

Management Tool #B-26: ©

How to delegate, get more done and grow your people...without losing control:

One of the biggest problems in many businesses today is that 'the boss' won't delegate. This 'boss' could be the business owner, a department manager or a supervisor.

The result is that things don't get done, problems don't get solved, opportunities get missed, customers get frustrated and go elsewhere, talented, initiative-taking employees leave in frustration and the business slowly grinds to a halt. Sadly, I see a lot of this in my work!

So, why does this happen? Why do 'bosses' fail to delegate? In my 40 years in business and in coaching businesses around the world, below are the top 10 reasons for not delegating. Feel free to check off in the boxes below any of these possibilities that may be affecting you, or your business. Be honest. This is a tough but important reality check. Just remember, *'The beginning of wisdom is the recognition of reality.'*

- 1. Fear that someone else won't do it as well as I would. Or, fear that someone else will do it differently than me and, of course, my way is the only 'right' way.
- 2. Fear that someone else might do it better than me and that will embarrass me or expose my incompetence.
- 3. If I delegate, I'll lose control.
- 4. I don't have time to train people so that I can delegate to them. It's just easier to do it myself.
- 5. My fundamental belief that, *'You can't find good people any more'*, so I've given up trying.
- 6. I / we don't have the ability or recruiting process to identify and attract top talent, so most of our staff are not competent to take on additional responsibility or projects. Or, we don't pay enough to attract and keep top talent.
- 7. I feel threatened by really bright people, so I hire people who know less than I do and who do what they're told. And, besides, it feels good to be the 'go to' person when problems arise. **Warning:** *'We become what we hire'*. If we hire 1st rate people, we become a 1st rate business, one recruitment at a time. If we hire 2nd and 3rd rate people, we become a 2nd or 3rd rate business...and we're in big trouble!
- 8. I don't delegate certain tasks because I feel comfortable doing them myself. They keep me too busy to tackle the more difficult, high-value tasks that I really should be doing...but which I'm not sure how to handle.
- 9. I don't delegate certain tasks because they keep me busy so I don't have to go home to an unhappy situation. The business has become my 'neat fort' and I need to keep it that way. The business is where I feel safe, secure, important, comfortable and in control.
- 10. My boss promoted me to be a manager because I was a great 'doer of things'. But I've received no training or coaching on how to manage people or projects, so, I retreat to the familiar by 'doing things' myself...but with a higher paycheck. My team is frustrated by my lack of leadership and I'll probably get fired for being ineffective. Bummer!

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Reality check: When we don't delegate, or don't delegate effectively, we severely limit our possibilities. Specifically, we limit our career, our income, our business and our life. We get bogged down and, eventually, burnt out trying to do it all ourselves.

How many of the 'Top10 reasons for not delegating' listed on page #1 have you seen in your business? Which ones did you check off and what does that tell you about how and where you need to rethink and refocus? What assumptions and attitudes might need challenging to improve your management effectiveness, grow the business...and improve your quality of life?

Many of the 10 reasons on page #1 have to do with a fear of losing control in one way or another. To solve the problem, it's important to, first, redefine your role in the business and how you bring value to it. Your real value to the business is not in your ability to 'keep busy' or look like the smartest person in the room...or to feel comfortable. Sorry.

Whether you're the business owner, a department manager or supervisor, your value is in your ability to attract, engage, develop and empower a talented team that will take initiative, solve problems, grab opportunities, make things happen, operate more efficiently and delight customers...and, in the process, you will grow the business, grow people, grow the bottom line and have time to have a life.

Because this is such a pervasive problem, I've developed the following 4-step process to help clients delegate more effectively, get more done, grow their people and their business...without losing control.

Step #1: Delegating a task.

Begin by announcing to your staff that you're going to start delegating more tasks, projects and decisions to team members as a way of growing the business and providing more growth opportunities for those who are keen to help move the business and their career forward.

