

The Power of Delegation

“Few things can help an individual more than to place responsibility on him, and to let him know that you trust him.”

—BOOKER T. WASHINGTON

Successful leadership of any organization is dependent on the ability to effectively delegate; good delegation is a defining feature of a “leader of leaders”. Often the model for leadership development is described in four simplified, but crucial, steps:

1. I do, you watch
2. I do, you help
3. You do, I help
4. You do, I watch

This model works well for apprenticing and discipling people to *do what you do*, but as organizations become more complex, there are obviously tasks and initiatives that need to be done for which you may not have any skill or expertise. And hopefully you’re leading leaders who are sharper than you...and have moved way beyond thinking you’re the smartest person in the room!

For instance, imagine you are weighing launching a new ministry in your church (or a new product line, or a new division or entrepreneurial opportunity) in which you know little about. What’s more, your time cannot be directly spent on this; you don’t have the space or experience to even do the first two steps.

This is where effective delegation comes into play.

DELEGATION SPECTRUM

DOMINATION  ABDICATION

When it comes to the process of delegation, many of us leaders slip into either end of the Delegation Spectrum. On some creative-type projects in which I had high interest, I tended to dominate. My fingerprints would be all over every aspect with a micromanaged obsession.

In other arenas, I would abdicate, thinking that the person would (or in my mind, should) be able to intuitively figure out how to make it work. Or worse, I might abdicate if it was something that I frankly was glad to hand off.

In both cases, I was the bottleneck. Not only was I being ineffective in the ultimate productivity of the organization, but I was unaware of the effect I was having on those who worked (or volunteered) with me. Or even if was aware, I just wanted to see the job get done.

DOMINATION

If you tend to lean into the *Domination* end of the spectrum, you're typically frustrated in several ways:

- You're obsessed with what your team member is working on and where they are all the time
- The results are usually exasperating to you
- You not-so-secretly would have done it differently (er, better...)
- You want copied on every email
- The devil-is-in-the-details...and you're constantly performing an exorcism. Let's be honest: you secretly enjoy correcting the details.

Believe me: your employee or volunteer feels you don't trust them, they're demotivated and are aggravated with being micromanaged. You make them feel dumb when they know they're not. They're quickly becoming disengaged and will either respond in two ways: trolling help-wanted websites or shuffling apathetically through their daily work.

What's worse, your personal productivity is stunted in the long run. While you're in the weeds, high-level strategic work is being compromised. Leaders must routinely remind themselves, "What is it that only I can do?"—because of the unique role that the leader of an organization has. Even more, you're creating "organizational liability" because your team can't perform without your heavy-handed involvement; their development is hampered because of the way you operate.

You're the bottleneck.

Your first assignment is stop offering your team the "how" and instead focus them on the "what". Second, in the long run, none of us is really indispensable...so it's not all about you. Get over it. As a friend would remind me, "*Dave, the sun will rise tomorrow without you.*" And third, get over your fear of failure, because the dark side of your behavior is: you're creating a culture of codependence. Culture is far more critical than isolated failures if you consider leadership a marathon.

A bottleneck affects the level of production capacity that an organization can achieve

ABDICATION

If you fall more at the *abdicating* end of the spectrum, you're probably finding yourself frustrated in these ways:

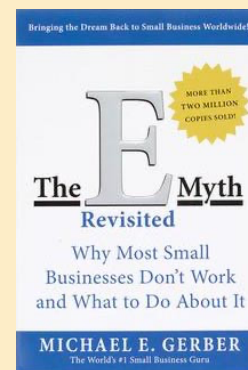
- Your initial euphoria at handing off a task is soon diluted by the less-than-stellar results
- You wonder why your people aren't more intuitive (read: like you!)
- You end up firing people because the job didn't get done the way it should have.

On the flipside, you probably don't realize the effect that abdicating has on your team members. For one, they assume you're really disinterested in their work. Deep down they know you gave them a job you didn't want to do. That may be true, but they should clearly understand that it's so you can focus on the things your position requires that only you can do. Otherwise they can easily default to thinking you didn't want to be responsible for a project or task. They may also be frustrated because they rarely meet with you and feel deserted. With no clear goal or measurements for success (and often no end in sight), they will eventually feel under-challenged and unfulfilled.

