



Leadership NOTES

Principles of Purposeful Delegation

Introductory Note:

"Leadership is often defined as getting work done through people. Servant leadership seeks to get people done through work." Anonymous

"Tend to the people, and they will tend to the business." John Maxwell.

Peter Drucker, the renowned author and business consultant, was once asked, "What is the most important decision an executive makes?" Drucker answered: *"Who does what."*

"Servant-leaders delegate intentionally, mindfully – and purposefully – with the goal of helping others to grow and develop." Joe Iarocci

Delegation is an essential leadership function. In essence, delegation is simply the division of tasks and projects among those who are available to do the work. Delegation is an important time management skill for executive leaders since it entails not attempting to do everything oneself.

At a more strategic level, delegation also offers an opportunity for the development of skills and judgement in others that will benefit the organization in the future as delegates matriculate into positions of senior leadership. So, delegation is beneficial in the present, as a time management tool, and it is beneficial in the future, as it develops and prepares employees for future roles.

Under the umbrella of servant leadership, where one acts upon a calling to serve the individuals in an organization and not simply to direct them, delegation has an additional, higher purpose. The highest purpose of delegation is to prepare and develop people for their own benefit, not just the organization's benefit. Delegation should be used to purposely enrich the jobs and lives of others. Fortunately, well designed delegation can accomplish all three aims at once... time management for the leader, skill development for the organization, and job enrichment for the employee.

Principles of purposeful delegation

Give everyone a promotion. We do our best work, and we grow the most, when the task represents a challenge, yet is within our reach. Rather than delegating tasks that are well within a person's current abilities, consider delegating tasks that will stretch the person's abilities.

Not only will the person develop through this approach, they will also likely give the task a higher priority and bring their best effort to the task since it represents a stretch opportunity. Give APs principal work to do, administrative assistants AP work to do, and volunteers/interns administrative assistant work to do.

Connect work to mission. We enrich a person's work life when we take care to clearly link the delegated task to the larger purpose or mission of the organization. Think why before what and how. An AP supervising a JV basketball game will likely do a better job and be more enriched if they see themselves "creating a positive school climate" than if they see the work as merely "covering the game."

Be transparent about delegation that is not particularly enriching or developmental. Be honest. If a task is just a task, say so. Leaders do well to avoid saying "I have a growth opportunity for you," when the task is really just a non-development bit of dirty work that, nonetheless, needs to be done. Not every task in one's career will be a developmental bonanza. No one expects

that people take pride in pitching in and doing whatever it takes for the team to be successful. When that's what's on menu- say so. And... say THANKS.

Delegate for breadth and depth of experience. We can likely get better work in less time if we keep delegating the same types of tasks to the same people. People build craft mastery when they are able to work on several rounds of the same or similar task. Craft mastery is valuable and is part of an enriched job experience. Leaders should also, however, delegate for breadth of experience. Results will be slower and the quality of the work will be less perfect, but the overall development of the delegate will be greater.

A personal note: In my first job as a High School AP, I recall how our principal, Dr. Bill Shipp, rotated all the AP assignments among the four of us. At first this seemed ineffective to me. Why not just keep us all doing the same thing so that we could get really good at it? I quickly realized that Dr. Shipp's purpose in rotating our responsibilities wasn't just to get the job done. He was purposely preparing each of us for the future role of principal. When that day came, I was much better prepared for the job. Purposeful delegation is *"getting people done through work."*

Involve employees in designing their delegated responsibilities. There is great effect in overtly communicating to an employee "My purpose in delegating to you is not only to get the work done, but to develop you and enrich your work. Tell me about your goals and interests, so I can do a better job of designing your work to offer growth opportunities in those areas." It's also wise to add "I won't always be able to delegate work that is in your strike zone, but I'll be better able to do that with your input."

Go for empowerment, not abandonment. When we miss the mark with purposeful delegation we usually miss in two ways. First, we delegate, but then micromanage the work to a degree that it subtracts the growth opportunities for the delegate. Or, we delegate, then abandon the delegate with no support, guidance, encouragement, or feedback. It's better to aim for empowerment which provides both support and autonomy; feedback and responsibility.

"An empowered organization is one in which individuals have the knowledge, skill, desire, and opportunity to personally succeed in a way that leads to collective organizational success."
Stephen R. Covey

In Servant Leadership in the Workplace, Joe Iarocci, CEO of Cairnway, elaborated on the servant leader's role with respect to empowerment:

"Servant-leaders in the workplace act to empower their followers in two senses of the word "empowerment." First, servant-leaders empower their followers by sharing organizational authority. They know that this kind of empowerment gives people a stake in outcomes, increases innovation, and raises employee engagement. Second, servant-leaders help their followers grow stronger, more confident, wiser and more autonomous – as employees and as whole people.

That's another form of empowerment. Servant-leaders are good stewards of power. They don't try to grab power or hoard it once they have it. Instead, servant-leaders are generous with power." (Iarocci, 2017)

Delegate for both personal and professional growth. Purposeful delegation should involve delegation designed to promote an employee's personal, as well as professional growth and development. Delegated tasks and projects can provide experiences that develop strategic thinking in the analytical, courage in the meek, and empathy in the self-assured. Remember Greenleaf's test of servant leadership... *"Do those served grow as persons? Do they, while being served, become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, and more likely themselves to serve others?"* Robert K. Greenleaf