can't find the solution for yourself."* He or she has clearly defined their expectation that the employee will make an effort on their own first as a means of self-development. And, even when an employee comes to them, their first question is something like, "Before I tell you the answer, where did you look for yourself?"

If the employee made no effort on their own, the leader tells them to do a little investigation first. However, if the employee made a bona fide attempt and failed, the leader may point them to a better information source or tell them the answer. Either way, it will not take long for employees to realize the leader will be available for them but expects them to attempt to find their own solutions first.

Please burn this into your memory chip

> **IF YOU WILL HELP THEM UNDERSTAND THE "WHY" OF SOMETHING,**
> **THEY CAN USUALLY FIGURE OUT THE "HOW" FOR THEMSELVES!**

If time allows, ask the employee what he or she thinks is the best answer and why they think it is. Then explain to them why their rationale is correct or incorrect.

Establishing SMART Goals

Now we will start using some of the performance and productivity concepts we mentioned earlier in the establishment of meaningful Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic, and Tangible goals.

Specific means using as many of these six "W's" as you can. Who (is involved?). What (do I want to accomplish?) Where (Identify a location); When (Establish a time limit); Which (Identify requirements and constraints); Why (Specific reasons, purpose or benefits.)

Measurable can take many forms but the essential information you must know is, "How will I know I am making progress?" and "How will I know when I have finished?" The essential elements for this are quality, quantity, and time (QQT).

This is why announcing a goal such as, *"My goal is to improve the relationship between our departments"* is a waste of time unless you have measurables that will tell you:

- The extent of the current relationship
- The minimum acceptable level for the 'improved' relationship
- How we will know if it is getting better, worse, or not changing
- The actual goal to achieve or do we just keep working at it? (This is Alice's problem when she talks to the Cheshire cat. When you do not know where you are going, any road will take you there.)

We will show you a way to create measurables for a situation like this in our course entitled "Measuring Performance and Productivity."

Attainable – The goals must be realistic enough that you can actually attain them. Setting a goal to lose 50 pounds before your high school reunion next month is not attainable *because it is not realistic* outside of possible extreme surgery.

"Attainable" means there are no laws of science (such as losing 50 pounds in 30 days) or society (we can drive across the city in 20 minutes if we take a shortcut down the airport's main runway) preventing it from happening. The fact that it has never happened to you but has happened to other people means it can be done but only you can determine if it can be done BY YOU! (For example, not everyone has won a marathon race but some people have. If you are physically able to compete in a marathon, it may take a lot of practice and will power but it is attainable by you.)

Realistic *(in the mind of the person doing the work)* – The person must feel they have some chance of success or they will not bother trying. (This is very much like attainable.)

Tangible - They must involve his/her *doing something* that they can observe and measure.

A goal that calls for *"Understanding how a travel expense voucher flows through the Accounting Department"* is useless because you cannot measure **UNDERSTANDING** in a meaningful way.

It only becomes useful if he/she must **do something** that demonstrates his/her understanding such as, "*explain in writing* the complete workflow of a request for travel reimbursement from the time Accounting receives it until they deposit the money into your account."

We will use the three elements of **quality, quantity,** and **time** as the basic essentials for a measurable goal and to define productivity.

The other parts of the SMART goal are important, too, but we believe **QQT** are the most critical.

Supplemental Summary

The student should understand that effective empowerment contains these concepts of performance and productivity:

1. Productivity only occurs when the elements of *quality, quantity, and time* are present. If any of these are missing, the person has simply been 'busy' and not really accomplished anything.

2. Staring a project or a journey as Alice in Wonderland without a clear destination (outcome) in mind will result in a lot of wasted effort, possible stress, and may be career damaging if you do it too often.

3. You must allow people to fail (gently) if they are going to learn. The trail-and-error process is a primary learning method for many people. **Experience only comes from making mistakes while making mistakes only comes from lack of experience.**

4. Feedback loops are essential in a work process if we want people to become accountable for their performance. If there is no way for someone to track their work progress, they will not be able to self-correct when going wrong or continue as they are when going right without having the boss tell them.