

# To Delegate or Not to Delegate?

LEADERS & STAFF



# Practical Ministry Skills: To Delegate or Not to Delegate?

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**TO DELEGATE OR NOT TO DELEGATE?****Leader's Guide**

*How to use "Practical Ministry Skills" by BUILDING CHURCH LEADERS in your regularly scheduled meetings.*

*Welcome to BUILDING CHURCH LEADERS: Your Complete Guide to Leadership Training. You've purchased an innovative resource that will help you develop leaders who can think strategically and biblically about the church. Selected by the editors of Christianity Today International, the material comes from respected thinkers and church leaders.*

"Practical Ministry Skills" is completely flexible and designed for easy use. Each theme focuses on a practical area of church ministry and comprises brief handouts on specific aspects of that ministry. The handouts give a succinct and practical overview of the issues most relevant to your goals. You may use them at the beginning of a meeting to help launch a discussion, or you may hand them out as brief primers for someone new to a particular ministry.

This special theme on **To Delegate or Not to Delegate?** is designed to help you improve time management skills while also considering your responsibility as a leader to guide the spiritual development of your staff. You may either use these handouts for personal edification or for a group training session. Or you may choose to provide copies to the church board, staff members, or those involved with specific ministry teams at your church. Simply print the handouts you need and use them as needed.

To learn more about embracing tasks you might usually delegate, read Kent Hughes' article, "Going to Your Left" (pp. 3-4). To see why it's important to think of delegation in terms of our call to steward leadership, read R. Scott Rodin's "The Steward Leader" (p. 9). For practical tips on how to effectively delegate tasks so they shape staff into leaders, see John Maxwell's "Don't Dump—Delegate!" (pp. 10-11).

We hope this training tool will guide your efforts and encourage you as you seek to improve the emotional health of your church. And ultimately, we hope that your congregation, your ministry, and you will be blessed as you see God working through your ministry.

Need more material, or something on a specific topic? See our website at [www.BuildingChurchLeaders.com](http://www.BuildingChurchLeaders.com).

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**TO DELEGATE OR NOT TO DELEGATE?****Going to Your Left**

*Sometimes the tasks we'd rather avoid are exactly what we need to grow.*

Luke 12:48

Most basketball players are right-handed. They find it easier to dribble to the right than to the left. Going to the left requires them to use their other hand, which isn't natural. Only the best players are ambidextrous, able to play well with either hand.

Sometimes even pastors have to "go to their left."

Soon after I became a Christian in high school, I was certain God wanted me to preach. But I had a problem: shyness. Even today, when I'm with new acquaintances, I'm not the type to assert myself. I'm perfectly happy to sit at the back and follow other people's leads.

Since I had been called to preach, though, I knew I would have to deal with this weakness. So as a teenager, I intentionally took leadership positions: I was a student body officer in high school and a leader in my church youth group. In front of such groups, I felt terrified. At times I achieved the illusion of being a confident, articulate leader, but I wasn't. Nothing I did was spontaneous. Even with announcements, I'd prepare a script.

As a seminarian, I remained nervous when up front. When I led devotions, I made sure not to look at my wife, because if I caught her eye I would be distracted by how I was doing. At times I'd get twitches in my cheek, my eyes would water, and I'd blush. Yet I still felt called to public ministry. Today people tell me I'm an accomplished preacher, and I've been a pastor so long they think I naturally fit the role. Many in my congregation would never suspect my inherent shyness.

All this convinces me that pastoral ministry means more than using one's strengths for Christ. In fact, I've come to believe that Christ uses our weaknesses in ministry as much as our strengths.

Some people wonder, *Isn't it poor stewardship to work on a weakness? Doesn't God create us with strengths so we can major on them, and by doing so, work most efficiently and fruitfully for him?*

These questions contain a kernel of truth, of course. But I've found that strengths are only part of the pastoral picture. To be effective, I've had to work out of my weaknesses too. Here's what I've noticed along the way.

**Strength's Downside**

It's fun to work in areas of strength. I find ministry less toilsome and more enjoyable when I do. But strengths have a downside.

I've seen many gifted high school athletes, for example, who quarterback the football team, pitch and hit superbly in baseball, or score high in basketball. Then they go to college, and I never hear of them again. Why? The gifted young athlete had become uncoachable. He was so confident in his abilities, he didn't relish advice or practice. Soon he was passed by less gifted, more coachable athletes.

