

# CLEAR YOUR PLATE: IT'S TIME TO DELEGATE

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A couple of months ago, I was riding back to the airport with one of the participants in my inventory management seminar. This gentleman was a seasoned professional who had been tasked with creating a functional purchasing team full of millennials and gen x employees. Being a boomer himself, he was working hard on the communication side of this endeavor. Managing a multi-generational task is no easy feat, but he shared one area he has been able to master – delegation. Above his door reads a sign, “Only do what only you can do”. I had to let the words sink in a bit and even asked him to repeat the phrase. Such a simple phrase, yet it had the ability to transform the way he approached his leadership responsibility.

I have run across some pretty profound concepts in my coaching practice, but this one ranks up there pretty high. Even now, I have to repeat the phrase a few times to let it sink in. When researching the origin, I had visions of some eastern philosopher with a bald head and flowing robe; but alas, it was just another guy like me who is obsessed with using fancy words to get leaders to think differently. There is some argument as to who originated the phrase, but it most commonly attributed to a well published innovator named Paul Sloane.

Essentially, Mr. Sloane is pushing the concept of delegation. Over the last several years of teaching and coaching distribution professionals, I have found that this is one of the most difficult actions for managers to put into practice. The barrier seems to be multi-faceted and almost always self-imposed. In other words, it's all in their head.

One of the toughest hurdles to overcome, as stated by students I have worked with, is the transition from “bud to boss”. When a person is promoted from a member of a functional team to the leader of that same unit, there is an awkwardness to the change in role. New managers often find it difficult to ask their former peers to handle tasks that they are fully capable of performing. They are afraid to upset the relationship with the employee. To overcome this, the manager must recognize two things: 1. They have limited bandwidth, and 2. The relationship has changed.

Another barrier comes from the leadership style the new manager wants to emulate. In classes, I often show students an image of Teddy Roosevelt to help them visualize types of leadership. The most common characteristic noted is that Roosevelt was someone who lead by example. An admirable trait when used in the right situations. Sometimes new managers confuse this leadership style with the need to show others that they are not above the tasks they are delegating. If the leader continues to perform the task repeatedly, they have effectively taken it back on their plate. This is definitely a balancing act.

I was recently having lunch with one of my clients. He is a young general manager, a new father and is struggling with finding balance in his life. He was complaining that he was unable to get any exercise and it is effecting his mental outlook at work. I asked about his work hours. He is the first in and generally the last to leave. Ah-ha, now we are getting to it. I asked him to consider going to the gym before work and showing up at 7:30 in the

morning. He struggled with this idea because he was afraid of not getting in his 50-60 hours a week. He was stuck on the “time-served vs. quality of time” work ethic. I explained to him that the number of hours was less relevant than what he did with it. A mentally stressed manager is not an asset to the organization. The key to his success will be to give himself permission to come in a little later. This is the kind of mental barrier that can lead to task hoarding. Folks, it's ok to work 40 hours per week. Even less if you know how to delegate.

One of my favorite leadership educators is Brian Tracy. Mr. Tracy wrote a famous book, *Eat That Frog! 21 Great Ways to Stop Procrastinating and Get More Done in Less Time*. There are so many nuggets of wisdom packed into a short read. Let's just say there were more than a few forehead slapping moments during my first read. One of these thought provoking moments was found in a very short section on delegation. I am paraphrasing a bit here, but he suggested “If you are paid \$25 per hour, do \$25 per hour work. Quit doing \$10 per hour work.” Doing the lower compensated work is really like taking a mental holiday. You can do it without breaking a mental sweat. It is easy. Sure, this work needs to be done; but it should be done by the appropriate level of employee. By doing the mentally easy stuff, you are cheating your employer out of the money they are paying you. Get back to the big picture work. It's what you are being paid to do.

Delegation is often a byproduct of effective planning. Taking another cue from the Brian Tracy playbook,