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How to Get Better at Delegating

First, ask yourself why you're reluctant to hand off tasks. *by Rebecca Knight*

Published on HBR.org / March 3, 2025 / Reprint [H08MJ1](#)



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Maybe you think it's faster just to do it yourself. Or maybe you have a deadline coming up and you don't want to risk missing it. Or maybe you don't fully trust your team. If delegating feels like a struggle, you're not alone—but you are holding yourself back. Delegating isn't just offloading tasks; it's keeping things moving, developing your team, and focusing on what matters most. So, where do you start? How do you stay involved without hovering? And how do you stop thinking you're the only one who can do it right?

What the Experts Say

Delegating may seem simple, but the real challenge is overcoming the emotional hurdles that make it hard to let go, says Dave Kerpen, the author of [*Get Over Yourself: How to Lead and Delegate Effectively for More Time, More Freedom, and More Success*](#). Distrust, control issues, perfectionism, and fear of failure can keep you tangled in the details or stuck doing everything on your own. Kerpen suggests focusing on the bigger picture. Sure, “you’re afraid of losing clients, looking foolish, or messing up—but can you push through those fears and be courageous anyway?” After all, the stakes of delegation go beyond completing tasks or having a productive team. “They’re about how you choose to spend your time, your focus, and ultimately, your life.” Consider delegating as your personal “energy management system,” says Emily Morgan, founder of Delegate Solutions and author of [*Let It Go!: How to \(Finally\) Master Delegation & Scale Freedom Across Your Organization*](#). “Your energy is your most important resource, and when you delegate, you redirect it toward your most impactful contributions.” Here’s how.

Recognize your self-sabotaging habits

Before you can delegate effectively, you need to understand what’s getting in your way, says Morgan. Identify the patterns that [turn you into a bottleneck](#). Are you an isolationist, trying to do everything solo? A hero, always swooping in to save the day? A dreamer, throwing out ideas while your team scrambles to keep up? Or an interventionist, a nicer term for micromanager, who insists on being looped in? Once you recognize these tendencies, ask: What’s the real cost—not just to you, but your team and the work? “Be really clear about what you want to spend your time on,” Morgan advises. And don’t let past struggles stop you. Thoughts like *I’m not good at delegating* or *I tried before and it didn’t work* create a self-perpetuating cycle. “The reality is that once you’re committed to delegating, the ‘how’ is not complicated,” says Kerpen.

Determine tasks you can delegate (hint: there are a lot)

According to Kerpen, there are only three things a manager can't delegate: strategy and vision—which he calls, “the head work, that’s why you’re the leader”; [hiring decisions](#); and ensuring access to resources and budget to get the job done. Everything else? Let it go. When a task lands on your plate, ask yourself: Can someone else handle this? If it doesn't fall into those three categories, the answer is probably “yes.” While it's easier to delegate tasks you dislike, it's more difficult to hand off the ones you're good at and enjoy, says Morgan. “They're the hardest things to let go of because they consume a lot of your time and make you feel important and needed.” But hoarding these tasks deprives your team members of [learning opportunities](#), she says. “Think of delegation as a way for them to grow their skill sets.”

Start small

[Begin with baby steps](#). Morgan recommends tackling low-hanging fruit: tasks that are simple, require minimal effort, and can be completed quickly. “Having some quick wins under your belt creates positive momentum.” Focus on routine tasks with clear steps that others can replicate, like weekly reports or update memos. “Capture them into a process and empower your team,” she says. Allowing others to prove themselves also helps address any [lingering trust issues](#), adds Kerpen. Starting with small assignments fosters gradual [skill development](#) and “builds mutual confidence,” he says. And remember, “when people mess up, and they will, because we're human, it's part of the learning process.”

