

# Delegation (or How to Keep Members Involved)

*Cassy Dierking Venters, Continuing Education Specialist*

Essentially, delegation is the art of spreading responsibility and opportunity around. It is an indispensable concept that can make "managers" out of "doers," get group members involved and teach members to accept responsibility gradually. Effective delegation isn't as easy as it sounds. Many first-time practitioners of delegation do so without thinking, and this can lead to frustration for everyone involved. So how do you do it?

## Have confidence

Don't limit yourself or anyone else with the "I-can-do-it-better-myself" fallacy. Have enough confidence in someone else to value their ideas about how to complete a task.

## Ask for volunteers

Interest and belief in a project is a strong motivator for success. Don't be upset if no one volunteers. Often, a person won't volunteer because he or she lacks confidence. Assign the task to someone you think would do a good job. Be smart and match tasks to people. Don't ask the finance person, who thinks art is a spreadsheet, to prepare publicity materials. You wouldn't want an artist who can't balance a checkbook to be in charge of finances either.

## Be specific

Provide enough information for the task to be completed. If you ask someone to plan the town and country dinner, let them know if that includes arranging for food, tables, chairs, transportation, publicity, etc. The best way to communicate expectations is to put them in writing. Identify the tasks to be done and the people who might be called on to assist. Be specific instead of saying Extension staff will assist, identify who will assist and what type of assistance they will provide. Many times delegation breaks down here because the people assigned to the task put off completion of the project because they never really knew what they were expected to do. If a task is being delegated to a committee, ask the chairman to keep records that can be passed on to the next committee chairman.

## Check progress

Don't try to impose your ideas or your way of doing things. A friendly "how's the project coming along?" could be all it takes to nip potential misunderstandings in the bud.

Some leaders are afraid to lose control of a task because they might not know what is going on if they delegate. They want to do it all themselves and take all the glory. Others fear the consequences of allowing committee members to make decisions on their own. Effective leaders are confident in sharing

responsibility with other members by delegating tasks. Effective leaders also have more time for themselves.

## Do delegate

1. Matters that repeat themselves, such as reoccurring events and tasks.
2. Minor decisions made most frequently.
3. Details that take up large chunks of time.
4. When you feel someone else has particular qualifications that suit the task, such as publicity for an event or the planning of a special project.
5. When someone expresses interest in the task.

## Don't delegate

1. Situations where you have to change someone's behavior.
2. A decision that involves someone else's morale.
3. The "hot potato."
4. Something that involves trust or confidence.
5. Something you would not be willing to do.