

Women's Biz by Francie Dalton

Does delegating divide staff, but conquer no goal?

Are you exasperated by the frequency with which your subordinates complain about each other? Do you sit alone in speechless wonder that their behavior could be so adolescent? Have you lost your temper with their territorialism? Are you searching in utter futility for ways to inspire emotional maturity? Whatever the dimensions of suboptimal behavior, chances are the way you delegate has something to do with it.

If you've committed any of the following six classic errors in delegation, get busy correcting them.



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Disengaging. You can't ignore the feuds of your subordinates, no matter how childish they act. Despite your disgust, it's inappropriate to abandon them to playground scuffles. As the boss, it is part of your job to resolve high-level disputes. Intervene with clarification of outcomes for which each is responsible, establish lines of authority, and describe your collaborative requirements. Be explicit that their compliance will be linked to performance reviews and bonuses.

Caving on consequences. Developmental delegation requires not just the articulation of, but also the imposition of, consequences. When outcomes fall short

of your expectations, you must confront, even if doing so makes you uncomfortable. Your comfort cannot be the determinant for action. If you're unwilling to impose accountabilities, you've become a contributor to poor performance, and have lost the right to complain about it.

White-horse delegating. If you've established a pattern of stepping in to rescue subordinates from their mistakes, you're likely stunting their growth and eroding the respect of their subordinates. Additionally, the rescue generates tremendous resentment from their peers. Instead, help them develop self-sufficiency in rescuing themselves.

Overlooking side effects. Do some of your subordinates consistently fail to anticipate what assignments will encroach on others' functions, resulting in intractable boundary setting? When delegating, anticipate the possible impacts on and implications for other departments relevant to the assignment you're making, and require your subordinates to communicate appropriately to those individuals.

Valuing outcomes regardless of method. When delegating assignments, do you discuss methods of accomplishment with your subordinates? Unless and until you impose equal scrutiny on methods as well as on outcomes, the impact of, for example, managerial behavior that departs from organizational values will remain invisible to you, free to impede business results with impunity.

Duplicating efforts. Have you delib-

erately assigned the same task to multiple subordinates? Rather than inspiring healthy competition, this type of delegation actually causes serious conflict, which usually takes the form of silo behavior, a lack of collaboration and information sharing, even sabotage. Continuing to delegate this way is not only divisive, it also erodes morale and loyalty.

Delegating to weakness. In an effort to reduce the number of your direct reports, do you have marketing reporting to finance? Do you have engineers making public presentations to laypersons? Have you promoted your star salesperson into a management function? Have you staffed a highly regulated function with an entrepreneurial spirit? If so, you've delegated employees away from their core competencies. Rather than stretching and developing with this form of delegation, you've likely eclipsed their strengths.

In your zeal to do more with less with apparent ease, remember that your job will be easier and succession planning will be more successful if you can retain the best. Doing so in a competitive market place requires that your style of delegation is developmental — not divisive!

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