I've also known some gifted preachers who didn't go far. It was apparent that even in seminary they knew how to use language. Their timing was superb, and there was a magnetism about their physique and bearing. But because they met so much early success, they stopped honing their preaching skills. They stopped studying. They wouldn't take seriously others' comments. Instead of relying on the Lord in prayer and working hard, they began to rely on clichés and technique. They calcified. Giftedness doesn't last without effort.

We don't have much problem giving our weaknesses to God. Since we don't think we have much choice, it's easy to tell God, "I'm not good in administration. Lord, help me." The problem is giving him our strengths. Oswald Chambers says, "God can achieve his purpose either through the absence of human power and resources, or the abandonment of reliance on them. All through history God has chosen and used nobodies, because the unusual dependence on him made possible the unique display of his power and grace. He chose and used somebodies only when they renounced dependence on their natural abilities and resources."

Of course, God has also chosen to use people with great gifts—Augustine and his intellect, Spurgeon and his eloquence—but only when they renounced dependence on their natural abilities and resources.

But strengths don't lend themselves to such humility. In some ways, they make godly ministry more difficult. Up to this point I've used strengths and gifts as synonyms. Ultimately I know they are not. Some people are strong communicators but not gifted by the Spirit to preach. Others are efficient administrators, but they don't have the gift of godly administration. The difference is simply this: a strength is something we do well or easily and enjoy doing. A gift is a skill, strong or weak, that God uses for bearing spiritual fruit.

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I'm a good administrator, but I'm not naturally gifted in or motivated to do administration. I don't find it enjoyable. The constant drudgery of the task makes it difficult to face. However, the daily discipline of intelligently attacking a task I naturally dislike has made me a competent administrator. In fact, my staff says I run a "tight ship," and by God's grace, lives have been blessed. I've overseen programs and guided staff people well enough to minister indirectly to others—many more than I could have through my direct contact.

But if early on I had determined that because of my lack of interest in administration I shouldn't spend much time at it, I would have missed this God-given opportunity to minister.

Another danger of focusing on strengths is procrastination, personal and corporate. I often hear that a church should wait for the gifted, meaning those with natural talent, to come forth before it undertakes a ministry. Again, there's a measure of truth in that logic, but it can be turned the wrong way: if such-and-such isn't my gift, then I have no responsibility to get involved. I've been in too many situations, however, where waiting for talented people to come forth led to procrastination of obedience to Christ.

There are too many needful things to be done to wait around for someone to feel gifted. In fact, I've noticed that when some things need doing—like cleaning up after Sunday school or doing dishes after a church dinner or putting away chairs or repainting the choir room—there is an acute shortage of people who feel gifted! Nonetheless such things need to be done.

Strengths alone, then, do not a ministry make.

### Renaissance Pastor

Almost all pastors have to give leadership in more areas than they can possibly have strengths. To be an effective pastor, then, I must be a Renaissance pastor: I have to be an administrator, managing well the life and business of the church; a communicator, teaching my people the good news; a visionary, leading people to new vistas; a contemplative, listening to the voice of God; a compassionate person, hearing the hurts of people; a decision maker, making the many hard choices of church life.

If I were to concentrate my ministry in one or two areas of strength, I think my ministry would become flat. I've known ministers who think of themselves as primarily communicators. The problem is, when they are away from a pulpit or lectern, they are not very interesting people. They are even less effective pastors. Because ministry for me is an occupation that demands my attention in many areas, it stretches me—about as much as I can be stretched!

In addition, I've found that working on one skill often improves another. For example, I wouldn't say I have the gift of mercy. I don't enjoy, as some do, going from room to room in a hospital, ministering to the ill. But I regularly do hospital visitation, though I could easily delegate the entire task to the rest of my staff.

And I've never regretted going. First, I get to know my people. And second, by knowing my people, I've become a better preacher, one who can connect with their real struggles.

A Renaissance pastor is not only a more interesting person, but a better pastor.

—KENT HUGHES; adapted from Deepening Your Ministry through Prayer and Personal Growth, © 1996 by Christianity Today International.

### Discuss

1. What tasks do I usually pass off to others? Why do I pass them off? Might I be missing opportunities to develop weaknesses?
2. How can I actively develop my areas of weakness? How might this improve my ministry?
3. Have I become 'uncoachable' in any areas of strength? How could I consciously work to renounce dependence on my natural abilities?

