

Letting go for growth

Business leaders need to acknowledge the benefits to their business of delegating work to others in their team: this means developing their own skills as well as adopting proven delegation strategies

It's hard to acknowledge that sometimes what is holding back the growth of a business is the business owner him or herself! Being an inspirational leader, an expert in his/her field and a great salesperson may not be enough. The astute owner also recognises what excellent leaders have long accepted – that at some point the team or business has to be allowed to develop and grow beyond the 'hands-on' capabilities of its leader.



He or she still leads and sets direction but also cultivates the potential of the team and organisation allowing them to flourish too. The ambitious business owner or manager invests in parallel in developing his/her capabilities and confidence to lead the organisation in playing the bigger game: distributing leadership among the top team facilitates this growth.

Let's take the example of a youth rugby team. The team manager starts off with a team of enthusiastic players who he moulds into a high performing team through many months of training. They learn technical ball skills and team skills from him and through competing against other teams continue to get better and better. Then, at some point the team and its leader face a choice.

Firstly the team manager could acknowledge that the players are outgrowing his ability to teach them new skills, and he could allow them to develop independently, searching, still under his guidance, for new challenges – maybe joining a different team, trying a new position. The high ability players go on to compete at the top level and other clubs look on with envy at the way talent has been nurtured and developed. This manager is a successful one but will not grow beyond a certain level

Secondly, the team manager can develop a culture of dependence, where he is in charge, all the decisions are made by him and development of players' skills beyond a certain point is discouraged, perhaps unconsciously, as it may upset the team. His team is successful in the short term but beyond his local league no one is ever aware of their potential. This manager appears successful, but this is not sustainable in the long term

Thirdly, the team manager can recognise that he needs help to take the team to the higher level. He invests in developing his own skills and works on building his confidence so that he and the team will succeed at the higher level. He may bring in the expertise that the team needs to build their capabilities and confidence, and shares leadership tasks within the team: together they go on to achieve great results. This manager has developed his own capability, as well as the team's, so that both can perform at a higher level.



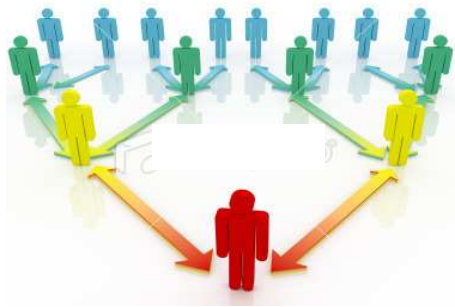
Business owners and senior managers need to acknowledge that, just like the rugby team manager, however successful they have been to date, how they develop themselves and their team is key to their future. Not facing up to the challenge may mean that they are now **the** limiting factor on future growth, and the success they have had so far is not sustainable.

As the business is in a position to expand, they now have to allow others to develop around them, so that the owner can step up to a new level, which is naturally a somewhat scary move. This might demand stopping using some skills that are currently strengths for them and that they enjoy, but they need to free up time to develop new skills.

So the first step is to delegate tasks to their team, in a way that develops those people and prepares them for higher things too. We find many people struggle with this need to delegate what they are good at to others. The uncertainty of the new is challenging and the certainty of the known is comforting; to grow you *must choose uncertainty*. So how to let go of the known?

Effectively delegating work to others is the first step in 'letting go' as your business grows. The key is to do this in a way that develops others and builds on their potential.

10 Tips on delegation:



1. Identify the tasks that ONLY you can do – these require the competencies, knowledge, skills and authority of your role. (Be ruthless!) You must keep these tasks.
2. List the rest of the tasks you do – these are all potentially delegatable.
3. Identify people in the organisation, who would benefit from development – this may be due to business demands or personal growth to keep the person interested and motivated.
4. Go through the tasks you could delegate and match with suitable individuals – they don't have to be your direct reports, it may be suitable to move some work to a peer.
5. Develop a training plan to build the individual's competence in doing the task, starting from their current knowledge and skill level. It will be you doing the training so make sure the plan fits both your and the individual's commitments. Delegation means handing over responsibility and authority for the whole task, so make sure you are thorough.
6. Discuss this growth opportunity with the individual and agree expectations *mutually* on the final responsibility and the hand-over period. This includes your commitment of support to the individual.
7. Don't dump the task on the individual, or delegate only a part of a whole task.
8. Adopt a supportive approach – this is best for both parties: you get to check the quality of the work and can be confident standards are maintained, letting go completely only when the individual is competent and confident; they get the support they need to grow into the task quickly.
9. Make sure you inform all concerned that this person is now responsible for that task and all communication should go to them.
10. Give recognition and praise where it is due, and support where it is needed

If you follow these 10 steps to effective delegation, you will be surprised how quickly your team members can step up to higher levels of responsibility and performance and that allows you the space to step up and take the business to the higher level.

"Remove the barriers that stop people from being as good as they can be."
W Edwards Deming.