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Do Less, Achieve More: The Beauty Of Effective Delegation

By Dave Lavinsky

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Are you swamped at work? Here's how to delegate effectively and increase your productivity.

As company owner, you need to focus only on the items that add the most value to your organization. In general, these are the things that you, and *only* you, are capable of doing. You should delegate the rest.

Of course, you need a way to determine what the key things are on which you should be spending your time. Consider the Pareto Principle, or the 80/20 rule, which states that 20 percent of one thing (e.g., your customers) yields 80 percent of results (e.g., total company sales). In the case of your focus, the Pareto Principle says that 20 percent of your efforts yield 80 percent of the results you achieve. Therefore, the key is to identify what this 20 percent of your work is and do more of it (and delegate the 80 percent).

Identifying Your Top 20 Percent

The first way to determine which 20 percent of work you do yields 80 percent of the results is to think back. What were the most important projects you completed last year that

propelled your company forward? Your answers will include the types of projects that belong in your top 20 percent and which you should continue to do.

The second way to determine your top tasks to perform is to review your to-do list and consider the following questions when reviewing each item:

- Does that activity really *add value* to your company?
- Are you *really great* at performing that task?
- Is there *somebody else who can do better, as well as, or nearly as well as you* at completing the task?

Finally, a great way to determine which tasks are *not* in your top 20 percent is to keep a running list of low-value tasks. To begin, you cannot be performing tasks that have a low dollar value. For example, you can't do work yourself that you could hire someone to do for \$10 an hour. As you go through your days, write down all tasks you perform that fall into this category.

The next step in the process is to delegate the lowest value uses to others.

Five Steps to Effectively Delegate

It is often hard at first for some entrepreneurs and business owners to delegate because they want to control everything themselves. However, to achieve your end vision, you must delegate. Consider Steve Jobs. He clearly didn't create the prototype for the iPod, nor did he manage the manufacturing, marketing, or customer service. Neither did Bill Gates. He clearly didn't write the code for all of Microsoft's products. Neither did Sir Richard Branson. How could Branson possibly manage nearly 50 companies at once without delegation?

The fact is this: Delegating tasks to others can save you a great deal of time and allow you to focus that time on the highest value-added tasks. However, when done incorrectly, delegating results in things not getting done or getting done poorly, which is when you end up expending more time and energy than you have.

This is why it's critical to delegate properly. Using the following steps will help you do so.

1. Identify the Right Person for Delegation

This person might be an employee of your company or an outsourced individual or firm. The right person is the one who has the requisite skill set to do the task and the ability to complete the project within the appropriate timeline.

Your employees should maintain daily and weekly to-do lists. This way, you can review those lists to identify which employees have the ability to tackle the project to be delegated.

2. Clearly Define the Project

The next step is clearly to define the task, the deliverables, the completion date, and why the project needs to be done. If you rush through this step and simply say, "do this by this date," you will get poor results.

3. Discuss the Plan of Action or How the Task Can Be Accomplished

Next, you need to discuss the plan of action: Specifically, how the person charged with completing the task can accomplish it.

Of key importance here is that you don't want to delegate a task (e.g., fax this report today), but rather a process (e.g., fax all the reports I have for now on). Therefore, even when delegating a seemingly simple task such as sending faxes, you need to discuss the plan. For example, how often do you need reports faxed? How quickly must they be faxed once you create them? What must be done after sending the fax? (Confirm receipt? Shred document?)

You want to spend time detailing and documenting how the delegated task should be performed.

4. Have Them Repeat Back the Plan

Next, have the person to whom you delegate repeat the task and deliverables back to you to ensure their complete comprehension. Most people will nod and say, "Yes, I get it"--that is, until you ask them to repeat your directions back, and they get them wrong. Have the person repeat all of your directions back to you until the directions are right.

5. Monitor Progress and Provide Feedback (Longer-Term Tasks)

When you delegate a task that will take more than one or two days, you need to monitor its progress and provide feedback. Ideally, you identified project milestones or checkpoints to ensure the project stays on track when initially discussing the plan.

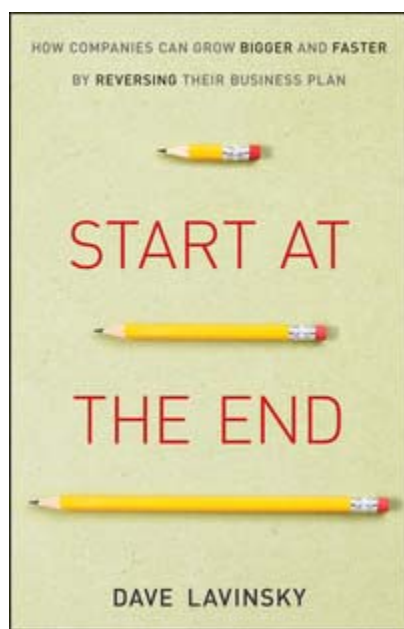
To ensure projects are completed properly, mark those milestones on your calendar and monitor that results are delivered on time. If they are not, be sure to immediately alert the worker that he or she has fallen behind. Meet with the worker periodically to provide feedback and guidance.

6. Evaluate Performance

The final step to effective delegation is to evaluate performance. Most entrepreneurs and business owners skip this critical step and suffer as a result. Here's why: If somebody does a B1 job the first time they perform a task that you delegate, how do you think they'll perform the next time they do it?

Are they going to magically do an A1 job the next time? No. In fact, the next time they will do a B1 or lower job because they think that their B1 job is good enough. This is why providing feedback and evaluating performance allows you to get the best results from those to whom you delegate.

Even if they did a great job, you need to explain why they did a great job so that they know how to repeat this performance in the future. You need to explain if there was room for improvement. People generally appreciate slightly negative feedback versus no feedback at all. So, explain the good and the bad, and you'll get increasingly better results on the tasks you delegate to that person.



Finally, you need to understand and accept that it will often take at least twice as long to delegate a repeating task the first time as it would to do it yourself. However, once you delegate something successfully, it will be off your plate forever.

You must also accept that many delegated tasks may not get done as well as if you did them yourself. Although this isn't acceptable for some areas of your business (e.g., providing a service to a customer), for others (e.g., reordering supplies, completing paperwork), good enough is good enough.

Effective delegation makes you replaceable, and although it sounds a bit strange, this is what you want. It allows you to spend time growing--rather than simply maintaining--your business. You can spend less time working and take real vacations. It also makes your business attractive to buyers, which is particularly important if your end vision is to sell your company.

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Author Dave Lavinsky is the cofounder of [Growthink](#) [6], a consultancy that helps entrepreneurs and business owners identify and pursue new opportunities, develop new business plans, raise capital, and build growth strategies.

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Michel Ozzello

If you don't do anything else, at least you should follow the 80/20 rule! :)
That is the best way to really focus on what is important to deliver the biggest results (instead of trying to do everything and try to get it perfect). At the company I work for, the 80/20 rule is actually one of the culture pillars and is preached and enforced at all levels in the organisation. It really makes it easier to identify the things you should be delegating.

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I preach
this in my business everyday... most people feel that they will lose control if they delegate.... When you delegate you are in charge of the outcome not the task.

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