



# Delegation versus Empowerment



Developing Leaders & Getting Work Done

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# What's the Difference?

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To delegate means to choose or elect a person to act as a representative for another. To empower someone means to give power or authority to someone else. Do you hear the difference? To delegate something to someone is to only give them enough leash to act on **your behalf**, as you would for yourself. To empower another means you give them enough power and authority to act on **their own behalf**.

# When to Delegate

There is a proper time for delegation. I can think of two scenarios: when someone is new to the ways of leadership and during times of crisis.

When someone is cutting their teeth on leadership you want to teach them how to handle responsibility. It leans into the principle of seeing if they will be faithful in little so that they might grow toward being faithful with much.

In times of crisis, there needs to be an authoritative decision-maker. There must be someone who can manage the crisis and tell others what to do. This is a moment of clear, specific delegation. But these two scenarios leave space for a lot of opportunities to consider a different path.

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# Three Critical Aspects to Empowerment

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To truly empower someone you must **grant them authority**, you must **give them proper resources**, and you must **hold them accountable** to organizational values and objectives. They have to have enough authority to make some significant and important decisions. You have to give power away. They have to have resources that are truly theirs to steward, including people, money, and tools. Yet it is not a free for all. There must be an accountable aspect that helps them stay within the playing field of organizational boundaries. You tell them the “what” and the “why” but the “how” is left up to them. They have to have enough of all three things to truly have the freedom to fail on their own efforts and learn.

Whenever  
possible,  
empower!

Empowerment raises up leaders

Delegation largely raises up followers

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Empowerment is more work for you in the short run

Delegation is less work for you in the short run

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Empowerment is less work for you in the long run

Delegation is more work for you in the long run

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Empowerment places someone else at the center  
of leadership activity

Delegation keeps you at the center of leadership  
activity

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Empowerment ensures that more leaders are your  
leadership legacy

Delegation ensures that you alone are your own  
leadership legacy-for better or for worse

Leadership is providing  
inspiration and vision, then  
developing and empowering  
others to achieve this vision.

— Marshall Goldsmith

Consider today some people around you who you can truly empower.