**TO DELEGATE OR NOT TO DELEGATE?****Overseeing the Organization***Interview with Donald Seibert.*

Acts 20:28

*Donald Seibert has seen the inside workings of not only churches but high-pressure corporations. As chairman and chief executive officer at J. C. Penney, he gained a reputation as an effective organizer and peacemaker. And in peace, the company prospered.*

*He's also an active member of Long Hill Chapel in Chatham, New Jersey, where he leads Sunday night congregational singing, teaches Sunday school, lends his voice to various music ministries, and has been an elder and a trustee. For several years, he has also helped lead a small Bible study group of top corporate executives.*

*Here are his reflections from a lifetime of service within the complex organizations of church and business.*

**How does the pastor function as church administrator?**

The buck stops with the pastor, who must assume final responsibility for the way the church is administered. That's not to say every pastor is a good administrator. You have other functions to perform, and you'd probably like to spend more time on sermon preparation and counseling, for instance. But, regardless, you have to be accountable for how the church is run. You can delegate administration, but you can't delegate accountability. The big danger in delegating administration — if you then walk away from it — is that the wrong administrator can gradually change the whole program of your church.

**Does that mean a pastor must supervise each ministry of the church?**

Certainly not. I feel I've been a more effective leader when others have actually done the work. And I want everyone to know who accomplished what. It's the same with pastors. The feeling that you can do the job better yourself makes delegation difficult. But delegation is a must in any organization, and I believe people will execute a plan more successfully if it's *their* plan too.

**As a leader, how do you overcome the feeling that you can do the job better yourself?**

That's not easy to answer. I think it's a given that the pastor will not be the most skilled person in the church at everything. Otherwise he'd be leading the choir, singing the solos, and running the air conditioning. In my company, I can find someone who is better than I am at performing almost every function. Marketing, advertising, writing product specifications — you name it, someone can do it better.

But a symphony conductor is not usually the best French horn player, and he doesn't feel threatened. His role is to make the whole orchestra function to its potential. You should not feel threatened by an individual with great administrative skills, for example. Use him; help him realize his potential within the church.

**But what happens when the French horn player only wants to play solos? Doesn't participatory leadership encourage that kind of thing?**

I suppose in some cases it does. But then you have the other side: When a number of people participate in leadership and administration, *they* help deal with the would-be soloist. The responsibility doesn't rest entirely on *your* shoulders. Furthermore, in my church experience, most problems of this nature sprang from spiritual problems within the individual. They weren't the result of management styles at all.

**So you're democratic as opposed to autocratic?**

I am careful not to be autocratic. True, many organizations prosper under an autocratic leader. But in those places, you'll also find a lot of unhappy people. When they find they just can't work in that kind of environment, they leave.

And in a church with an autocratic pastor, a large part of the congregation becomes so dependent on this type of leader that when he steps down, he's almost impossible to replace. One of the principal responsibilities of a

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CEO is to assure the company that an appropriate successor is ready to step in if something happens. There can be no interruption of the company's growth. This is hard to pull off in companies led by an autocratic leader. In a sense, it is much better if my organization doesn't depend on me as an individual but rather on my part in the long-range goal-setting process. And when I leave, this process must go on.

—DONALD SEIBERT; adapted from Leaders, © 1987 Christianity Today International.

### **Discuss**

4. In what ways is a pastor's role like that of a CEO? In what ways is it different?
5. Do you fail to delegate tasks because you feel you could do them better?
6. How are you actively cultivating leaders who could step in if and when you leave?

**TO DELEGATE OR NOT TO DELEGATE?****Clearing the Clutter***How to handle all the things that come across your desk.*

Ephesians 5:15-16

Administrative clutter includes paperwork, work done by you that should be done by others, and snarls in communication or the chain of authority.

Administrative clutter seems to come from everyone and everything around us, like debris carried by swirling flood waters. But its real fountainhead is within, springing from the needs, fears, and desires of the leader. Here are some essentials for straightening up administrative clutter.

**Release the need to control everything.** Someone asked me once, "Are you still running the church?"

"No, I haven't run the church for about five years," I answered. "I'm leading it, but I have a lot of people running it."

The greater our need to control every decision, practice, program, and activity of our church, the more nonessential matters will consume our time and energies.