In his classic book *The E-Myth Revisited*, Michael Gerber vividly describes the point a leader abdicates:

*"There's a critical moment in every business when the owner hires his very first employee to do the work he doesn't know how to do himself, or doesn't want to do... And in a single stroke, you suddenly understand what it means to be in business in a way you never understood before. 'I don't have to do that anymore!' At last you're free. The Manager in you wakes up and the Technician temporarily goes to sleep. Your worries are over. Someone else is going to do that now. But at the same time — unaccustomed as you are to being The Manager — your new found freedom takes on an all too common form. It's called Management by Abdication rather than by Delegation. In short, like every small business owner has done before you, you hand the books over to Harry...and run."*¹

While you may feel a sense of freedom, it's really only short-lived. Chances are high that quality and/or long-range productivity will slip—not because you're not doing it yourself, but because tactics-



¹ Michael Gerber; *The EMyth Revisited: Why Most Small Businesses Don't Work and What to Do About It*; HarperCollins; Upd Sub edition (March 3, 1995); p.45-46

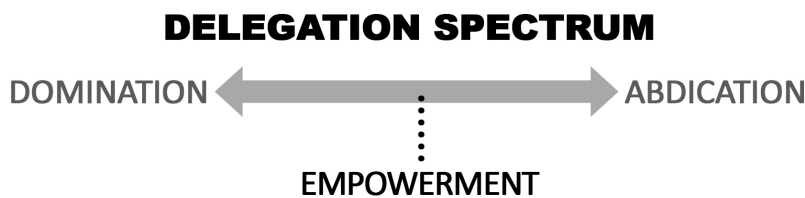
connected-with-values were not developed in a structured systemized hand-off. In short, your team member was not set up for success because of the lack of a development process. Instead, they were deserted. By you. Were you simply dumping a task or were you entrusting it?

And once again, you're the organizational bottleneck. >>>>>

THE SWEET SPOT

The bottom line is: domination equals a lack of trust; abdication signals a lack of care. Domination is all about micromanaging; abdication is simply avoidance.

The sweet spot in the delegation spectrum is learning how to *empower*.



Truly effective delegation is all about empowering someone with the authority and responsibility to *act in your behalf*. But like each system in every organization, there needs to be well-thought out processes for healthy delegation.

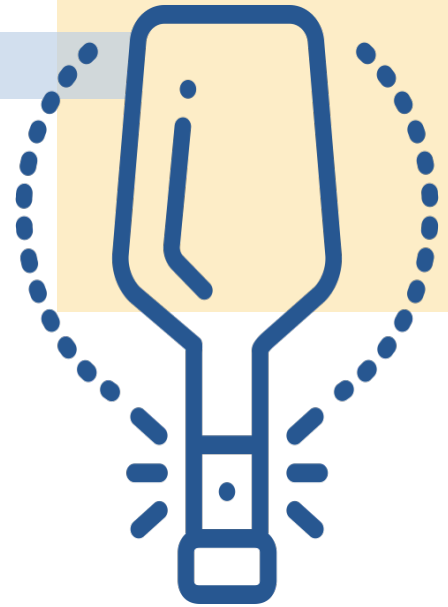
FOUR PHASES

Effective delegation typically follows four phases or stages: Preparation, Progression, Production and Possession. When a team member is given a project or ongoing ministry to tackle, they're made aware of the four-phase process that's involved as well as the end result: **Preparation → Progression → Production → Possession.**

1. PREPARATION

In the Preparation phase, the team member is given a picture of the problem and a clear assignment: explore, do research and gather information.

For example, suppose you recognize that a significant number of people in your church are single parents and as a result you've



anecdotally discovered that many are frustrated with the quality and price of daycare centers in your community. What's more, you believe a daycare could meet a huge "felt need" for people outside your church who are struggling as well.

You commission Julia—a leadership team member—the assignment to research the problem. You meet to discuss potential angles: contact churches in other communities that run daycares, look at the financial challenges and liabilities, interview church members, explore the possibilities within your children's ministries, and so on. But ultimately it's her project to think through the research angles. There is a reasonable calendar date for her report and you offer any help she needs, including a letter of authorization or a phone call to a key person in the community. But essentially, Julia runs the research herself along with any volunteers she recruits to help her. Once or twice during the research process, you meet briefly with Julia just to check in, offer any help on any roadblocks and reconfirm the due date for her research report.

