



The art of delegation

Overview

Delegation. We all know what it means. Getting other people to do stuff!

In reality it is something we do every day but without really thinking about it, however, in my experience, it is also the single biggest cause for poor performance and dissatisfaction across the whole working world.

There is a single remedy for a multitude of ailments and it is “brilliant delegation” and that is what we are going to focus on this week.

Any leader wants to maximise performance, but a compassionate leader recognises that the route to performance is a more emotional one, it is through gaining commitment.

So we will look at the impact of poor delegation both on performance and the emotional impact.

Key questions

It is important to identify what delegation really is, what it is not and why we do it.

What's the point of delegation? Why do we do it?

Here is a selection of reasons:

- Time!! To lead, to represent, to get a life, to keep a “heads up” strategic view.
- Maximise revenue productivity and capacity - more people doing more tasks!
- Remove SPOF's - single points of failure - if all actions and decisions go to one place, one person, it creates a major potential risk.
- Succession and Development - leave a legacy. You cannot move on if you leave a vacuum behind you. Delegation provides a constant stream of talented and motivated people.
- Morale - it is fun! People feel valued, you tap into their self-worth.
- Get stuff done - improve - grow – move.
- Legitimacy power base - This will become clear when you complete the superb model on Power and Influence!
- Get a better job done as you can delegate to the person with the right skills, time and motivation.
- Knowledge sharing - the more others do more tasks the more we spread the knowledge and ability.
- Ownership of issues and the business; as you delegate to others you foster a culture of ownership. Ownership leads to a strong fulfilment of self-worth, which is, as we know, the cornerstone of commitment - a focus for a compassionate leader.
- Commitment to the organisation and vision.



What is the cost to you and your business if delegation is not done well?

Here are a selection of reasons:

- No personal development - for you and the team members.
- Missed deadlines.
- You get swamped - stressed, deflated, demoralised - longer hours, conflict, mistakes, sickness, work v life balance out of kilter.
- Cost to the business.
 - Staff "burn out" – sickness.
 - Mistakes, wasted time, - "busy fool".
 - Higher paid staff doing lower paid work.
- Missed opportunities.
- De-motivation - poor retention / recruitment, (the cost of recruitment) lack of productivity.
- Project time compression.
- Poor productivity.
- Unsustainable.
- JDI leads to compliance - Just Do IT!
- Leadership impact - lose respect, no volunteers, no initiative, no feedback (sitting back not sitting forward) no succession.
- SPOF's.

What can we delegate and what can we not?

There is a simple catch phrase we can use on this. We can delegate ... *"All the authority, but I'll take the responsibility"*. We can get caught up on semantics and meaning of words, but when I consider the impact of this statement I understand as "I am giving you the freedom to apply your brilliance to make this happen but if it goes wrong the fault lies with me".

The quote provided by Sandra Day O'Connor in our introduction picks up on this *"The really expert riders of horses let the horse know immediately who is in control, but then guide the horse with loose reins and seldom use the spurs."*

I read this as the leader letting everyone know that they have the responsibility but wish to give the team the freedom to let fly and achieve.

To whom can we delegate?

In essence, everyone. Sometimes we relate delegation to hierarchy and authority thinking that there is a descending direction for delegation - top to bottom! I disagree.

As a leader, I have frequently been asked to take on a task by a member of my team. When being led, I have often asked my leader to take on something that I did not feel able or confident to do or did not have the time to do.

Asking someone to do something and then gaining clarity and agreement is, in essence, what delegation is all about. You can delegate to your boss, your peers, your team and to the wider community.

What stops delegating?



Here are a few of the most common “excuses” I hear. I have added some of the reasons people use these excuses and suggestion some possible outcomes and a few solutions.

