

Recognize the 12 Classic Errors in Delegation

BY FRANCIÉ DALTON

This article describes each, and provides easy-to-implement tips for how to avoid or correct them.

Ever wonder why it's so tough to get desired outcomes from personnel? Is it that they keep turning in work that isn't "ready for prime time"? Or is it that their stellar work outcomes are delivered at the cost of tremendous arguments or disagreements? Are they truly short-staffed and overwhelmed?

However you measure shortcomings in your organization, chances are at least one of the causal factors is the way you (and your personnel) delegate.

Poor delegation can easily be categorized as either Inadequate or Disabling. Within these two categories are no fewer than 12 classic and discrete errors in delegation. This article describes each, and provides easy-to-implement tips for how to avoid or correct them.

INADEQUATE DELEGATION

Number 1. Failing to Identify Higher Purpose Served

When you're caught up in the rush of doing business, it's easy to delegate on the run, without articulating how the assignment enables the organization to achieve its strategic initiatives.

There are three important benefits to taking the extra minute or two required to articulate the linkage between the assignments and their higher purpose:

- It increases the perceived importance of the assignment, thereby
- Increasing emotional commitment to a great outcome; and,
- It equips the personnel with tools to motivate the performance of and increase the morale of his/her staff.

The technique to easily isolate and identify the higher purpose of an assignment is to ask yourself why the assignment is needed, what other out-

come its accomplishment enables, and why that other outcome is needed.

Number 2. Lack of Clarity

Have you ever been surprised to discover at performance review time that one of your staff was oblivious to a requirement you thought was implicit? The key to ensuring clear expectations is the establishment of evidence-based performance measures. Here's how:

Start with an outcome you plan to assign. Rephrase it using a FIB (fill-in-the-blank) statement.

For example, if your original goal statement is: "Improve attendance at this year's annual convention", using the FIB technique would rephrase the statement into this question: "Attendance at this year's annual convention will be adequately improved when _____".

The FIB technique forces you to clarify your expectations embedded in your goal statement by specifying any or all of the following: a certain number of attendees, a certain type of attendee, a certain revenue number, etc.

Number 3. Emphasizing Outcomes to the Exclusion of Method

How accomplishments are achieved often matters as much as what is accomplished. Yet this balance between outcome and method isn't often reflected in a staff member's goals and objectives.

Unless and until you impose equal scrutiny on both method and outcome when delegating, the person's performance will not be satisfactory and will affect your operation's results.

Augmenting the basic goal statement with qualifying phrases such as the following will help:

- In collaboration with;
- Per specifications provided by___;
- Consistent with our core values;

Things I Do Well That I Should Be Doing	Things I Do Well That I Should Not Be Doing
Things I Do Poorly That I Should Be Doing Well	Things I Do Poorly And Should Not Be Doing

Figure 2 Delegation Grid

appropriate is to hold this person accountable for the flawless execution of what you agree to be a comprehensive strategy which maximizes the likelihood of the desired legislative outcome.

- Now let's assume you've delegated responsibility to someone for ensuring zero erosion of existing customers. Customers can indeed be lost through no fault of your staff. Mergers, acquisitions, and bankruptcy exemplify this point perfectly. Avoid this mistake by rephrasing the goal as follows: "Ensure zero erosion of current customer base for reasons

Number 12. The BIG ONE

Let's admit it. We're all trying to impress someone in our work context. The most obvious opportunity to do so is to achieve more with less; to consistently

other than M&A or bankruptcy."

Here's something else to think about: shared responsibility. Sometimes a mistake by just one person can derail an entire initiative. Protect yourself against demoralizing the group by phrasing the goal as follows: In collaboration with staff members X, Y & Z, work toward ensuring the goal is accomplished by at least "A" by (year).

execute an overwhelming volume of work, on time and with apparent ease. In our zeal to succeed at this, we take on more and more, delegate less and less, putting various facets of our personal and professional lives at risk.

Do you want to reduce that risk while simultaneously making your star shine even more brightly? Then take a look at Figure 2.

This Delegation Grid invites you to scrutinize all your activities, listing them in one of the quadrants. If you complete this grid with brutal honesty (which may require input from others), the two right quadrants will contain fairly long lists. Your challenge is to shed everything on the right side of this grid. Work on getting better at what you've listed in the lower left quadrant, but focus on finding broader applications for and ways to better feature the work listed in the top left quadrant. Instead of continuing activities listed on the right half of the grid, seek additional work that requires the same strengths and competencies that underlie the work you've listed in the upper left quadrant.

Francie Dalton is founder and president of Dalton Alliances Inc., a full-line business consultancy in Columbia, Maryland, specializing in the behavioral, management and communication sciences. She can be reached at (410) 715-0484 or www.daltonalliances.com.

Reprinted with permission of The Association for Facilities Engineering ©2007