



Effectively Developing People: A Key to Leadership Success

One of our obligations as leaders is to develop people. In fact, I believe it to be one of the cornerstones of excellent leadership. Effectively developing people accomplishes several important things for us and our organization.

When we develop others, we add to their value. They become more versatile, more productive, and more confident. As a person's knowledge base expands and their ability to accurately assess situations improves, their capacity for creative problem-solving increases. As their breadth of knowledge and abilities expands, so does the pride they take in their work. And pride in work and workmanship leads to higher productivity, more creativity, and the desire to go the "extra mile" to ensure excellence. Their ability to take on more responsibilities increases. Their potential for advancement elevates, and their likelihood of becoming another leader moves closer to reality.

Additionally, as we demonstrate an interest in the progress and success of others, they in turn, become more loyal to us. Taking an interest in the success of others helps them take an interest in our success. As a leader, it's important to be respected by the members of our team, and effectively developing others nurtures this respect.

There are even more direct benefits to us as a leader when we develop others. When we increase the capacity of our team members, we create the ability to delegate more and more. The more we can delegate, the more we can leverage our time and our effort. Delegation leads to greater productivity. In addition, the more of our work we can delegate, the easier it is for us to rise above the grind of always working "in" our business and spend time working "on" our business. One of the things that holds us back from taking our business or our career in new directions is not spending enough time stepping back from our busy-ness to see the bigger picture. Effectively delegating allows us to take that step back.

Besides improving our personal productivity and insightfulness, we also move others closer towards taking on a leadership role of their own when we develop them. Which means that we are grooming someone to take over our responsibilities from us. At first glance, this may seem like a foolish thing to do by making us replaceable, however it allows us to easily "fill in" behind us, which in turn, makes us more "promote-able". If no one else can do our job, then we aren't in a position to move on to bigger and better opportunities.

OK, now that we've established the importance and wisdom of developing others, let's talk about how to actually do that. How do we effectively develop others? One of the challenges in developing people effectively is that development is an art rather than a science. It takes a bit of skill and judgment to become good at it. Effective development requires the ability to read people and understand their strengths and weaknesses. It requires the judgment to know which areas to develop a person in, which tasks are good candidates to delegate, and how hard to push someone's growth. It takes being sensitive to the other person's demeanor to decide whether to ask them if they have a desire to take on something new or, in the alternative, to simply place the new task in their lap. The whole process can be broken down into deciding on which tasks to delegate and then deciding on how to delegate to whom.

Let's start by discussing which tasks or responsibilities to delegate. These fall into two categories - those that require no judgment (like compiling a report) and those that do require judgment. Clearly, tasks that require no judgment are always good candidates for delegation. Key points for being effective in delegating these tasks are 1) to ensure you choose the right person, 2) ensuring they have



the proper tools and knowledge, and 3) clearly communicating your timeframe and level of importance. Tasks or responsibilities that *do* require judgment are good vehicles for developing someone past the basics of “getting the work done”. You must choose these tasks/responsibilities carefully so as 1) to avoid undermining the person’s self-confidence and 2) not to create problems if poor judgment is demonstrated by the person being developed. You’ll need to gauge the person’s level of self-confidence before you assign a challenging task.

How do you ensure that a misstep doesn’t wreak havoc on your organization? Two suggestions: 1) Don’t delegate anything too critical and 2) When you delegate something that requires judgment, make sure you regularly check in on their progress and always leave enough time for review and correction before the results are released to others.

As far as determining how to delegate and who to develop, it really depends on the task and where a person is in their skill level, state of mind, capacity for change, level of self-confidence and self-image. Someone who is lacking in self confidence or is just starting out on their development path requires more guidance and “hand-holding” than someone who is experienced and has already developed a higher level of confidence. Sometimes people need to be asked whether they’re open to learning something new or taking on more responsibility. Remember, a key to effectively developing others is to make sure that they are open to growth and to stretching beyond their current state or present comfort zone. Too often, we believe in others more than they believe in themselves, and as such, may push them harder and faster than they want to go. While it is important to stretch people, we don’t want to “break” them. This is part of the “art” of effectively developing others.

Clearly the amount of judgment you expect someone to demonstrate will depend on their level of experience and their track record of making good decisions and good choices. Placing someone in a position to make decisions in an environment they are unfamiliar with creates the opportunity to teach and mentor for growth. Just make sure you use the opportunity to teach and mentor, and don’t react to mistakes or poor judgment with criticism or belittlement. Situations that are new and/or challenging offer us great opportunities to teach. An excellent way to teach and develop is to adopt a “coach-like” manner in your leadership. Rather than tell or criticize, guide and reveal insights to the other person. Be a guide and mentor, not a manager or boss.

By refining your development skills, becoming an effective delegator, assessing others accurately, and adopting a coach-like approach, you’ll help others grow, add to their value, improve their self-confidence, and further your own interests as well. Effectively developing others will propel you towards exceptional leadership.