- Don't trust the ability / capability of the team to do it - leader should look in mirror! - train team, spend time with the team.
- Not enough time to delegate - *“It would be quicker if I just do it, I know how”, “I don't have time to explain”* - the leader becomes a busy fool and gets busier and busier doing the same thing!
- Frequency of the task *“It happens so rarely that I might as well just do it”* - it's your time, think about it. A one off is OK, but a string of “one offs” makes you a busy fool!
- Don't want to let others do it - an insecurity that you may not be “needed”, others may improve around you - lack of self-belief/confidence - look deep into the leadership mirror!
- Sensitivity - customer perception that a minion is doing it, - security issues, - the emotional impact on the team (note this could be negative and a positive - negative if it is a menial task, positive if it is done in a manner to support the team) - challenge that thinking by selling the benefits of delegation and assuring them that you are still responsible for it.
- Wrong structure - too flat - change or accept constraints.
- Short term business culture demanding instant action - always urgent - prioritise with the strategic goal as the guide.
- Lack of prioritisation - prioritise with the strategic goal as the guide.
- No one to delegate to!! - change (recruit) or accept constraints.
- Corporate restrictions - authority - change or accept constraints.
- Coming up through the ranks so still doing old job - *“don't do a job you can do, do the job you should do”!*
- Wrong or No Powerbase - you will not be able to influence if you have not been given a Powerbase - work on it!
- Not understanding the benefit - well stop, reflect and understand the many benefits then!
- Don't know what the job is? - you are not meant to know the intricacies of the job - you are not necessarily the expert. You should know the desired outcome, timeframe and parameters though.
- Feeling guilty - question why you are delegating? If it is not a good reason then don't do it, however, if it is right, then do it. Remember the benefits for you and your team.
- Matrix management tension - speak to each other!!
- Misunderstood - remember *“It's not what you say but how it lands that counts”* - are you speaking their language? Check comprehension by asking them to tell you what the task is.
- The team failed before - look in the mirror. Why? Poor comms? Poor leadership? Poor delegation? Or not trained / capable?
- Unclear and ever-changing structures - this is a problem. Organisations need structural and organisational stability to deliver.
- Unaware of our leadership behaviour and impact - we need to develop conscious and compassionate leaders raising self-awareness.

By focusing on the benefits of delegation it is hard to maintain these excuses, even the organisational restraints - you can influence your immediate surroundings; even if your organisation has a culture on constraint and restraint, you are still able to lead your team and influence those you touch to create a local culture of delegation, performance and compassion.

What are the skills of delegation?



To delegate effectively, you need to be able to;

- Communicate - clarity in giving, and a skilled listener (Levels 3 & 4).
- Coach - a large part of delegation taps into coaching skills and, likewise, when we work on coaching we see that the application of coaching is almost invariably tied to some form of delegation - not always, but frequently.
- Knowledgeable;
 - Of the strategic intent of the organisation,
 - Of the capability and commitment of the team,
 - Of the person through being empathetic,
 - (not necessarily in the details of the task itself).
- Negotiate - delegation needs to be an agreement.
- Compassionate - be a compassionate leader.

What attitude do you need to both give or receive delegation?

This is in reality more important than the skills; attitude is everything in my eyes. If we have the right attitude, skill can come. And if we have the right attitude about delegation then, wow, what great opportunities we will have in front of us.

A compassionate leader delegating brilliantly will need to be:

- Selfless - it is not about you. It is about legacy, growth of others, the bigger picture.
- Confident - in yourself and the people around you.
- Learning mindset - in the process of delegating you need to be open to learning; the other person may know better.
- Open - to ideas, suggestions, feedback.
- Positive - your attitude will be infectious. You need to approach all tasks with positivity and let that spread.
- Clear - on what needs to be done, why and the constraints imposed.
- Consultative - it is a suggestion made through dialogue rather than an order.
- Dialogue - remember, delegation is an agreement.
- Aware - of yourself, of the other, of the situation and "how it is landing".
- Trust - the people you delegate to, trust yourself.
- Humble - opens your mind to learning and opportunity.
- Instil confidence - through your confidence and encouragement.
- Compassionate - empathy with positive action - delegate the right task to the right person.
- Take risks - it isn't safer to do it all yourself, allow others to grow as you did.
- Feedback acceptance - "Could that have been better delegated"?
- Disciplined - to do what you know is the right thing, to stop yourself falling into the traps we discussed above that might hinder your desire to delegate.

