



# Delegating



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## Fact Sheet

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Are you a person who runs yourself ragged trying to do everything that needs to be done? Do you find that nothing quite comes together, because there is simply not enough time available to get all your tasks accomplished?

If any of these statements describe yourself, then giving other people some jobs that you usually do yourself (delegating) will prove to be beneficial. It is common for people to find delegating difficult because of guilt, or simply not knowing how to do it. If you are trying to change roles, such as serving as a committee chair after working for yourself, delegating may be especially difficult.

In volunteer work as in household work, it is important to remember that delegating means sharing work to accomplish shared goals. It is more than just assigning tasks.

### **Why Don't We Delegate?**

Take a few minutes to think about your reasons for not delegating some of your tasks at work or in the context of a volunteer role. If you are like most of us, you have some standard reasons.

#### **“If I delegate my work I feel like I'm not doing my job.”**

Stop feeling guilty when you delegate responsibilities. No one can do it all, including you. Other members of the group will benefit from the work that is done. Why should you have to do it all? You (any other member of the organization) are not superhuman.

#### **“It is easier to do the job myself.”**

Teaching others requires time, patience, and often a lowering of your standards — at least temporarily. It may take you more time to teach, and them more time to accomplish the tasks in the short term, but you will gain in the long term.

To teach volunteers at a mystery fans' convention to monitor autograph sessions with popular writers, meet with the volunteers and hand out copies of guidelines to be followed. Occasionally check the progress of the lines into the designated rooms. Make sure the guidelines are being followed.

This same principle applies to most other types of events. It will not be long before you know you can depend on your volunteers to do a good job. Anyone not enforcing the guidelines must be talked with. But the services of good volunteers can be utilized again and again.

#### **“I like being recognized for doing the job myself.”**

Everyone likes to be appreciated. Why not share the enjoyment? When you delegate, thank the volunteers who performed the tasks. If they receive recognition, they may be more appreciative and more willing to take on other responsibilities.

### **The responsibility for a task may be too scattered.**

If volunteers who have agreed to be door monitors at a convention don't appear when they have promised, other volunteers may feel they are being taken advantage of. Be sure the times and tasks everyone has agreed to are very clear. Checking or following up can remedy this.

### **Why Should We Delegate?**

There are many long-term advantages to delegating. There are benefits to both you and the persons you delegate to.

#### **You ease the workload on yourself.**

This is not an immediate advantage, but you will see it soon. Do not criticize a delegated job even if it was not performed to your standards. If a volunteer at the souvenir table has not entered the sales on your ledger, but has kept a record on a small note pad, what's the point of making a fuss? The sales were still made. The records were still kept.

#### **You teach someone else skills and responsibilities.**

Volunteers benefit from the skills and responsibilities they develop — immediately and in the future. One of the biggest advantages of training volunteers is in gaining a pool of knowledgeable people, one or more of whom can replace you when your leadership term comes to an end.

If you have been called away, or are in bed with an illness, your trained volunteers will know how to go ahead and accomplish all the tasks that must be done. You are well covered, and so is your organization.

#### **It is easier to schedule tasks.**

When chores are divided among busy committee members, things get done on time more often. For example, each member of the program committee has different ideas, different contacts, and different ways of working. Each one of them takes responsibility for a part of the program and it comes together in no time.

### **Tips for Effective Delegation in Community Work**

Delegation is easier when someone is in charge and the group responsibilities are clear. In new situations, planning time by a small group may be an essential first step.

Necessary chores can be divided in a number of ways:

- The RESOURCE method. The people with the resources (time, energy and skills) do the job.
- The ROTATING-JOBS method. The chores are rotated among all members. This helps everyone to learn new things.
- The EACH-PERSON-FOR-HIM/HERSELF method. Each person or subcommittee is responsible for his or her own jobs. It requires coordination to be sure everything fits together at the right time
- The SUBSTITUTE method. The goods and services are purchased in order to save time (i.e., catered meals or buying pre-printed flyers).

### **Share decision making.**

Call the committee together, make a list of things that need to be done, and discuss who will do them. One member may prefer calling other interested individuals, while another prefers writing flyers and walking door to door.

Let the person who is responsible for a task have input on how and when the job is done. For example, if one person is responsible for bringing snacks to a meeting, let that person have much of the input on what to bring.

Committee members who feel that they have some influence in decisionmaking are likely to be more responsible.

### **Choose the right people for the right job.**

Don't ask someone who can't balance a checkbook to be the organization's treasurer, and don't ask someone who is sharp, snappish, and exacting to coordinate volunteer activities. Make sure the personalities and talents mesh with the tasks that your people are being asked to do.

### **Train thoroughly.**

If certain tasks can't be done without prior knowledge, be sure the previous committee chair sits down with his or her successor and goes through all the procedures. It also helps to have written procedures to pass along to others.

### **Define responsibilities clearly and set deadlines.**

Discuss what is expected, and set deadlines for finishing the tasks. For example, minutes of a previous meeting should be sent to other committee members well before the date of the next meeting. All of this should be spelled out in a procedure sheet or notebook.

### **Set performance standards.**

Accept the fact that you may need to change or adapt your standards. The minutes this year may not be written in as literary a fashion as those sent by the previous secretary. If they tell what happened at the meeting and they come on time, that's all that counts.

### **Help volunteers see how their part fits in with the complete task.**

It helps to have occasional gatherings of volunteers to update them on the overall goals of the function for which they have offered their time, and to give them encouragement and appreciation.

### **Let go of authority.**

When others become more capable, let them be in charge. As the one in charge of the autograph signing tables, a volunteer might find that the room has become quite overcrowded with eager fans, and too warm and noisy for comfort. Experiencing that mistake will give your volunteer overseer first-hand insight into the reasons for the established guidelines.

### **Remember to say, "Thank you."**

After a job is done, acknowledge each person's accomplishments! Make sure you commend and encourage committee members as they learn their new responsibilities.

Praise the actions of people whose actions go beyond what you have expected of them. Do not comment only when mistakes are made. It helps to acknowledge truly helpful people in a larger gathering as well.

Ask yourself if there are things that you can stop doing or can do monthly or weekly.

Some committee work could be done less often if you think ahead. Your committee may have to meet only once or twice in the summer, if most of the members are taking vacation during that time. Membership checks may be held for deposit in the bank until you have received more than one or two. Few people will notice if certain jobs are done less often.

### **Conclusion**

You may find as a committee head that delegation of tasks is difficult for you to do, but you will find many advantages in sharing responsibilities.

Organizations run more smoothly when many hands work toward a common goal. More active volunteers means not only more interested members of an organization, but more active leadership for the future of the organization.

Sharing decision-making, thorough training and follow-up, setting performance standards, and keeping individual abilities in mind are all ways to help delegate work in your volunteer organizations.

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