

Delegation A God Ordained Principle

By Kumela Gragne

“God blessed them, and said to them, be fruitful, multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion over the fish of the sea, the bird of the air, and over every living creature that moves upon the earth” (Genesis 1.28)

Many executives of today are hesitant or even reluctant to delegate the authority vested in them because they claim that it is most effectively used when exercised by them personally. The claim amounts to asserting that the correct solutions to all problems are in their hands only. According to the above passage, God delegated man to administer the earth and every creature that lives on it. When it comes to managing the earth, there is no doubt that the all-knowing God could do a far better job than the man. He created. However, for reasons best known to Him only, eternal God has appointed man to manage the earth and rule over it.

The lesson from the above scripture is that delegation is a God initiated concept. When implementing delegation, man is not walking an uncharted territory or making a fresh experiment with unknown results. He is only applying a principle ordained by God from the beginning. Since God who is eternal and omniscient has created everything perfectly and put man in charge, should not man with a short tenure on earth and a limited knowledge of his environment be more than willing to delegate his authority to fellow man? For the writer of this article, and probably for my readers, the answer to the question is a resounding affirmative that authority is best exercised when shared with others through effective delegation rather than when retained by an individual and guarded jealously.

Definition of Delegation

Delegation is the process of transferring authority, responsibility and accountability from one person to another. It usually involves turning over of authority from a superior to a subordinate. In modern organizations with ever-expanding and diverse programs, a few individuals can not handle the entire task because their expertise is limited or they lack the time to attend to everything. Division of work and decentralization become inescapable if progress is not to be hampered. Decentralization can be implemented only where there is willingness to delegate. In order to appreciate the benefits of delegation, let us go through one more scriptural passage and then attempt to scan the reasons for, the advantages and process of delegation in modern management. As there is tacit or sometimes explicit resistance to effective delegation, we will also briefly examine the barriers to delegation efforts.

“When the number of the disciples greatly increased, complaint was made by the Greek-speaking Jews against the native Hebrews because their windows were being overlooked and neglected in the distribution of relief food.

So the apostles convened the multitude of the disciples and said ‘It is not seemly or desirable or right that we should have to give up or neglect preaching the word of God in order to attend to serving at tables and superintending the distribution of food.

Therefore, select out from among yourselves, brethren, seven men of good and attested character and repute, full of spirit and wisdom, which we may assign to look after this business and duty. But we will continue to devote ourselves steadfastly to prayer and the ministry of the Word’. And the suggestion pleased the whole assembly and they selected the seven.” Acts 6:1-6

The above episode narrates the experience of the early Christian church led the number of apostles. The apostles had raised a great number of followers. As the number of followers increased and their family members moved with them from location to location, some followers started grumbling because their windows were left out when food was being distributed.

Upon hearing the complaints, the apostles called a meeting at which they declared their own core duties and responsibility clearly the preaching of the Gospel. At the same meeting, they singled out food distribution as a task which was not their main job. It must be noted that food distribution was not labeled unimportant by the apostles. They merely stated that it could be handled effectively by their subordinates thus freeing the apostles for their main tasks.

According to the new proposal, the task of distributing food was to be entrusted to seven men of proven integrity to be selected from the rank of the followers. Once the assignment is given to the selected men, the apostles promised that they would unwaveringly devote their time to prayer and teaching. The proposal was acceptable to the whole assembly and the seven men were selected to take care of the job that had been previously neglected.

The above passage contains some of the main principles that are followed when delegating authority in modern management. The reasons for delegation are spelt out the tasks that are to be delegated are identified and those to be retained by the leaders distinctly separated. More over the criteria for the selection of persons to be delegated as well as the selection process are established.

Applying the scriptural principles referred to above, we first examine the advantages of delegating in modern management:

Relieves Managers

Many leaders at different levels of modern organizational structure experience a lot of pressure because of the numerous tasks they have to handle daily. Since the working hours at their disposal are limited, they try to cover their escalating office duties by stealing time from their other commitments. Too often, crucial family time and prescribed physical exercise programs are sacrificed in order to cover office duties. Skipping or shortening tea and lunch breaks, working beyond normal hours and ignoring social commitments are some of the schemes devised by busy leaders in order to overcome the dilemma they themselves perpetuate by avoiding effective delegation.

Since no amount of executive manipulation can stretch the total available time beyond twenty-four per day, the most reasonable remedy for work overburden is to delegate the important duties to competent sub-ordinates. Delegation energizes managers and helps them focus on their most important functions. It also reduces stress on managers by enabling them to strike a healthy balance between work and leisure.

