

# Delegating Effectively

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**Abstract: Delegation is an art and a science. Effective leaders know when and how to delegate in order to 1.) get more done and 2.) develop people. This white paper provides clear, actionable tips for effective delegation.**

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As a project leader, manager, or business owner, you may suffer from a fatal disease — one that can suck the very life force from not only you, but from everyone and everything around you. The disease is called delegitis and its symptoms include:

- Feeling overwhelmed not just by the amount of work, but also by the broad range of work that you need to do.
- The nagging suspicion that people around you — your team members and staff — are not as competent as you always thought.
- The increasing sense of responsibility with the knowledge that there’s no one who can do the work as good as you and as fast as you.
- The meltdown that occurs when you DO count on others and things go south.

If you’ve ever experienced these symptoms, you may have delegitis. In its final stages, it can devastate a team or company. In this article, we’ll talk about the causes of delegitis and the cures.

## Delegitis Linked to Monkey Bites

Has this happened to you: You’re walking down the hall and one of your team members greets you and says, “We’ve got a problem. You see, ....” As you listen, you realize that 1.) you know enough about the problem and possible solution to get involved, but that 2.) you don’t know enough to make a decision on the spot. So, what happens? You say, “I don’t have enough time right now. Let me see what I can come up with....” As you rush off, the problem — like a monkey — that your team member was carrying is now on your back. You own it. Your team member does not — CANNOT — do anything until you “see what you can come up with.”

The monkey — the problem — started off as your team member’s responsibility. Now it’s your responsibility. You don’t have time for yet another priority. And, your team member will be forced to wait for you.

Your team member gets frustrated with the bottleneck you’re creating. You are frustrated by the mounting problems you have to resolve (not to mention the monkey bites you’re receiving). Both of you are becoming angry at the apparent incompetence of the other person.

Why does this happen? Because you and the team member assume at the outset, wittingly or unwittingly, that the problem under consideration is a joint problem. It isn't. The problem is — and should remain — your team member's problem.

The solution is to get the monkeys off your back and keep them off. If a decision is required, make it. If more work needs to be done on the problem, have the subordinate do the work and provide you with 1.) a recommendation and rationale, 2.) a decision and report, or 3.) whatever else you need to solve the issue.

Keep monkeys off of your back by performing the duties required of you as a leader and by NOT performing the duties you expect of your team member. Become proficient at recognizing monkeys and adept at refusing to accept monkeys!

You'll get more done and so will your team members! And, you'll avoid the monkey bites that cause delegitis!

## Delegation

Most leaders accept monkeys because they believe that there are only two levels of delegation: 1.) I do it, or 2.) YOU do it. They further believe that if YOU can't do it, then I MUST do it. Ouch, another monkey bite!

Delegation actually happens at distinct levels. Knowing these levels helps you prevent monkey-jumping (and enables you to actually start coaxing some of the monkeys off YOUR back!):

### *Levels of Delegation*

Level 0	Wait for my direction (this really isn't delegating which is why it's level 0).
Level 1	Look into the problem — provide facts — I will make the decision.
Level 2	Look into the problem — provide me with alternative actions, make recommendations.
Level 3	Look into the problem — inform me about what you intend to do.
Level 4	Take action — inform me of final result.
Level 5	Take action — no further contact with me required.

## *Selecting the Appropriate Level*

Choosing the appropriate delegation level is fairly straightforward: “Does the person have the capability to do the work at the level I’m delegating?”

Capability implies:

1. **Time and priority;** the team member must know the time requirements for this task and must have — or get from you — the authority to complete the work.
2. **Skill;** the team member must have the skill or knowledge required to do this work or must be provided avenues for getting the skill or knowledge.
3. **Freedom/responsibility;** the team member must understand clearly what is allowed and not allowed, what kind of reporting/check-in is required for YOU to feel confident, and what success looks like. Then the team member must have the appropriate freedom and latitude to do the work without interference from you. (As leaders, we subconsciously invite most monkeys to jump onto our backs!)
4. **Confidence;** provide the appropriate level of support depending on the level of delegation. Too much support seems like meddling. Too little support seems like abandonment.

## *Delegate Effectively*

Delegate effectively by:

- Matching the task to skill set or development area.
- Discussing the end goal with the team member.
- Allowing for flexibility in solving the problem or accomplishing the task.
- Clarifying expectations, timelines, and support needs.
- Following up appropriately (depending on the task and the capability of the team member).
- Recognizing good performance.
- Coaching unsatisfactory performance.

## *Delegation Dos and Don'ts*

- **Do** ask yourself, “What is the most important thing I can be working on right now?” If you’re not doing that thing right now, consider delegating what you’re doing!
- **Do** be realistic. No one will do it as good as you or as fast as you the first time. Get over it. Your job in delegating is to determine what is acceptable and to manage to that level. Perfection is an unforgiving taskmaster.
- **Do** use delegation to develop team members. Increase the level of delegation and provide the support they need. Don’t know what support they need? Ask!
- **Do** monitor appropriately. Don’t confuse delegation with accountability. Even though you may delegate an entire task, you are still accountable at some level for its success. Check in. Recognize effort and results!
- **Do** ensure success. Provide communication guidelines to help prevent failures or stalls. “Give me an update every Thursday by 5:00.” “Call me if you have trouble getting the figures you need, and we’ll brainstorm....”

- **Do** network. Often leaders don't delegate because they don't know whom they can delegate to. Sometimes the best talent might come from outside your immediate team. Consider colleagues, other departments in the company, vendors, and organizations outside the company. Consider personal contacts to whom you can delegate non-work-related tasks (such as house cleaning, shopping, lawn care, etc.).
- **Don't** delegate things that only you can/should do. These include motivation, coaching, team building, organization, praising, reprimanding, performance reviews, and promotions.
- **Don't** hang onto pet projects only because you like them. A pet monkey bites just as hard as a rogue one! Look for opportunities to free up your time and effectively use your resources.

Recognize delegitis before it cripples you or your organization. Keep the monkeys off your back and use delegation techniques to increase your productivity and the health of your organization.