Then, when you have a problem to solve, a project to do or an opportunity to look into, select someone or a small group on your team who you think are best suited to helping you with this. Start with relatively simple problems, projects or opportunities to 'test the waters' and move up from there as experience is gained and performance is proven.

Start a 'List of Problems, Projects or Opportunities' that you've not yet gotten around to and start delegating them to people or small groups on your team using the process described here. Keep adding to the 'List of things to delegate' as ideas come to you. For ideas on what to add to your 'List', ask your staff, "*What needs doing, fixing, upgrading or improving around here to make us more competitive, to increase sales, delight customers and be a better employer?*" Trust me, they'll have items for your 'List'.

Note: When you're looking for help with a problem, project or opportunity, if no one ever comes to mind as being capable, that's a sure sign that your Talent Pool is way too shallow. I'll talk more about this towards the end of this Biz Tool.

So, here in Step #1, you've identified a problem, project or opportunity with which you'd like help and you've identified a person or small group to help you. Sit down with them, describe the specific problem, project or opportunity that needs addressing, give them the info that you have and tell them you'd like their help.

Assure them that if they have any questions about their mandate or would like a little coaching along the way, you'll make yourself available. Advise them of who else on your management team or what suppliers may have helpful insight and advise those folks that they may be contacted by the individual or group. Also, are there other outside resources or industry experts that may be helpful in coming up with ideas or options?

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Work out with the individual or small group and their direct reporting point how they'll integrate this project into their regular workload. Answer any questions they may have and confirm that they're up for the task. If they are, ask them to go away and think about the task, do whatever research they think will be helpful and come back to you with three or so possible courses of action with 'pros and cons', including cost estimates, for each.

Now, here's the key; get a commitment from them as to when they'll get back to you with their thinking, or at least an update. Let's say that you agree on, "*May 21st at 2 PM.*" Document that commitment and follow up. Then, they either show up on May 21st with some good ideas or an update on their progress...or they don't.

Through this simple process, delegated the problem, project or opportunity but you've given them no authority to take action, so you've given up no control.

Step #2: Receiving their 'Solution Possibilities'.

Let's be optimistic. They show up for their meeting commitment at 2 PM on May 21st. They present to you their three or so options and the 'pros and cons' including cost estimates, for each. Or they give you an update, you have a further discussion and set another specific time that you will meet.

You listen intently to their suggestions and the reasoning, you ask questions, you coach them with your thoughts and ask them which of their possibilities they recommend...and why. Or, it might end up that the best solution is some combination of their suggestions. Or, they may need to go 'back to the drawing board' to do further work.

Through this process they're doing the legwork and gaining valuable experience, you're coaching and seeing who is sharp, resourceful and committed and, together, you're coming up with decisions that otherwise might never get made.



Once you've agreed on a course of action, ask them by when they can come up with a step-by-step Implementation Plan, including a cost estimate.

Agree on a specific time that they'll get back to you with the Implementation Plan, let's say, "*June 27th at 10 AM.*" Document that commitment and follow up. Assure them, once again, that if they have any questions about their mandate or would like a little coaching, you'll make yourself available. And advise them again who else on your management team or which suppliers may have helpful insight and then let those folks know that they may be contacted. Also, are there other outside resources or industry experts that may be helpful in coming up with an effective Implementation Plan?

Note that you've still given them no authority to take action, so you've given up no control.

Now, let's be less optimistic. Let's say that they don't show up at 2 PM on May 21st, which probably tells you all you need to know about their ability and commitment. If they're 'no-shows', meet with them to discuss what happened.

Or, they do show up with work that has not been thought through well enough. In this case, ask them if they'd like more time, or if there are challenges that they could not overcome, or if they've lost interest in the project...and why. Ask them if there's some other project in which they would be interested. Don't be judgemental in this conversation. It is what it is. Not every 'delegation project' will be a success. 'Thank' them for their work, learn from the exercise and move on.

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Step #3: Receiving their 'Implementation Plan'.