For example, while I need to train those who work around me, I also must let them work in the way they find best. Recently I've hired a new personal assistant. She's a competent administrator who organizes her schedule and mine with a different system than the one used by my previous assistant — an extremely competent woman as well. But I don't care how she organizes the details as long as we get as much done, and done as well. As long as people hit the ball, I don't worry how they swing the bat.

At Skyline, at least ten people know more about what's happening in the church than I do. I have confidence in them, and I've released control. I have no qualms about giving them credit for what's getting done.

We've made light-handed leadership our church policy. At Skyline, decision making and problem solving are done at the lowest possible levels, by the staff members, committee members, or leaders directly working with ministries. The board doesn't decide whether or not the church should buy a new typewriter! The only matters that come to me or the board are those only we are qualified to handle. (We even canceled one board meeting this year because we didn't have enough to talk about.)

**Overcome the need to be needed.** When our need to be needed gets out of hand, we attract clutter like an electromagnet attracts scrap iron. As pastors, we like being the information hub of the church. We feel important when time and again we're asked, "Pastor, what should we do about ...?" It's draining, but we like it. Having to know all, though, fills our ministries with clutter.

I do several things to repel information clutter. I've told my staff and leaders that while there are some things I always want to know — the mood of the church, relationship problems among staff or leaders, decisions that aren't working — I don't need or want to know everything.

For example, my assistant meets for lunch regularly with various leaders in the church, and she returns with a list of ten or so things that are happening in their areas. I've told her, "Select the two or three most important points on the list. That's all I can remember or do anything about anyway."

In other settings I handle information in one of four ways:

1. Don't receive it. People in your church learn what information "turns your crank." If someone passes "scrap iron" to me — for example, minor conflict among workers in one of the departments or criticism of a staff member's program — I'll dryly say, "Okay; thanks," and that's all. I won't dismiss it arrogantly, but people get the message.

2. Receive information with someone who can manage it. When I attend a meeting where there's a possibility I'll walk away with something to do, I bring my assistant. I can delegate the work to her on the spot without having to explain the context of what needs doing, as I would if I left her at the office.

This can be done with lay people, but we have to get comfortable bringing others into the process. A secretive, play-things-close-to-the-vest approach to ministry insures that your vest pockets will be full of clutter.

3. Receive information after someone has worked on it. When we need to process information into a message, article, or report, or when we need to research a subject, we have a choice between two leadership styles. We can do the spadework ourselves and then hand it to another for reaction, editing, and improvement. Or we can have someone research and put together the information, and then we review, edit, and refocus as needed.



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My preference is the latter. After someone else does the first 80 percent of the thinking, I add my 20 percent. After my assistant carries the ball as far as she can, I take it the rest of the way.

4. Receive it and immediately do something about it. My goal here is to plug information into a calendar, file, or box so I don't have to bother remembering it. Anything to remember is clutter.

When I go to denominational conferences, for instance, in my briefcase I have files labeled for the information I'll receive or produce — one file for my assistant, another for our executive pastor, another still for sermon outlines and illustrations. As I think of things to do or receive printed material or write messages, they immediately go into the appropriate file. That way I can forget about them, and when I get home, I just hand out files.

**Release jobs that are enjoyable but not essential.** I used to keep track of the numbers at church: offerings, attendance, baptisms, conversions. I would spend an hour each week compiling records, as gleeful as a toy maker at Christmas, thanking God for progress, envisioning new goals.

At my second church one day, I was seated at my desk with ushers' reports and financial reports spread out before me. Suddenly I realized, *This is ridiculous! I'm spending my time with an adding machine and graphs when someone else could do this and give me the results.* So I sheepishly got out of my chair, walked out of my office, and said to my secretary, "Give me fifty minutes, and I'll show you what I'd like you to do for me."

At the time, that was one of the hardest things for me to let go of, but it was unnecessary clutter. Obviously we need some emotional rewards in our work, and I could have kept doing it for the sake of enjoyment, but I chose to release it to devote my energies to "new and better toys."

**Overcome the fear of a subordinate's failure.** If you can't bear a job done wrong or risk the failure of subordinates, the work piles will litter not their desks but yours.

When our executive pastor hired his first employee, he quickly discovered he chose the wrong person. But I couldn't fault him, because when I look in the mirror I see someone who makes mistakes every day. So we sat down and discussed how to prevent a repeat performance.

