The Control Freak Within
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As a manager and leader, do you find yourself frequently firefighting, and struggling to get everything done? Do you find yourself lacking the time to plan, create vision, and develop your people? I see many nodding...

Assuming that you answered "yes" to at least one of these questions, let me ask you another: Do you delegate effectively? If you are honest with yourself, your answer is more than likely to be "no." If the answer is as such, then ask yourself why (and don't worry, you are not alone!)

Effective and productive delegation is something that is a bit of an anathema for many; we want to be good delegators, but so many issues stop us from relinquishing control. Many of us are surrounded by well-trained, capable and enthusiastic staff (we probably chose them for exactly those reasons), yet we hold onto certain tasks, afraid that if we delegate to someone else, the job will not get done, or it will not be done to our standards. Some of us are even secretly afraid that another person will do the job better than us, and this will affect our power or credibility as a manager!

When we do this, we tend to stockpile knowledge, believing that knowledge is power. We have a need to feel indispensable. However, the most successful managers are not those who know how to do everything themselves, but those who surround themselves with brilliance and who tap into this!

I have to admit to some of these "control freak" tendencies myself at times. I can be a perfectionist, and sometimes that manifests itself as wanting people to do things the way I do them, rather than focusing on the end product. This is because I know my method works - nothing wrong with that. But, if I insist on this, I am depriving others of development opportunities and creating more stress for myself. Delegation is the art of letting go without losing control. So how is it done?

First, (and this is no surprise) effective and timely training. Make sure your employees are well-trained, and then coach them to the standard you desire. Then back off and let them do it. Most will rise to the expectations you have set.

Second, make sure that the tasks you delegate are well-defined. Don't leave employees in the dark, wondering what they are supposed to be doing. Have an open-door policy so that they may clarify if needed.

Third, delegate little by little. Don't overwhelm your employees by delegating too much, too soon. Give a little at a time, and gradually build up their confidence and skill.

Fourth, create checkpoints. Depending on skill and trust levels, this might be checking every aspect of their work (only at first), or it might be as simple as them letting you know they've completed the task. Make sure that they are aware of the checkpoints, and that you will leave them alone in between. For most employees who are worth their salary, nothing is more frustrating than micro-management.

Fifth, always be available to provide support. Employees have to feel that you support them and will back them up if they make a mistake.

Finally, realize that delegation is a form of development. It develops skills, motivation, commitment and pride. It assists in reducing stress for you as the manager, and allows you to focus on higher level tasks. Don't view it as a chance to "dump" the work you don't want to do on others; make it meaningful.

Remember that delegation doesn't mean that you abdicate responsibility. As the manager, the ultimate responsibility is still yours to keep. However, you can give authority and trust, and in doing so, build effective teams and relationships.