

# Notes on Delegation

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1. **Specify the *results* you want, not the method, and hold people responsible for the result.** In the words of General George Patton “Don't tell people how to do things, tell them what to do and let them surprise you with their results”. As well as benefiting from their ingenuity, there's another plus: if you are too specific about the route to achieving a goal and there turn out to be unforeseen roadblocks, some subordinates will give up and dump it back at your door: “You told me to go this way, and it didn't work, so I give up – over to you”. If you have specified the *destination*, not the route, then the onus remains on them to find their way – it's reasonable for them to request extra help, but not to give up.
2. **Specify *evidence* – how will you both know for sure that you got the result?** Here's a common, and very annoying problem: you ask someone to do something, and what you get is not what you wanted, but you can see how they got the wrong end of the stick. You end up settling for what you didn't want, or having the work done over – a real nuisance. Usually the culprit is vague language. Make it absolutely clear what you want to *see, hear* and/or *feel* that will confirm the result. E.g. “What I am really after is one page press release on my desk, with all the right facts and contact details already filled in, that makes the reader feel like they want to get on the phone for the story immediately”.
3. **Make it clear *why* the result is important at *two levels of objective above*.** Individual jobs, especially staff jobs which are similar even in different industries - HR, accounts, IT, estates - can seem quite disconnected from the strategy of the business. Make it plain how the result you are requesting contributes to the mission of the business. It helps people get motivated, it shows how your request is reasonable, and it enables them to improvise if they come up against problems
4. **Make it plain that you are proposing a contract, or *agreement* – ask them if they accept.** You can coerce people to do things, but that's not delegation. This is the crucial step where responsibility is delegated. You ask them (explicitly or implicitly): “Are you prepared to sign up to this? If you do, you are accountable.” Be vigilant that they don't accept too automatically. Consider playing devil's advocate. If they are more junior, this is a big opportunity to coach and develop them.
5. **Allow the assignee to negotiate changes to the specification, including *resources and support*.** Ideally you want someone who says “Yes, I can make this happen for you, as long as I have the following resources”

6. **Document the agreement.** A simple email will be enough in some cases, in others, something more akin to a project proposal, with milestones, metrics etc is needed.
7. **Monitor and support,** but don't solve all their problems for them. There's a difference between delegation and abdication.
8. **On completion, acknowledge result and give out rewards, if appropriate.** This doesn't have to be a big deal, but it shouldn't be skipped either. Since real motivation is intrinsic, the best reward comes from helping the person feel personal satisfaction and an increasing sense of competence.