I have an understanding with subordinates. They have the freedom to make mistakes as long as they allow me the freedom to step in and use those mistakes as teaching opportunities. I take time weekly to sit down with my executive pastor and discuss wins and losses.

Delegating clutter is never enough. Without adequately training workers, we actually increase snarls. For example, when others seek help and your subordinate can't solve their problems adequately, people lose confidence in your subordinate and quickly learn to bypass him or her and come straight to you. My aim: to recruit the right people and train them until they inspire confidence, until others would rather deal with them than me!

God is creatively at work in his church. But the pastorate, like virgin wilderness, can be a tangle, cluttered by trees, underbrush, and rocks.

These acres don't change from wilderness to productive farmland without brush clearing, rock collecting, and sod busting. Ministry doesn't become a place of order and fruitfulness without clutter clearing.

— JOHN MAXWELL; adapted from The Time Crunch, © 1993 Christianity Today International.

## Discuss

1. How much "clutter" do I deal with in a given week? How could I better employ my staff to help with these tasks?
2. What areas of my church's ministry do others know more about than me? In what areas could I cultivate other go-to leaders?
3. How have I handled mistakes by subordinates in the past? How could I give them more freedom while still using slip-ups as teaching opportunities?

**TO DELEGATE OR NOT TO DELEGATE?****The Leader's Highest Calling**

*Delegation is about more than just getting things done.*

1 Peter 4:10

*A good leader is steward not just of his or her own time and talents, but also of those of the people they lead. In his book *The Steward Leader*, R. Scott Rodin outlines ways in which leaders can view delegation as part of their calling to be leaders who carefully steward the resources they've been given.*

**Delegation as Stewardship of Others' Talents**

Steward leaders must be brutally honest with themselves in knowing their own weaknesses and addressing them. For some, this requires accountability. For others, it means the practice of disciplines that include self-assessment and honesty. For all of us, it requires a daily “dying and rising”—dying to the sin of control and ownership that leads to bondage, and rising in freedom to the life of the godly steward. As we do this daily, we isolate those areas where we are most vulnerable to our kingdom-building tendencies. Then we can name them and, through prayer, call all the resources of heaven to combat them.

Steward leaders are united with their people on this journey of faith. As such, they develop their people as holistic stewards, see them as ends and not means, and employ their skills in ways that bring them fulfillment and joy. This egalitarian understanding of the role of the steward leader serves that leader well when it comes to the challenge of organizational consistency. Involve your people, seek accountability, and develop the value of consistency as central to your mission. As your people journey further in their transformation as godly stewards, they will become ever more vital partners in cultivating and maintaining organizational consistency in living out the call to be holistic stewards as a community.

**Delegation as Strategic Planning**

The steward leader helps people excel in ways that transcend their own beliefs about their capabilities. If you have ever experienced significant growth as a result of great leadership, you know that steward leaders stretch us, challenge us, and make us better at what we do. They help us discover new talents and develop our abilities to the highest level possible. They put us in situations where we can rely most often on our most reliable and effective abilities, and in doing so we find not only success but also satisfaction. All this is a stewarding of our people's talents. It is a process of continually encouraging their unfolding.

Here the steward leader can use effective strategic planning as a tool in the efficient employment of people's best skills, matched to their best application. By its very nature, strategic planning seeks to match the best resources of an organization to the most important issues that will determine its long-term vitality and growth. In writing plans we ascertain the strengths and weaknesses of ministries to develop goals that build on the former and overcome the latter. When we write objectives to address our goals, we assign them to the people uniquely skilled to achieve them, and we provide the resources for those people to be successful.

Marshaling the right people to do the right jobs with the right resources to achieve the right goals at the right time is one of the highest callings of the steward leader. And for that reason, effective strategic planning is one of the highest forms of organizational leadership.

—R. SCOTT RODIN; adapted from *The Steward Leader* (InterVarsity Press, 2010). Used by permission.

**Discuss**

1. How do I currently view delegation as part of my calling as a leader?
2. What talents do each of my staff members possess? How are they using these talents currently? Is there anything I am doing they could do better? What types of tasks could help them grow in these talents?
3. How can I help my staff transcend their own beliefs about their capabilities?

**TO DELEGATE OR NOT TO DELEGATE?****Don't Dump—Delegate!**

*Successful delegation nurtures and develops the gifts of those around us.*

Psalm 32:8

"I owe whatever success I have attained," said Andrew Carnegie, "by and large to my ability to surround myself with people who are smarter than I am." Delegation is an opportunity. After others get training and experience, they may be more gifted than we are at their ministries. And although it initially takes more time to give work to others, in the long run we save time.

