

Delegating to Unique Individuals

by Dennis Hooper, copyright © 2006, published in the Houston Home Journal on March 2, 2006

Each of us is unique. Each member of your team differs in how they think, how they learn, how they build relationships, what drives them, how patient they are, their family experiences, other educational backgrounds, their emotional outlooks, their goals, why they work, etc.

Leaders can sometimes forget or ignore this truth. My objective with this article is to help you as a leader to delegate better. The uniqueness of the person being assigned the responsibility or task is an important consideration in your delegation process.

I commend to you *The One Thing You Need to Know* by Marcus Buckingham. Extensive research yielded this major insight: "The one thing all great managers know about great managing is: 'Discover what is unique about each person and capitalize on it.'"

"Hmm," you might be pondering. "Just exactly how does that apply to the topic of delegating?" In addition to delegating to get the job done, leaders should consider how the act of delegating might best serve the unique individuals under their authority.

For example, here is a range of three different types of individuals to whom you might delegate responsibility for a given project or task. Might you be overlooking two of them?

Competency. The most obvious individual to whom you might delegate is a skilled contributor you know will handle the responsibility well. A big reason leaders don't delegate is because they believe that no one will do the job as well or as quickly as they can do it themselves. That's a self-fulfilling prophecy, of course. If you do the work yourself, no one will ever be as competent as you. (And surprise! You may not do it as well as you think you do!)

Yet if you consider all the individuals available to you, there must be at least one who could handle the task or responsibility fairly well. And with the proper guidance from you, he or she just might do a stellar job! You'll have to plan for it and offer proper expectations, of course!

Opportunity for personal growth. On the other end of the spectrum is the individual who has not yet built competency. Are some of these individuals interested in skill growth? Could you expand the skills of such a team member through learning how to accomplish the needed task?

Your organization may not yet have a conscious process in place for building future leaders. You could, however, be a change agent, breaking new ground. Offering a challenging opportunity and providing appropriate support might boost the success of a growing individual!

Opportunity to influence others. Maybe the responsibility you have to delegate is one that could be handled by a developing leader who needs the experience of further influencing others. How does a person build leadership skills if you never provide the opportunity to lead?

Clearly specifying the desired outcome, offering the necessary resources, and together building the guidelines of how the work should be accomplished will help ensure that the individual will be successful in managing the task. There are likely individuals under your authority who are ready to assume greater responsibility and will respond favorably to the leadership opportunity you offer. Become more overt about considering these individuals for intentional challenges

If you've not been in the habit of effectively delegating, you'll require a major change in your thinking and in your behavior. Yet the benefits can be huge. It will free up time for you in the long run. It will enhance the contribution those under your authority can make to their growth and the organization's results! And it will add to your reputation for building future leaders!