

## levels of delegation

Delegation isn't just a matter of telling someone else what to do. There is a wide range of varying freedom that you can allocate to another person. The more experienced and reliable the person having a delegated task to is, the more freedom you can give. The more critical the task then the more cautious or added supervision may be required in order to be about to extend a lot of freedom, especially if your job or reputation depends on obtaining or completing a professional result or outcome. Take care to choose the most appropriate style for each situation. For each example, the statements are simplified for clarity; in reality, you would choose a less abrupt style of language, depending on the person and the relationship. At the very least, a "Please" and "Thank-you" should be included in the requests.

Remember to ask the other person what level of authority they feel comfortable being given, are they comfortable working with or without a level of supervision or can they go it alone. Why guess? When you ask, you can find out for sure and agree this with the other person.

Some people are confident; others less so. It is your responsibility to agree with them what level is most appropriate, so that the job is done effectively and with minimal unnecessary involvement from you.

Involving the other person in agreeing the level of delegated freedom for any particular responsibility is an essential part of the 'contract' that you make with them.

These levels of delegation are not an exhaustive list. There are many more shades of grey between these black-and-white examples. Take time to discuss and adapt the agreements and 'contracts' that you make with people regarding delegated tasks, responsibility and freedom according to the situation.

Be creative in choosing levels of delegated responsibility, and always check with the other person that they are comfortable with your joint agreed upon and chosen level. People are generally capable of doing far more than you imagine.

The rate and extent of responsibility and freedom delegated to people is a fundamental driver of organisational growth and effectiveness, the

growth and well-being of your people, and of your own development and advancement.

## levels of delegation - examples

The examples below, of different delegation levels progressively offer, encourage and enable more delegated freedom. Level 1 is the lowest level of delegated freedom (basically none). Level 10 is the highest level typically (and rarely) found in organisations.

1 "Wait to be told." or "Do exactly what I say." or "Follow these instructions precisely."

This is instruction. There is no delegated freedom at all.

2 "Look into this and tell me the situation. I'll decide."

This is asking for investigation and analysis but no recommendation.

The person delegating retains responsibility for assessing options prior to making the decision.

3 "Look into this and tell me the situation. We'll decide together."

This has a subtle important difference to the above. This level of delegation encourages and enables the analysis and decision to be a shared process, which can be very helpful in coaching and development.

4 "Tell me the situation and what help you need from me in assessing and handling it. Then we'll decide."

This opens the possibility of greater freedom for analysis and decision-making, subject to both people agreeing this is appropriate. Again, this level is helpful in growing and defining coaching and development relationships.

5 "Give me your analysis of the situation (reasons,

options, pros and cons) and recommendation. I'll let you know whether you can go ahead."

Asks for analysis and recommendation, but you will check the thinking before deciding.

6 "Decide and let me know your decision, and wait for my go-ahead before proceeding."

The other person is trusted to assess the situation and options and is probably competent enough to decide and implement too, but for reasons of task importance, or competence, or perhaps externally changing factors, the boss prefers to keep control of timing. This level of delegation can be frustrating for people if used too often or for too long, and in any event the reason for keeping people waiting, after they've inevitably invested time and effort, needs to be explained.

7 "Decide and let me know your decision, then go ahead unless I say not to."

Now the other person begins to control the action. The subtle increase in responsibility saves time. The default is now positive rather than negative. This is a very liberating change in delegated freedom, and incidentally one that can also be used very effectively when seeking responsibility from above or elsewhere in an organisation, especially one which is strangled by indecision and bureaucracy. For example, "Here is my analysis and recommendation; I will proceed unless you tell me otherwise by (date)."

8 "Decide and take action - let me know what you did (and what happened)."

This delegation level, as with each increase up the scale, saves even more time. This level of delegation also enables a degree of follow-up by the manager as to the effectiveness of the delegated responsibility, which is necessary when people are being managed from a greater distance, or more 'hands-off'. The level also allows and invites positive feedback by the manager, which is helpful in coaching and

development of course.

9 "Decide and take action. You need not check back with me."

The most freedom that you can give to another person when you still need to retain responsibility for the activity. A high level of confidence is necessary, and you would normally assess the quality of the activity after the event according to overall results, potentially weeks or months later. Feedback and review remain helpful and important, although the relationship is more likely one of mentoring, rather than coaching per se.

10 "Decide where action needs to be taken and manage the situation accordingly. It's your area of responsibility now."

The most freedom that you can give to the other person, and not generally used without formal change of a person's job role. It's the delegation of a strategic responsibility. This gives the other person responsibility for defining what changes projects, tasks, analysis and decisions are necessary for the management of a particular area of responsibility, as well as the task or project or change itself, and how the initiative or change is to be implemented and measured, etc. This amounts to delegating part of your job - not just a task or project. You'd use this utmost level of delegation (for example) when developing a successor, or as part of an intentional and agreed plan to devolve some of your job accountability in a formal sense.

**contracts - 'psychological contracts',  
'emotional contracts'**

Variously called 'contracts' or 'psychological contracts' or 'emotional contracts', these expressions describe the process of agreeing with the other person what they should do and the expectations linked to the responsibility. The point is that people cannot actually be held

responsible for something to which they've not agreed. Everyone should be more committed to delivering a responsibility if they've been through the process of agreeing to a given 'contract'. This implies that they might have some feelings about the expectations attached, such as time-scale, resources, budget, etc., even purpose and method. You must give the other person the opportunity to discuss, question, suggest improvements, make changes and highlight issues concerning expectations attached to a delegated task. This is essential to the contracting process.

See [The Psychological Contract](#), and [Transactional Analysis Contracting](#) - both are highly relevant to delegation.

Certain responsibilities are effectively agreed implicitly within people's job roles or job descriptions or employment contracts, but commonly particular tasks, projects, etc., that you need to delegate are not, in which case specific discussion must take place to establish proper agreement or 'contract' between you and the other person.