That only happens, however, if we delegate rather than dump. We dump work on others when we give jobs on the spur of the moment; if we fail to take into account others' unique gifts, personalities, and interests; if we don't provide coaching, preparation, and information; if we give out jobs because we're frustrated rather than because we have the right jobs for the right people. Dumping always causes more problems than it solves.

All I did in my early ministry was dump. I didn't understand the value or discipline of delegating, and I certainly didn't know how to do it. I would try to do everything myself, and when I ran out of time and a job was undone, I would dump. As time went on I discovered that delegating is equipping. That changed my approach to assigning responsibilities.

Successful delegation has the following characteristics:

*Know yourself.* This rule governs all the points. One person does not have the gifts or time to do everything.

One of the greatest things you discover is your strengths and gifts. I know what jobs are required of me by the church, what jobs I get the greatest return doing, and what jobs give me a personal sense of reward. All other jobs I try to delegate.

*Know your team.* "Don't put a sword in a madman's hand," says one English proverb. That's a strong way of saying that the wrong people can do a lot of harm both to themselves and others (and me!). So however great the need, I don't give a ministry to others unless I think they're suited.

*Clearly define the task.* This doesn't mean always telling someone how to do a job. If people are capable, often it is better to allow them to figure out how to do a job in the way that best suits them. But I must tell workers what results I'm looking for and what I expect of them.

*Provide the resources necessary to accomplish the task.* That may include a budget, facilities, training seminars, curriculum, promotion, etc.

*Encourage feedback.* One sure way to make a person feel abandoned is to fail to communicate. After a person begins a job, there will always be questions, problems, refinements. I want to help people learn, and on-the-job training is the most effective way. I like to ask the questions: How are you progressing? Any problems? Anything I can do to help?

*Clarify the level of authority given.* How free are people to make decisions and take action? Are they to (1) report a situation to you so that you make all decisions, (2) make recommendations about their work though you still decide, (3) choose a course of action but wait for approval, (4) deal with situations but advise you of what they did, or (5) handle their responsibilities without advising you of their actions?

*Hold people accountable.* I try to keep in mind a rule of accountability I read some time ago: when I delegate authority to act, I don't abdicate my responsibility to get the job done. If the people to whom I delegate responsibility fail, that, in the end, is the consequence of my leadership — it has failed in that instance. So that reminds me that I have the responsibility to hold people accountable.

*Recognize effort and reward results.* I want to make people glad they have been working for me. So I tell people when they've done good work, and I like to make that known publicly, from the pulpit or through the church newsletter.

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When I follow these guidelines, I delegate successfully, and the person to whom I've delegated wins, the church wins, and I win. My mind has been freed up, as has my schedule for other, needful tasks.

— JOHN MAXWELL; adapted from The Time Crunch, © 1993 Christianity Today International.

### **Discuss**

1. What are my strengths and gifts? How do my current tasks give me a personal sense of reward?
2. When I have given others tasks in the past, how have I communicated my expectations? How might I better communicate guidelines in the future?
3. How do I feel about the statement, “I pride myself in not having a clue about many things going in our church”? Does this make me uncomfortable? What keeps me from feeling this way?

**TO DELEGATE OR NOT TO DELEGATE?****Working through Leaders***Align unique gifts with specific tasks.*

Exodus 18:17-23

**Your Unique Contribution**

After placing the right people in the right spots, we have to make critical decisions about which tasks to do ourselves and which to accomplish through them. Naturally, there are certain tasks we never delegate. Peter Drucker refers to those as a leader's "unique contribution," what he alone brings to the organization. Leaders shouldn't delegate what they are best positioned and gifted to accomplish.

A senior pastor, for instance, typically is gifted and trained as a teacher. Often his most significant contribution is teaching on Sunday mornings. So when he gets overloaded, he should focus on message preparation and delegate competing tasks to others.

My unique contribution at Willow Creek is to build our subministries. No one else is so commissioned to help our ministry directors develop their departments. Someone else can type my correspondence, lead singles meetings, or administrate our magazine, but no one else is called to oversee our department leaders.

How do we determine our unique contribution? By considering our gifts, passions, talents, background, personality, and temperament. Given that insight, we can then decide how we can best fulfill the requirements of our particular position.