- ▷ **YOUR ROLE: CLARIFYING AND COMMISSIONING THE ASSIGNMENT**
- ▷ **MEETINGS: INFREQUENT; ONCE OR TWICE DURING AN AGREED UPON COMPLETION DATE**



2. PROGRESSION

The Progression phase follows exploration with the go-ahead to begin the process.

In Julia's case, after her report and her suggestion that operating a daycare is not only viable, but would be a huge benefit to the community, you give her the go-ahead to launch it. Julia is excited, scared, nervous but hungry to prove her value to the organization. In this phase, you may have weekly meetings with her in order to be updated with her progress. You've both agreed on the final product, but not with telling her how. She knows she has your support and interest and may ask for advice or feedback on something she's trying. More than anything, you're watching her leadership capacity, resource management and ability to move a project along a timeline. You're engaged, but not actually involved in the tactics.

- ▷ **YOUR ROLE: SOUNDING BOARD**
- ▷ **MEETINGS: FREQUENT; WEEKLY DEPENDING ON THE SCOPE OF THE PROJECT OR DEPARTMENT**

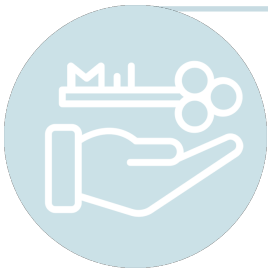
3. PRODUCTION

In this phase you're looking at results and outcomes. The daycare is in the early stages of operations; you want to know the metrics: Is it self-sustaining? What are the ongoing costs of operations? What's the satisfaction quotient of the users? What factors were unexpected?—and so on. You're also monitoring Julia's capacity and personal involvement and her ability to delegate as well; hopefully, your modeling has given her a delegation template that she can use with her volunteers.



- ▷ YOUR ROLE: "TRUSTEE"; YOU'RE LOOKING FOR RESULTS
- ▷ MEETINGS: A BIT LESS FREQUENT; MONTHLY

4. POSSESSION



In the final delegation phase, there is a clear, formalized handoff of ownership: Julia is fully in charge and accepts the responsibility of its success and reaps the benefits—she is in possession of this department/project/area. This is less about giving it away and more about entrusting—it rewards your leader with an intrinsic reward that they are trusted with something important to you and to the organization.

Your meetings with her—on this particular task—are informal and loosely once-a-quarter. At this point, you provide sincere affirmation and gratefulness for a job well done with periodic encouragement.

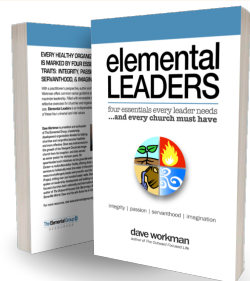
- ▷ YOUR ROLE: CHEERLEADER
- ▷ MEETINGS: RARELY & INFORMAL

MOVING FORWARD

Developing these four phases in your leadership development track is critical. While the process may seem slow and requires intentionality, the reproducibility of the system is simple and effective.

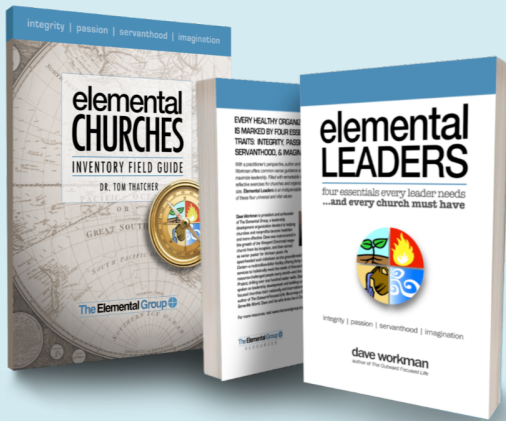
▷ DAVE WORKMAN

*Dave is the author of **Elemental Leaders: Four Elements Every Leader Needs...And Every Church Must Have**. Dave is President of Elemental Churches, a consulting group devoted to developing tools to help churches become healthier and more effective. For more info, visit www.elementalgroup.org.*



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