

Delegation

Many leaders and managers can find delegating tasks difficult. Relying on your staff to do a good job takes trust, skill, care and patience. Nevertheless, delegation is important for both efficiency and team development, ensuring increased flexibility and performance.

How you delegate a specific task will depend on both the nature of the task and the skills, experience and qualities of the person to whom you delegate. There are four approaches to delegation – according to Hershey & Blanchard's situational leadership, adapted from Landsberg (1997) – that depend on a staff member's skill for the task and willingness to do it (see Skill-Will matrix below):

Guide

Use for: Staff who are enthusiastic about a task, but lack the skills or experience needed.

Approach: Assign the task, but help 'George' take small steps. Check his results and give him feedback to help him develop. As he gains competence, you can start to release control.

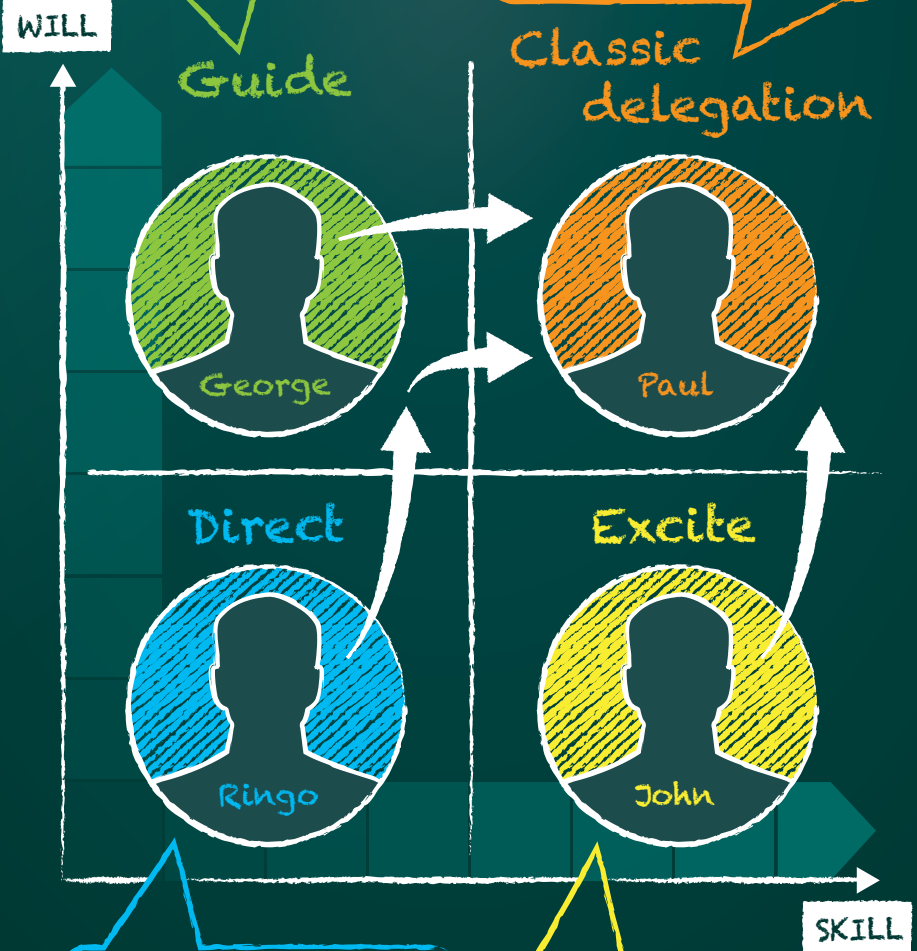
Tip: Be sure that the task is neither too challenging nor too easy; you are aiming to grow your staff member's skills, not overwhelm them.

Classic delegation

Use for: Staff members who are highly skilled in and willing to take on a task.

Approach: Discuss the goal, set a deadline and leave 'Paul' to it. His skill is sufficient and he is willing and able to do it.

Tip: Do not micromanage staff; let them complete the task their way using their skill and judgment.



Direct

Use for: Staff lacking both the skill and will to take on a task.

Approach: First work out why 'Ringo' is unwilling. Fear or lack of confidence is often a factor. Address this by breaking the task down and showing him he can do it. Once he is willing, use the Guide approach to increase his skill.

Tip: You need to take small steps. In the long run, this investment is worthwhile, as you develop a qualified member of staff.

Excite

Use for: Staff who have the required skills, but are unwilling to take the task on.

Approach: You need to identify why 'John' is unwilling. Does he have too much to do? Does he feel the task is beneath him? You need to find a way to excite him about the need for the task, or perhaps compensate him in kind for doing it.

Tip: As leader, it is your prerogative and responsibility to delegate tasks; you do not have to take 'no' for an answer, but you will gain in the long run if you can persuade rather than demand.