Let's be optimistic. They show up for their meeting commitment at 10 AM on June 27th. They present to you their Implementation Plan, including cost estimates. You listen intently, ask questions, make suggestions, perhaps make some changes and you approve the Plan. Or, for some reason, the Plan isn't workable and they agree to go 'back to the drawing board', to do further work. Agree on a date by which that will happen. Document that date and follow up.

If the Implementation Plan, or some modified version of it, gets accepted you're ready for the implementation phase. See Step #4 below.

Now, let's be less optimistic. Let's say that they don't show up at 2 PM on May 21st, with an Implementation Plan. If they're 'no-shows', meet with them to discuss what happened.

Or, they do show up but their Implementation Plan has not been thought through well enough. In this case, ask them if they'd like more time, or if some roadblock came up that interfered with their project, or if the project is simply no longer of interest to them...and why. Don't be judgemental in this conversation. It is what it is. 'Thank' them for their work, learn from the exercise and move on.

Step #4: Implementing the Plan.

If you decide to implement the Plan now (and it is your decision) here are some questions to answer:

- a) Who needs to be involved in the implementation (the Implementation Team)?
- b) Who needs to be informed about it?
- c) What resources and support will the implementation team require?
- d) By when will the implementation be completed?
- e) At what specific points during the implementation process will we meet to follow up on progress, deal with any issues and make adjustments to keep on track? Document those follow-up date commitments and make sure that you do follow up. The world is run by those who follow up.
- f) How will we measure and celebrate the success of the implementation? Do a debriefing with the Implementation Team about what they learned through this process and how it can be improved in the future.
- g) What ongoing reporting will be set up to ensure that the initial results or improvements are continuing.

If you decide not to implement the Plan right now, inform the person or small group who has worked on it as to why you're not able to proceed at this time and thank them for their time and effort. Tell them that you will advise them when you're ready to proceed with the implementation and how you picture them being involved.

Bonus Tip #1 about delegating:

When your staff come to you for advice or a decision on how to handle something...

- a) You can simply give them an answer,
- b) You can let them transfer the problem to you by saying, "*Leave that with me, I'll look after it.*", or,
- c) You can use this as an opportunity to coach them and help them grow.

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I vote for Option c). Using this as an opportunity to coach them and help them grow starts with asking a simple question, ***“What do you think we should do?”*** Listen intently to their suggestion, share your thoughts and experience, coach them, agree on the action to be taken and ask them by when that action will be taken. Then, make a note to follow up to find out how it went. This will give you an opportunity to make sure it got done, acknowledge success and, perhaps, add some further helpful coaching, if required.

Bonus Tip #2 about delegating. Sometimes you’ll delegate by outsourcing:

Sometimes you simply won’t have the skills, experience or resources in-house to delegate effectively within your organization. That’s the time to outsource (delegate) to proven outside professionals. That does not mean having your 19-year-old niece redo your website because she’d love to give it a try.

Depending on the size and complexity of your business many services, projects and tasks will best be delegated by outsourcing. There are two categories of outsourcing. They’re listed below with some examples of each. You’re most likely already outsourcing many of these.

a) Ongoing Outsourcing: This is outsourcing certain functions or services for an extended period.

- Legal advice.
- Outside accountant / CPA / auditor.
- Web design and web maintenance.
- E-marketing & social media.
- Creative content for marketing, advertising and promotions.
- Systems design & maintenance.
- Tech support & maintenance.
- Long-term licensing of industry-specific or task-specific software.
- HR advisor. If you don’t need a full-time HR person you can access an HR Pro for the number of days a month you need them. HR is super important. Get it right.
- Employee benefit design & administration.
- Health & safety program development, training and administration.
- Staff & management training & development.
- Employee candidate suitability testing and screening.
- Service contracts for HVAC and other mechanical.
- Landscaping & grounds maintenance.

b) Specific Project Outsourcing: This is outsourcing specific one-off tasks or services.

- Facility planning & design.
- Efficiency improvement & incentive program design.
- Computer hardware and software selection, installation & training
- Graphic or packaging design, photography or video production, trade show booth design.
- Merger & acquisition advice.
- Succession, exit and business sale planning and execution.

