

DELEGATING TASKS TO PARENTS

Organizational Skills Domain

4-H Youth Development Programming is a collaborative effort between volunteers, professionals, and parents to provide high-quality educational activities, events, and opportunities for youth. Due to the nature of 4-H, volunteers often take on essential leadership roles for clubs, projects, and/or events. They often serve as the face of the 4-H Program in the community and take on a variety and varying degrees of responsibility including club management, event planning, or other activities that take coordination. Assuming these volunteer duties in addition to their professional and personal responsibilities can feel like a lot, but they do not have to do it alone. Delegating tasks to parents and others can be a beneficial skill for volunteers, especially those in leadership roles.

Delegation is one of the hardest, but most crucial leadership skills to master. This is true regardless of whether you are a leader at work or in your volunteer role. Delegating tasks to others can be difficult because it requires relinquishing power to someone else and often it requires giving up autonomy and allowing them to complete the task as it fits their work style. This may cause anxiety or frustration on the part of the leader (delegator) especially if there is a big difference in work style⁴, or if they still retain responsibility for the overall outcome or product with which the task is associated.

Learning and practicing delegation strategies is one of the best ways to alleviate these concerns. Think of delegation as simply sharing tasks with others. It may take practice and planning to get into the habit, but once a leader starts sharing the workload with others, everyone can reap the rewards⁽³⁾ including:

- increase in knowledge, skills, and abilities
- improvement in productivity
- improvement in adaptability
- improvement in time management
- decrease in individual workload
- building comradery and team spirit
- improvement in retention
- contribution to succession planning

Through delegation, individuals become more aware of all the tasks associated with a project and the role a leader plays in accomplishing them. This can make it easier for others to volunteer to help with more tasks or show appreciation when tasks are accomplished. This also can lead to the creation of a supportive environment where individuals feel essential, rather than just involved, which can make it easier to bring on new people or pass the leadership baton. Foster delegation can ultimately lead to sustainability, ensuring the work can continue if/when a leader steps down.

Here are some suggestions and tips that may help improve delegation skills. The key is to start small, be flexible, and have a plan.

Delegation Steps for Leaders^(1&3)

Match tasks with an individual's skill.

- This works best if a leader is aware of the skills and experience of group members.
 - Use a skills survey, task list, or direct conversations with individuals to gather this information if needed. Be careful not to assume another person's skill. When in doubt, ask!

Provide clear expectations and information.

- This is best done in person when possible.
- Provide all information for an assigned task to the individual assuming the task before they start.
- Make sure all information, resources, and tools needed to complete the task are easily accessible to the individual throughout the task.
- Specify any requirements or restrictions that may affect how or when the task is completed.
- Allow for questions and provide clarification as needed.
- Notify the individual if expectations or information changes as soon as possible during the completion of the task. Don't wait for a scheduled check-in.

Set realistic and achievable deadlines.

- Include this in the conversation about expectations and information.

- Allow input from the individual assuming the task. Be flexible (when possible). Giving them some agency on the deadline can improve their buy-in and motivation.
- Send a shared calendar invite for the deadline or determine another way to mark the date for all involved.

Schedule check-ins until the task is completed.

- Check-ins are most beneficial for long-term projects but can be used to check progress on any length/difficulty of the project. It allows a leader to show caring and provide support if needed. It can also alleviate a leader's anxiety about delegating the task.
- Check-ins can be scheduled or impromptu. They can be a meeting (virtual or in-person), or an email/ phone call from the leader.
- Allow input from the individual assuming the task for a scheduled check-in. Be flexible (when possible). Giving them some agency on the deadline can improve their buy-in and motivation.
- Set a shared calendar invite for a scheduled check-in or determine another way to mark the date for all involved.
- Leaders may get better results if they allow the individual assuming the task to "run" the check-in.
 - Allow them to share their progress.
 - The leader should consider asking them about:
 - Questions they may have.
 - Resources or help they may need.
 - Challenges they may be having.



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- Successes they have had so far
- Provide praise for accomplishments thus far and helpful feedback. Try to avoid telling them what to do and how to do it. This can dissuade them from continuing with the task.

Delegation Tips for Leaders⁽²⁾

Allow autonomy.

- Allow the individual assuming the task the freedom to complete the task how they wish (if possible). Even if that means they do it differently than it has been done in the past.
- Give advice sparingly and avoid giving directions unless requested.
- Provide additional resources if requested.
- Provide additional assistance if requested. If the assistance is to come from someone other than the leader, be sure to follow the delegation steps for that individual as well.

Avoid micromanaging and provide support.

- Try not to overschedule check-ins.
- Ask questions rather than give directions.
- Avoid “Why?” questions.
- Be flexible, understanding, and compassionate to issues/concerns/questions.

Celebrate accomplishments and show appreciation.

- Be genuine and generous.
- Share (verbally or in writing) the benefit of their work or highlight a positive attribute of their character.

- Share positive “gossip” about them or their work in public, especially when they are present.
- Bring coffee, tea, or a treat to an in-person check-in.
- Send a gift card for a coffee, tea, or treat for a virtual check-in.
- Give them an in-person or virtual handshake, high five, fist bump, or pat on the back.
- Use different appreciation tactics with different people, especially if it appears they do not like certain types of appreciation.

Diversify your delegation.

- Try not to ask the same individual to assist with multiple tasks at the same time.
- Be sure you don’t favor one person to help with all the tasks regardless of skills and interest.
- Avoid task permanency. A recurring task does not have to be delegated to the same person.
- Be creative in who you ask to help. Sometimes it is the quiet individual on the team that may have the greatest enthusiasm for the task.

Leaders who learn to delegate, or strive to improve their delegation skills, often end up cultivating a collaborative and supportive team. By sharing the workload with others, individual and group skills and abilities increase as does the understanding of what it takes to reach the goals of the team.

“Many hands make light work.”
-English Proverb

Why not lighten your load and improve your team at the same time?



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Resources:

- ¹MindTools. (n.d.). <https://www.mindtools.com/aru27rv/successful-delegation>
- ²Sostrin, J. (2017). *To be a great leader, you have to learn how to delegate well*. Harvard Business Review. <https://hbr.org/2017/10/to-be-a-great-leader-you-have-to-learn-how-to-delegate-well>
- ³*Why is delegation important? inability to delegate is hurting your growth*. Risely. (2023, March 2). <https://www.risely.me/why-is-delegation-important/>
- ⁴Wrike. (2022, March 14). *Effectively delegating tasks: Best practices: Wrike*. Blog Wrike. <https://www.wrike.com/blog/delegating-work-difficult/#Why-is-delegating-tasks-important>

The original resource 4-H Positive Youth Development: Empowerment of Others (VRKC: Volunteer Research, Knowledge, & Competency Taxonomy) was developed by Deb Jones, Tonia Dattage, and Sue Pleskac.

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