

THE ART OF DELEGATION

There is an old saying, "If you want a thing done well, do it yourself." Excellent advice perhaps for the "loner" who shuns group endeavor -- but bad advice indeed for those who enjoy the chairpersonship of group work. Through the twentieth century, experience has taught that, "If you want a thing done well, learn to delegate!"

The ability to delegate is a mark of a leader, whether they are in charge of a busy office, manager of a bustling household, president of a professional organization, head of a corporation or a chief of state. Why is delegation so important? Because it subtracts from the overload, divides the work among many willing and able hands, multiplies the leader's effectiveness and the project's chance of success and adds to the worth of all -- the leader, the helpers, the project, the organization itself.

In an organization of volunteer workers, the better the delegation of tasks, the less chance of "burn-out" your Chapter will experience.

Advantages

Spreading responsibility and authority among Chapter members has many advantages. Among them: It saves the leader's time . . . saves other people's time . . . with more minds at work on it, the job is usually better done . . . it avoids one-person activity and develops a working team . . . share group goals with the members . . . provide leadership training and experience for members . . . develop members' initiative, ingenuity . . . stimulate group planning . . . avoid dependency on a few . . . eliminate resentment among members eager to work . . . put in practice democratic methods . . . keeps the whole Chapter active and makes it a dynamic organization!

Widespread member participation is a tested way to assure group growth, progress and success. When a group's small complement of leaders attempts to do everything itself, members are left sitting on the sidelines to become an audience instead of part of the show, to grumble, criticize, resign -- and join other organizations that let them know they are needed and put them to work promptly in worthwhile activities.

What Is Delegating

Delegating means assigning, entrusting to the care or management of others. It means working through others, not just telling someone else what to do. It is the process of assigning to someone else a part of the leader's responsibility. It is important because it concerns relationships between people who are working in unison to make theirs a better organization.

Delegating is a good way to get members interested in the plans, problems, and work-load of the Chapter so they will accept responsibility for getting the jobs done. It is asking others to find the solutions to the problems, rather than attempting to find them all one's self. Understanding what delegating involves, why it is an important technique in modern group work, what can properly be delegated and what cannot, and how to go about it -- all are points one should be thoroughly familiar with before accepting leadership responsibilities.

Art of Delegation

More than a set of rules is involved in learning to delegate; the person delegating must be receptive to the ideas of others, must be able to see others make mistakes -- and regard them not as losses, but as a process of growth for the individuals concerned and for the Chapter. By careful selection of members when assigning responsibility, failures are rare. When mistakes do occur, the best course is to delegate more perceptively next time.

Source of Responsibility

The Chapter's By-Laws establish lines of authority and responsibility. The By-Laws say who is to be responsible for what. Quite properly, however, (because this would be impossible) the By-Laws do not elaborate on how each officer or Director shall do the task assigned.



The experienced leader will discuss the program; project, plans and problems with capable members, choose those whose talents and abilities seem best suited, arouse their enthusiasm for the work, assign specific parts of their responsibility to them with expected date of completion and later follow up tactfully to assure that the jobs are done on time; but a leader leaves them free to decide how they can best complete the assignments.

Steps to Delegation

To become expert in delegating authority, whether in home, business, community or organizational life, begin with three simple steps:

First, examine the assignment. How big is it? What is its purpose? What goals must it reach? What period of time will it require? How many functions or areas of activity does it involve? What is the deadline for completion?

Second, break it down into logical parts. Typically, it may involve such various responsibilities as these: Securing speakers, arranging entertainment, determining an appropriate meeting place, providing decorations, assuring the preparation of notices and announcements, mailing invitations, promotional letters or other materials, printing programs, receiving, housing and transporting guests, writing releases for press, organizing group telephoning and writing reports after the event. If so, then thirteen functions are involved, giving this fortunate Director thirteen opportunities to share their authority and responsibility with others who are eager to work for the same goals. The success of their undertaking is assured.

Third, delegate. Get agreements, make assignments, set up controls -- but once the project is under way, make the person in charge responsible for the result. Don't try to supervise all the details. Allow freedom for others' decision and action.

Delegate within definite boundaries. Coach members in the job to be done, what is expected of them, give them a date for completion. Later, check on progress by making friendly, interested inquires.

Establish mutual trust between the delegator and the delegate. Respect the trust.

When asking a member to accept an assignment, let them know that they are an associate, not a subordinate. Explain the importance of the assignment. If they see the challenge, they will develop their full potential of service. Never ask someone to do a job "to help me out."

Reminders

Chapter leaders have many other opportunities to delegate responsibility during the year: When new members join, when a vacancy in an assignment occurs, when a new Chapter is organized or an existing one is reorganized, when a previous program or project is reactivated, when a new program or project is begun, when an unduly heavy work-load falls on one committee.

Foresighted Chapter leaders keep a careful lookout among members for unused talent, latent abilities, energetic and/or ambitious workers who would welcome a chance to serve. She also tries to distribute tasks in a manner to avoid Board of Directors "Burn-out".

Is a certain director overloaded? Give them a vice chairperson or other assistant. Is the Chief Financial Officer overburdened? Assign someone to help by undertaking some part of the work, which the Chief Financial Officer selects. Devise a checklist when searching out members for responsible jobs; screen each one: What are they most interested in? Are they willing and able? Can they work with people? Can they develop their full value to the Chapter? Do they have a reputation for getting things done? Can they do the job better than anyone else can?

At every opportunity, plan a sequence of responsibilities for members who show exceptional promise. This will give them training toward later, more responsible posts. Do it in easy stages so they can grow in capability. A series of small successes will build a background of experience and develop confidence.

A last and best reminder: Members should resolve to explore further the art of delegating authority. Practice it in all group relationships -- home, business and organizations.