Find your people

Next, you need someone to delegate to. Think expansively, says Morgan. Start by asking: Who are your emerging leaders? Who has the interest, bandwidth, and talents for the task? Who needs to learn something new? And, of course: Who do you trust? Focus first on dependable team members who meet deadlines and are eager to learn. If you're drawing a

blank, it might be your control issues talking. “You don’t always need to be the hero,” says Morgan. Besides, adds Kerpen, “If you don’t think you have the right person to delegate to, it’s your job to find them.” There are plenty of options beyond your team and even your organization: contractors, part-timers, freelancers from Upwork, or even AI, he says. “Get creative and don’t let perceived roadblocks hold you back.”

Direct, but allow for autonomy

Be upfront about your expectations and offer direction, but don’t overdo it, says Morgan. Explain the assignment, set a deadline, and provide a rough time estimate. “Things can go off-course when someone spends their week on something you thought would take a few hours.” Share your vision for the final product and clearly communicate, both verbally and in writing, what success looks like. As Kerpen puts it, “delegate outcomes, not tasks,” and give your team the freedom to figure out how to get there. “It’s arrogant to think you know the best way to get it done,” he says. “If they’re bought into the desired outcome, they’ll find a way to achieve it.” Provide enough direction to stay aligned, but leave room for creativity. Then, “surrender control.”

Keep tabs, but don’t micromanage

The cadence of check-ins depends on the project and task complexity. Some initiatives require daily touchpoints, while others only need a weekly review. Kerpen suggests focusing on two key questions: “How are things going? And what are your roadblocks?” This approach keeps the conversation solution-focused, rather than “updates for the sake of updates.” Avoid constant Slack messages and unnecessary interruptions. “Don’t be the digital equivalent of breathing down someone’s neck,” he warns. For those who absolutely need to be in the know, Morgan recommends finding ways to keep tabs without disrupting the team’s flow. A work management platform, for example, can help you track performance without being intrusive. “That way, you can take a breath because you know things are on track.”

Guide, listen, and ask for feedback

Think of yourself as both a coach and a cheerleader, says Kerpen.

“A coach’s job is to get the most out of their people,” he explains.

You’re not there to ensure everything is done perfectly or exactly as you would; your role is to inspire and guide. Offer your experience and provide context. “Help your team see how their work fits into the whole,” says Morgan. “Why does it matter?” Encourage your team to ask questions and offer feedback to you, too. Without ongoing and open communication, “delegating can go off the rails.”

Remember: progress not perfection

Effective delegation is about “empowering your team, coaching them to success, and giving them the tools they need to succeed while championing them along the way,” says Kerpen. The best part is that you’ll have more time, energy, and space to focus on what matters to you, both at work and in your personal life. That said, be realistic: delegation isn’t a cure-all. There’s still work to be done. “Accounting for that in your brain and your calendar is key,” says Morgan. “Even if someone completes a task 80% as well as you would, or only gets part way through it, that’s a win.” After all, “We’re not going for perfection. We’re going for progress, and delegation is the tool to get there.”

Principles to Remember

Do

- Get out of your own way. Confront your fears, trust your team, and redirect your energy towards high-impact work.
- Start with low-hanging fruit. Identify simple, repeatable tasks to build confidence and create positive momentum for both you and your team.
- Treat delegation as a two-way dialogue. Inspire, guide, and encourage your team to give you feedback.

Don't

- Limit your talent pool. Look beyond your immediate team to contractors and freelancers who can bring fresh perspectives to the task.
- Hover. Instead, check in strategically with focused questions about progress and roadblocks.
- Micromanage the outcome. Delegate with the understanding that 80% done by someone else is infinitely better than 100% done solely by you.

This article was originally published online on March 3, 2025.



Rebecca Knight is a journalist who writes about all things related to the changing nature of careers and the workplace. Her essays and reported stories have been featured in The Boston Globe, Business Insider, The New York Times, BBC, and The Christian Science Monitor. She was shortlisted as a Reuters Institute Fellow at Oxford University in 2023. Earlier in her career, she spent a decade as an editor and reporter at the Financial Times in New York, London, and Boston.