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## WORK-LIFE BALANCE - Don't Drown, Delegate!

*You don't have to do it all, nor should you. Here's how to share the workload--and save your sanity.*



**By: Ela Schwartz**

You've worked hard and finally gotten that promotion. But now you find yourself buried in routine tasks and working late at the office after your colleagues are long gone. Instead of admiring your work ethic, peers and higher-ups may be shaking their heads over how you seem in over yours. It's time to cut loose and start delegating.

Failure to effectively delegate is a common pitfall for female executives, says Lois P. Frankel, Ph.D., author of *Nice Girls Don't Get the Corner Office* and *See Jane Lead: 99 Ways for Women to Take Charge*, and president of Pasadena, CA-based Corporate Coaching International. Yet the ability to delegate is essential to moving up the corporate ladder.

"Many women don't understand that at the management level you are not paid to do the job, you're paid to see that the job gets done," says Frankel. "Too many women remain in their comfort zones of doing rather than delegating, and so they are overlooked for promotions or strategic assignments. Their male counterparts understand that part of demonstrating you're ready to move up is the ability to effectively delegate and mobilize those around you."

While the ability to delegate is very much an individual matter, many see gender roles as explaining a greater reluctance to pass tasks to subordinates among women executives. "Look at our society," says Sherry Sullivan, co-author of *The Opt Out Revolt: Why People Are Leaving Companies to Create Kaleidoscope Careers* and associate professor at Bowling Green State University. "Boys tend to be socialized more into sports and being a leader, while girls' play tends to involve teamwork."

A study by Catalyst, a research and advisory organization based in New York, called Women "Take Care," Men "Take Charge." Stereotyping of U.S. Business Leaders, reports on stereotyping and its effects on women's advancement in the workplace. According to the study, women are viewed in the workplace as excelling at supporting, rewarding, and teamwork while men are seen as being better at problem solving and delegating.

Does this make women victims of self-fulfilling stereotypes? Absolutely not. In fact, Frankel says the same traits that may inhibit women from delegating can be assets in other areas of management. Empathy and intuitiveness, for example, translate into the ability to not burden employees with excessive workloads, and being attuned to people's strengths make a woman better able to match appropriate tasks to staff members.

Still, the ability to delegate is a critical skill both for effective management and in attaining work-life balance. Fortunately, it's a skill that can be honed over time. The five tips on the following page will help get you started.

### Learn to let go

That old adage "If you want something done right, do it yourself," is a surefire recipe for burnout. Yes, it can be faster and easier to do a job yourself—at first, says Elizabeth Dickerson, president of Hinsdale, Illinois-based Dickerson Training Associates and the leader of the American Management Association's "Delegation Boot Camp" seminar. In fact, a 10-minute task can take almost 15 minutes to delegate, she says. "But if that's a routine task, it's worth it to spend the extra time teaching someone else how to do it."

What's more, the inability to let go can actually hamper your team. Jamie Raab, publisher of New York City-based Warner Books, oversees 75 people in various departments. As an editor, she loved attending editorial meetings where staff discussed what books they were planning to acquire. Later, she delegated running these meetings to other staff members but couldn't quite bring herself to give up attending.

"Then it became apparent that as long as I was there, all eyes would turn to me whenever a decision had to be made," she says. "And the people I'd appointed would never be able to do the job well. Saying goodbye to that was wrenching, but also liberating, because I had more time for other things and could watch two confident people take on more responsibility."

### Delegate opportunities

Delegating only the grunt work and keeping high-profile projects for yourself can lead to resentment. "Give your employees a chance to develop and be challenged," suggests Sullivan. "They will appreciate it and be more loyal." Be sure, however, to give credit where credit is due. No one appreciates a boss who grabs all the glory.

At the same time, not all tasks are exciting. Difficulty delegating often stems from reluctance to dump mundane work on employees. Psychologically repositioning the task in a more positive light can help you overcome that hurdle, says Dickerson. "Show how it fits into the bigger picture and benefits the organization, or how the

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- Work out
- Say, "I'll do better next time."

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employee can add a new skill and become more marketable."

Put some thought into it "People tend to delegate on the fly," says Dickerson. "But just handing something to someone is not delegation." Communication with each employee is a must—explain the task, make sure you're both on the same page, and let employees know you're there for support.

Finding the right person for the job is another key to successful delegating. "Consider each person's strengths," says Frankel. "For example, a high-performing employee who needs a challenge might be ideal for a task you normally do yourself. It's likely that with a little guidance they will do a fine job at it, maybe even better than you would."

#### Take mistakes in stride

Winnie Leathers, a VP in the Chicago office of U.S. Bank, once delegated the task of wiring huge amounts of money to a conscientious, skilled employee. Unfortunately, the woman was so afraid of messing up that she got other people in the office to do the job for her. "She couldn't get over this mental block," says Leathers. "I had to switch that function to someone else. Delegating is not foolproof. People will make mistakes; that's just part of life. You just have to minimize the effect of those mistakes."

#### Get help

If you find yourself struggling, ask for advice from a colleague, mentor, or career coach, or attend a workshop or seminar. The investment will be worthwhile, says Raab, who compares delegating to conducting an orchestra. "If you tried to play every instrument in the orchestra, the sound would be pretty horrible," she says. But choose people who know their parts so you can focus on conducting, and you'll go from cacophony to harmony. Sounds good to us.

#### What and what Not to Delegate

Elizabeth Dickerson, who runs the AMA's "Delegation Boot Camp," offers the following tips on which tasks to delegate and which to do yourself.

##### Do Delegate:

- Routine tasks.
- Pressing priorities you don't have time to do yourself.
- Special projects and long-range tasks.
- Detail work on projects you're handling.
- High-profile projects that can help people grow and are key to their future.

##### Don't Delegate:

- Tasks that are sensitive or personal in nature.
- Performance reviews, counseling, or disciplining.
- Jobs that require a degree of risk that would be too much of a responsibility for the subordinate.
- Anything that requires your personal expertise or leadership, including anything that your manager says she's counting on you to do.
- Any task that has legal restrictions.

This feature originally appeared in *NAFE* magazine. To join Working Mother Media's sister organization, the National Association For Female executives, [click here](#).

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