I try to be a student of myself: Who did God make me to be? What has he called me to do? The best hours of my day should be given to make that contribution.

**Match Gifts to Tasks**

After I determine my slice of the circle, I need to look at the remaining tasks and ask, "Who can I find to help me complete the circle?" The key is to find people who feel about their slice the way I feel about mine.

For example, for a number of years I worked with our compensation committee. However, as the staff grew, the salary schedule became increasingly complicated. With no training in this area, I felt terribly inadequate. Yet technically, the responsibility fell in my circle.

At the time, a man in my small group was vice-president of personnel in a major corporation. His Ph.D. and vast corporate experience made salary negotiations a natural for him—and what's more, he enjoyed it.

Today he heads our compensation committee. Because of his expertise, our salary structure is worked out in great detail and everyone benefits. The staff is better served, the man gets to use his talents to help the church, and I am freed to do the tasks I do best. That happened because I found a leader who feels as strongly about compensation schedules as I do about ministry development.

**How and When?**

After determining which tasks to do ourselves and which to delegate, we must decide how much responsibility to give and when to give it. At Willow Creek, we operate on this principle: Faithful with little, faithful with much. We start by giving people a small task or responsibility, and as they prove faithful in that, we give them more.

Sometimes seminary students call and say, "I need an internship. Can I teach at Willow Creek?" We always turn down offers like that. We might offer students the opportunity to lead a small group in their home, and if that works out, expand their leadership role. But we won't bestow great responsibility without a track record of faithfulness and effectiveness in our fellowship. "You start by speaking to five," we tell them, "and then we'll see about fifty."

## TO DELEGATE OR NOT TO DELEGATE?

We expect potential teachers to display strong character, evidence a robust spiritual life, and build relational credibility. Then, if their teaching gift is affirmed, we find a place for them in ministry. The same expectations help us determine what initial administrative or service roles to offer other possible leaders.

While we shouldn't give too much responsibility too soon, it's important to challenge those through whom we work. In fact, it may be more damaging to expect too little of our workers than too much.

### The Challenge Imperative

Typically, people are drawn into leadership because others have noticed their competence in a variety of ways. Usually they're energetic, busy people who have proven they can do a job well. When people like this are bitten by the ministry bug, and when they taste the fulfillment of fruitfulness, they want to move ahead.

That's why it's so important to challenge them. To give them too meager a task, to expect too little, to fail to increase their responsibility at the proper time, is an insult. Competent people want to grow into positions of greater responsibility.

Naturally, I wouldn't expect someone who has never worked in children's ministry to assume a lead teacher role in Sunday school. I'd start such a person with a more manageable challenge, perhaps as a small-group leader. However, after a year or so, when the person's competence has been proven, I'd likely make him or her a lead teacher with twenty-five to fifty students.

It's necessary, of course, to talk with workers and monitor their progress. I can't dump a challenge on them and disappear. If I let colleagues down in their responsibilities, I'm not challenging them; I'm losing them.

Managers need to walk a fine line. They need to move people along at a reasonable rate so they don't feel overwhelmed. But they also need to remember that competent people usually feel most effective when they're stretched, when their responsibilities pull them a step beyond their comfort level. High-potential leaders would rather be roused by challenge than indulged by comfort.

It's that realization that keeps me on my knees. I need divine discernment to know how to challenge workers without overwhelming them.

I tend to be an optimist who sees the best in people and expects the best from them. I want to tell leaders, "You can do it. I know you can." But I can't say that to just anyone. So I don't glean leaders from whatever grows in the field. I prayerfully choose people who display character, spiritual maturity, and competence. Most often, people like that rise to the challenges of ministry.

— DON COUSINS; adapted from Growing Your Church through Motivation and Training, © 1997 Christianity Today International.

### Discuss

1. Break down a typical day, or week, of tasks. What do you spend the most hours doing? Is this your unique ministry contribution? How could you adapt your schedule so you spend more time doing what God has called you to do?
2. How do you determine the delegation of tasks? Are you challenging your staff members with their work?
3. How could you better walk alongside your staff members as you help grow their gifts and still keep them from feeling overwhelmed?

