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## Perspective

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# Delegation is an important leadership principle

I want to share with you an unforgettable lesson on delegation that has forever changed my life for good and remains my gold standard. In one high-level organization, there was one particular leader who had a large amount of staff turnover within his stewardship yet continued to serve. Upon further investigation on the subject, the records confirmed that indeed there had been a high turnover, but the reason for it is very important. It showed that of his 22-member team, over the years, 19 had been elevated to other key senior positions within and outside of the organization.

When one of the team members was interviewed and asked what it was like to work with David, his response is the unforgettable lesson learned: “Why, I can relate in a single sentence. David wouldn’t breathe if he could get somebody else to do it for him.”

I have never been able to forget that amazing insight and key leadership principle: David wouldn’t breathe if he could get somebody else to do it for him. Here was a leader/teacher who cared enough to give others opportunities to grow.

This, to me, is the essence of real delegation – let others learn, take responsibility, be fully accountable and excel. The aim is to elevate the doers, give them leeway to make mistakes, share the spotlight and empower them to act on their own. In other words, develop them into leaders and teachers and help them climb the ladder of success with patience, trust and respect.

I really like Webster’s definition of delegate: “To entrust to another one’s authority; to appoint as one’s represen-



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tative; deputize: to assign responsibility or authority.”

That is not an easy thing to do, to entrust someone with one’s authority.

“It takes courage to allow others to make some mistakes,” said Stephen R. Covey.

“This courage consists of patience, self-control, faith in others and in their

potential, and respect for individual differences.” Covey is the author of the book “7 Habits of Highly Effective People.”

I have found there is a precondition to effective delegation. A great leader or teacher knows the value of making a request as opposed to issuing an order. Rarely, if ever, should a direct order be issued. It is much more effective to suggest, persuade, invite, consider and encourage the doer to use his best judgment. Further, assignments delegated should be carefully matched with the needs of the doer.

Here are a few key principles to consider when delegating responsibilities:

1. Clearly outline the assignment prior to extending it. Ask, what results are expected?
2. Consider what standard of performance is expected and required, as well as when the assignment should be completed.
3. Give the individual challenging assignments that will stretch him, that will require the active use of his mind as well as the use of his talents and skillset.

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4. Ensure that the person understands the assignment, its purpose, the available resources and the time set for completion. Take additional time to ensure that there is a clear understanding of the date of completion.

5. Ask the person whether she is willing to accept the assignment.

6. Allow the person to complete the delegated assignment, using her own initiative in completing the assignment. As a leader, you must be available and should provide assistance, advice and encouragement as needed, but not interference.

7. Periodically ask the person to return and report on the assignment. Be willing to accept only the person’s very best efforts. Genuine expressions of gratitude should be extended. Clarify expectations and redirect the person to renew her efforts to complete the assignment in an accurate and timely fashion.

8. Provide ongoing training and coaching. This is the key strategy for the person to experience real growth, progress and development. Growth will not result unless there is a consistent program of follow-through. Take time periodically to examine what has

been done, assess the outcome, do some replanning, and provide additional training and coaching.

And finally, a few key questions to ask yourself:

- Do you understand the importance of effective delegation?
- Do you have the leadership capacity to delegate important assignments that can and should be done by others?
- Do you have the desire to improve as a leader in guiding, encouraging, counseling, challenging, letting go and then following up, extending heartfelt praise and commendation, with those you work with?
- Are you willing to develop relationships of trust and accountability with those you have the opportunity to work with?

Be a leader who cares enough to let others grow by drawing upon their abilities and resources in order to truly build relationships of trust.

“In order to have the fruits of organized effort, we must have leadership; and in order to have leadership, we must delegate some authority, because leadership without authority is ineffective,” said Richard L. Evans, a well-respected church leader. ▲