

THREE LEVELS OF DELEGATION

Delegating effectively is one of the most important things a manager does. Delegating effectively is what enables managers to shift from managing to leading. A key to their success – perhaps the most important key – is that they've learned how to hire effective people and then delegate specific decision authority to them. But it's harder than it sounds. This invaluable tool takes a look at the “dos” and “don'ts” of delegation, and highlights three levels of delegated decisions to help you build your management skills.

What does it mean to “delegate?” It means you've ascertained that someone has good judgment and that you trust him or her to make good decisions consistently. As a result, you delegate responsibility to make certain, specific decisions on a regular basis. And, as part of the delegation, you acknowledge openly that you are prepared to accept (and support) the decisions that he or she makes.

There are three different levels of delegated decisions – and each level carries its own set of expectations and protocols. It is very helpful to distinguish between different levels and to gain a vocabulary to help you communicate clearly to others.

Level A Delegated Decision: This is the first level of delegation. You have the authority to make a given decision, but you choose to delegate the responsibility and ask someone else to take the initiative and bring recommendations to you for approval. For example, you might delegate the responsibility to the Division heads to recommend their Division budgets.

Level B Delegated Decision: This means you delegate the responsibility to take initiative, develop recommendations, and then make decisions in specified areas, but ask that you be kept in the loop during the decision-making process. For example, you might delegate responsibility to execute a program.

Level C Delegated Decision: This is the most expansive level of delegation. You delegate full responsibility for taking initiative, developing recommendations, and making decisions in specified areas, and you do not require periodic updates during the process unless there is a significant change in circumstances.

Two quick notes:

- First, in any type of delegated decision, it's a good idea to consult with your boss if he or she will be affected by the decision or has valuable knowledge to impart. This doesn't change the delegation. It is simply a smart way to manage “up.”
- Second, the level of delegation can change if circumstances change. Let's say you are delegated Level B responsibility for making a hiring decision. Then you learn that one of the applicants is a former Board member. That may render it a Level A delegation. It's up to you to bring these changes in circumstance to your boss so he or she can decide whether to change the level of delegation.

The Flow of Delegations

The flow of a delegated decision can cascade several levels down. The important thing is to communicate this flow in writing, so that people have a clear, consistent understanding. Here is an example.