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10 important outsourcing tips:

1. Clearly define the scope and schedule of your project.
2. Evaluate a service provider like you'd hire a full-time employee. Look for specific experience fit. Check their references and ask for feedback from other clients who have used their services.
3. Review portfolios and samples of their work.
4. When you're evaluating proposals from service providers, don't be afraid to ask questions.
5. Don't choose a vendor based solely on price
6. When possible, start small and 'test the waters'.
7. Tie payment to clearly defined project milestones.
8. Negotiate and document ownership of the work done for you up front. Who owns it...you or the designer? Many business owners don't think about this. They assume that they own the 'work product' that they paid for, but often they don't. Be absolutely clear about this.
9. Don't forget about support after the project is complete. Especially for technology projects, it's important to specify a warranty or support clause so that you're assured of some amount of continuing support. Creative graphic projects should also include a support clause.
10. Whatever you agree on, get it in writing.

“This all sounds complicated. Why don't I just handle the problems, projects or opportunities myself?”

So, by now you may be saying, *“This all sounds complicated. Why don't I just handle the problems, projects or opportunities myself?”*

First off, many of the most important projects and possibilities in your business aren't getting done. There are simply not enough hours in the day to do everything that needs doing all by yourself.

One of my Biz Coaching clients was taking on all the projects that his team was supposed to be managing. *“Leave that with me, I'll get back to you.”* he would tell them. He was a brilliant guy who worked 12 hours a day, seven days a week. But every day he was picking up at least 20 hours worth of 'stuff' that he never got to. The business ground to a halt, the best people left in frustration and the rest sat at their desk, collected their paychecks and waited for the boss to get back to them. It took me months to sort that one out.

Here's one of my most important business-building insights...

You can't grow your business without growing your people...and without growing yourself.

“Yes”, it does take time to coach, delegate and follow up as you work to create an effective team... especially at the beginning. It also requires a big shift in defining your own roll in the business. Making that important transition from being the person who does and decides everything to the person who develops and leads a team of talented, engaged people who make things happen is one of the biggest challenges as any business grows...and it's where many businesses stall or fail.

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A couple of years ago I had a Biz Coaching client who bragged to me in our very first conversation that he could do every job in the company better than the person who did it day in and day out. I knew immediately that the business was in big trouble...and it was.

An important note re your 'Talent Pool':

When you're looking for help from your team with a problem, project or opportunity, if no one ever comes to mind as being capable, that's a sure sign that your Talent Pool is way too shallow. So, how deep is your 'Talent Pool'?

As a business owner, leader or manager, one of your most important jobs is to attract, develop, engage and manage talent. The real battle in every industry today is the battle for 'talent'. For help in assessing the strength of your Talent Pool, see my Biz Tool A-17.

What teams and functions in your business need strengthening? Who needs training, coaching and encouragement...and who needs to improve or move on? Are you dealing with non-performance? Many businesses don't. In fact, failure to deal with non-performance is one of the biggest problems in many businesses today. As one Biz Coaching client confessed to me recently, *"My people don't do what they're supposed to and I don't do a damn thing about it."* For insights on the reasons for staff non-performance and how to handle them, check out my Biz Tool B-21.

Or, it could be that one or more of the 10 factors listed on page #1 of this Biz Tool are at play here and some serious introspection and improvement on your part is required. Nobody said that being a business owner or manager is easy...because it isn't.

For help in creating a business culture that attracts, grows, challenges and retains top talent, look at my Biz Tools A-16, B-18, B-19 and B-22.

And how must you grow as a leader? Start with my easy 2-page Leadership Assessment Tool, A-9.

In conclusion...the challenge:

So, how will you use these insights to delegate, get more done and grow your people...without losing control?

Will you grow your business and have a life by growing your people and yourself...or will you try to do it all yourself, let the business stall and burn yourself out? Life is full of choices.

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