**TO DELEGATE OR NOT TO DELEGATE?****How to Know When It's Time to Delegate***Practical tips for busy ministry leaders.***Colossians 4:5**

When lay leaders heard their pastor speak of over-work, they often echo the words of Jethro, Moses' father-in-law: "You've got to delegate more." But pastors often face a bind that others don't recognize. Like Moses, we sometimes must learn to trust others with responsibilities that we're reluctant to give up, but we also know that just because it would be nice to delegate some jobs doesn't mean there are people lining up to help. Here are some guidelines for navigating this organizational challenge:

**Keep a personal activities log to determine what you can delegate.** For about a month, make a list of every task you do and every decision you make. Then identify which tasks and decisions you might delegate. Which are rare or occasional duties and which are regular? Prioritize the list and consider what two or three top responsibilities could be delegated.

**Consider to whom you might delegate these duties.** Begin with prayer. If the Lord wants these responsibilities off your plate, he will prepare someone to help you. Ask other leaders for suggestions. Go through your directory. Warning: Sometimes when you publicize a need, you get an unqualified volunteer. Turning that person down can be awkward.

**When you've chosen someone, meet with him or her.** Help the person understand this task as a significant ministry—to you, if no one else. Tell the person why you selected him or her and what this person's help would mean to you. Before the meeting ends, pray with the person about the task.

**Be specific about the job.** If you aren't clear about what you want done, you can't expect someone else to fill in the blanks. Be clear about deadlines, but don't expect too much too soon. Discuss what to do when you are gone. After the meeting, send a note or e-mail summarizing the task in writing, with the agreed-upon details and deadlines.

**Delegate the authority needed to do the job.** When you ask someone to do a job, give that person the authority and the budget to complete it. Assure the person of your availability, but explain that you won't micromanage.

**Give the person an out.** Agree on a three-month trial period, or ask a person to try a new task four or five times and let you know what they think. People are more likely to try something if it doesn't obligate them indefinitely.

**Maintain accountability.** As a supervisor of delegated tasks, you are still accountable for their completion. A busy pastor delegates many jobs, so it can be difficult to monitor everyone's progress. Put reporting deadlines on your calendar so you won't forget to follow up.

**Say thanks often.** Do not take people for granted, especially volunteers. Write a thank-you note after they finish a task. When you pass people in the hall, remind them of how much you appreciate their efforts. Ask occasionally if they have everything they need.

**Remember that you are shaping a disciple of Jesus.** This is your opportunity to help others grow by doing. Encourage their initial efforts, giving them space to find their own way of doing things, and let them learn from their mistakes. You may be pleasantly surprised at how creative people are when they have freedom to grow. Remind them to pray through the tough spots, and help them remember that this is a ministry to the Lord.

— KENT R. DAVIES; adapted from *The Church Leader's Answer Book*, © 2006 Christianity Today International.

**Discuss**

1. What is holding people back from volunteering for tasks? How could I better address that issue?
2. When was the last time I thanked the people who help me in ministry? How could I do better?
3. How does my leadership shape disciples of Christ? How could I improve my leadership to better reflect this call?

## TO DELEGATE OR NOT TO DELEGATE?

### Further Exploration

*Books and other resources to help you delegate.*

📖 [BuildingChurchLeaders.com](http://BuildingChurchLeaders.com): Leadership training resources from Christianity Today International.

📖 [LeadershipJournal.net](http://LeadershipJournal.net). This website offers practical advice and articles for church leaders.

***The Steward Leader*** by R. Scott Rodin. (InterVarsity Press: 2010, ISBN 9780830838783). Whether in churches, not-for-profit ministries, or in business, the need for sound leadership is readily apparent. Drawing on his years of experience in development and fundraising and his extensive theological training, Scott Rodin offers a new paradigm—a transformational approach to leadership that is biblically sound, theologically rich and practically compelling.

***Shepherding God's Flock*** by Jay E. Adams. (Zondervan: 1986, ISBN 9780310510710). Professor Adams outlines and provides direction for three primary responsibilities of shepherding: pastoral ministry, counseling, and leadership. Topics include candidating, premarital counseling, delegation and sharing, congregational meetings, and more.

***A Christian's Guide to Leadership for the Whole Church*** by Derek Prime. (Evangelical Press: 2006, 9780852346020). Unique because it must be always and completely subject to Jesus Christ, church leadership is vital at *every* level of the congregation. Drawing on his pastoral experience at home and abroad, Prime offers guidance on Christian qualities, efficiency, dealing with colleagues, delegation, common problems, and more.