In Summary

Delegation is...

"Trusting someone else to act on your behalf for an agreed desired outcome, giving them authority but not transferring responsibility, enabling them to achieve, and standing by them"

Delegation is an agreement!!

Delegate the right task to the right person. It is not just telling someone to do something! That is just ignorant and careless. How do you know that they fully understand the why, the what and the how if you have not had a dialogue and an agreement? You don't.

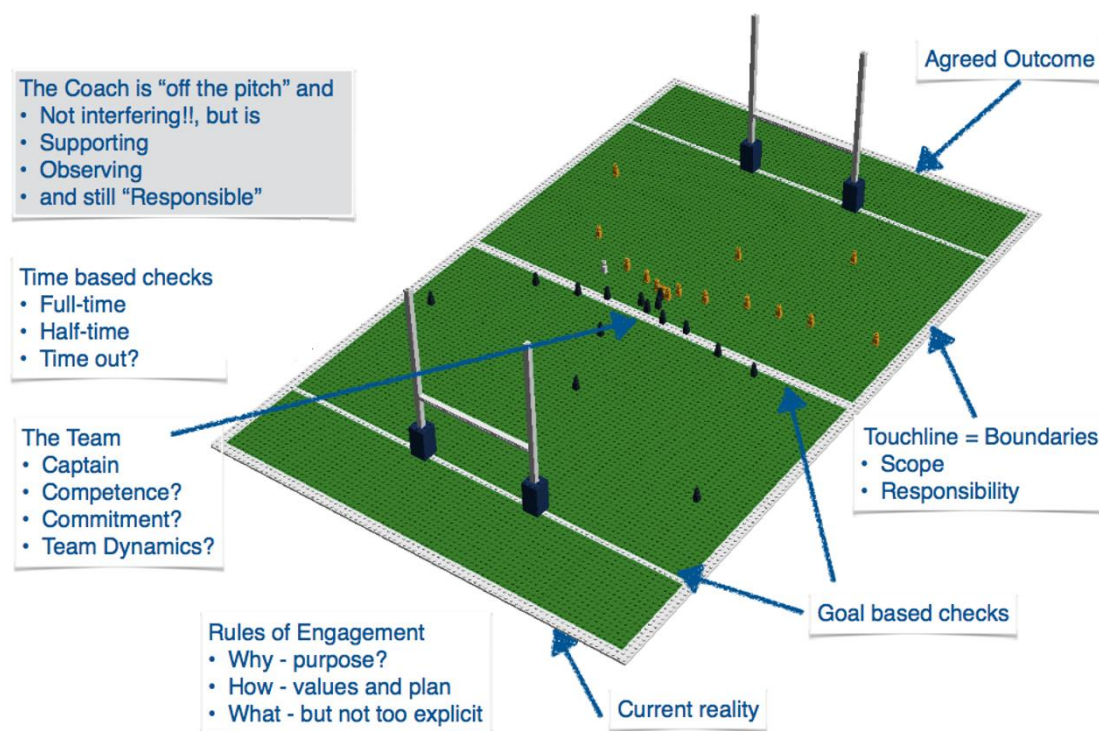


A compassionate leader is well placed to delegate effectively as they have the understanding of their people and the attitude to work positively with that understanding. Applying the definition of compassionate leadership “securing the best for all” will make brilliant delegation a normality - remind yourself of the reason, the attitude and the skills - it all fits in perfectly to be a compassionate leader.

The Model

Pitch-marking means;
Defined the pitch edges;

- The goal is the opposition try line (desired outcome).
 - We need to define - what is the goal, strategy, scope. What are the parameters?
 - We need to articulate and transfer the understanding and desire (purpose).
- We start from our try line, our current reality.
- Touch lines are the boundaries of responsibility / scope.
- There are drawn lines on the pitch that mark task-based milestones or checkpoints - 22m, 10m half way, 10m 22m.



- There are agreed rules and time limits.
- There is a team and a team captain - they need motivating, training, tools.
- There are time checkpoints - “time-out” calls, half-time or quarters.
- The “coach” is in the stands, not on the pitch, and is encouraging, monitoring, analysing. Blow the whistle and let them get on with it! Go to stands and observe but keep off the pitch (unless they invite you in and also at the agreed check points).
- The Club Chairperson = CEO may be in the stands too - as are your supporters and detractors.
- After a game there is a de-brief and a celebration (recovery).



- Before the next game there is a meeting to share the learning from previous, agree a game plan for the next and motivate the team.
- There is the opposition trying to block your path - this represents uncontrollable realities of outside circumstance.

This is a metaphor for Empowerment and the Art of Delegation.

Real Life Issues

Real life is full of “what if’s” and “may be’s” and “unknown’s” so ...

Q - What about “multi-tasks” - can they not be bundled?

A - Be careful. Small tasks can group but it is much better to ensure proper delegation for each individual task. In other words, “pitch-mark” for each task.

Q - What if we do not know the full scope or there are unknowns?

A - Life is full of unknowns. What needs to be marked before you can move is the far goal line (what you are trying to achieve” and your goal line (your current reality), then start the game and go explore for the edges, the touch lines. When you have found them. Stop and re-draw the whole pitch, in other words, stop and re-delegate.

Q - What if the goal is unattainable?

A - Re-draw the pitch. You cannot start a task if you don’t know what it is. You might have started and found out it is unattainable, in which case, stop and re-draw the pitch - re-delegate.

Q - What if the goal changes?

A - stop and re-draw the pitch.

Q - What if the time changes (do it quicker)?

A - stop and re-draw the pitch.

Q - What if the team changes?

A - stop and re-draw the pitch. This could be an opportunity to shuffle the team and provide a breadth of experience for them and then back on the pitch, or the skills lost may demand a ‘re-draw’?

Q - What if the scope creeps?

A - stop and re-draw the pitch.

Q - What if anything changes?

A - stop and re-draw the pitch.

If there are any fundamental changes the task will need re-delegating, the leadership dialogue will need to happen again.

This is also where delegation tends to go wrong. When something fundamental changes, particularly scope and time, there is a tendency to ignore it or deny it and carry on. That will not work. The task will fail. It will cause stress. Have the courage as a leader to stop and re-draw the pitch and have the courage as one of the players to call “time-out” and re-enter the delegation agreement process.

Q - Who decides where the lines are drawn and what the time checks might be?



A - Delegation is an agreement. The conversation might go,
"I trust that you know what you are doing, let's just do a midway check and an "almost there" check and I will let you call me when you need me".

Or it may go,

"I am really not sure how to do this, let's have an early check or two and if you are ok then I will leave you to it".

Q - What if the coach keeps jumping on to the pitch?

A - If you are the coach "STOP Interfering"!! If it is your boss that is interfering, remember you can clarify the rules of engagement (delegation).

Q - What of the pitch is the wrong size?

A - Too small and it is not big enough to play the game, in other words, it is not delegation. It is command and control "Do one small thing, stop, and I will tell you what to do next"! Too big and it is more abdication than delegation with little chance of completion and a stressed team. So, the answer is, as before, "stop and re-draw the pitch".

Q - What if the Coach changes; management does tend to cycle more quickly than staff in many organisations?

A - If the work has been delegated properly, then it should have little impact if the rules of the delegation are explained in handover. It may impact the next delegation however!

Q - What does the Boss' pitch look like?

A - Big!! And your pitch sits inside it. A leader will have many pitches within pitches as you will always own the big pitch, but have delegated various areas of your pitch to your next line of leaders (who own their pitches) etc.

Summary

Make it simple, clear, memorable - *i-UMU!!!*

Remember:

Every single time you ask someone to do something for you "mark a pitch".

Every single time you have been asked to do something by someone "mark a pitch" - have the conversation with whoever delegated this to you and say, *"You have asked me to do this, can I just check a few things with you before I start"?* and run through pitch-marking.

It may just be a mental check, but it must be a conscious mental check, or it may be a proper sit down, draw a pitch and fill in all the details.

Be conscious, be deliberate, be disciplined and be compassionate. Brilliant delegation is an agreement.