To reinforce the advantage of delegation, allow me to inject her concept from my reading of “the Prato principle” which paraphrased states that out of the total work we do the 20% of our best results. Delegation helps the delegator become more productive by focusing on issues that matter most.

Improves Efficiency

Since delegation decentralize decentralized decision making authority, officers at different levels make decisions pertaining to their units, the delegated persons make decisions without waiting for the approval of superiors who may not be available or may not have the time even if physically available. Thus, delegation minimized delays in decision making and contributes to the elevation of efficiency for the entire organization.

Encourages Development of Leaders

In general, organizations are formed to have indefinite life. They are expected to outlive their founders well as succeeding generation of leaders. As a result, every generation of leadership is required to raise its successors if continuity is to be ensured. A new breed has to be prepared to replace the aging and outgoing one. Through effective delegation potential leaders are groomed for take over when appropriate times for transition to new generation.

Motivates Employees

Delegation that is carried out on basis of merit recognizes the successful performance of the persons being delegated. Recognizing the past contributions of the delegated persons spurs them to do better in anticipation of higher assignment. What is more important is the example that recognition and delegation set for the whole organization. Employee's sense of belongingness is promoted reinforcing the spirit of shared opportunity and destiny. Witnessing delegation that is objectively executed encouraged and motivates employees down the line to work with dedication.

The delegation Process

- 1) Delegation starts with a clear identification of the responsibilities to be assigned to another position. Since the assigning of responsibility that is not clearly defined is a recipe for failure, ascertainment of the duty to be delegated is the first step in delegation. In the scriptural passage quoted above, the job to be assigned to the seven men was spelt out as "to attend to serving at tables and superintending the distribution of food". There is no ambiguity as to what the apostles wished to delegate to the disciples.

In the same manner, managers who delegate duties to their subordinates should clearly specify the job that they wish to transfer. Care should be exercised to avoid the use of delegation as a means of dumping mundane task on the delegates. Delegation should be designed and executed with the aim of serving as vehicles of success for both the delegating superior and the delegating sup errors and delegated subordinates.

- 2) Following the determination of responsibilities to be delegated, the level of the post to which the duty is to be assigned must be established in the company's organizational structure. The post level as well the post title should match and reflect the responsibilities to be assigned.
- 3) Taking into account the skill and knowledge that the position requires, persons with relevant qualifications are identified and lined up for competitive placement. The phrase "seven men of good and attested character and repute, full of spirit and wisdom" in our scriptural quotation above refers to the competencies required for the post under consideration; the value of objectivity demonstrated in selection the most suitable person must be emphasized. This phase of the

delegation process is crucial as incorrect decision can frustrate the entire exercise and lead to failure.

- 4) Once the right person for the post has been selected, the decision should be discussed with the individual concerned and announced to the staff. The announcement, in addition to bringing everybody on board, will demonstrate the resolve of management to make the delegation a success. Any justifiable concern from any corner regarding the delegation issue should be addressed prior to action.
- 5) Once the selected person has been delegated, he should own the job entrusted to him and become fully accountable. He is to take credit for successful performance and blame for failure. Appropriate monitoring system should be in place to measure the performance of the delegate and serve as a tool for coaching rather than as a pretext for interfering.

All the elements of delegation referred to above are inseparably interconnected as one cannot be undertaken without the other. A task that is not well defined cannot be delegated and even a well defined task cannot be delegated to a person whose competence and integrity are questionable. Accountability can not be exercised where the job has not been clearly defined and assigned to a specific person.

Barriers to Delegation

The greatest hindrance to delegation is the failure of managers to appreciate the benefits that both the delegating supervisor and the delegated subordinate stand to reap from the exercise. If the leader fails to convince himself that delegation gives him additional time to attend to the most important tasks of his position, he is likely to undermine it leave alone supporting it. Instead of being a promoter, he becomes a stumbling block. Under such circumstance, delegation is seriously hampered as it requires support from all sides. Delegation does not thrive under resistance, be it from top or bottom.

Let me her share with you a personal experience. I was once promoted to the post of an assistant to my supervisor. The promotion appeared popular except with my supervisor. Even my supervisor did not oppose the action openly and things went amicably well on surface for a short while. However, there was one essential element missing from the assignment my responsibilities remained unchanged in spite of the improvements in my title and remunerations. The delegation was ingeniously undermined and I had to finally abandon the post and move to another organization before long.

A superior may resist delegation out of fear that failure would tarnish his reputation and endanger the performance of the unit he is in charge. More often than not a superior may also resist delegating because of a perceived risk that he might be outshined or marginalized if the job is too well done by the subordinate. Such fear is usually expressed in a disguised form. The resisting manager's excuses may be masked as difficulty of training subordinates, incapability of subordinates to perform and the "I can do it better" arrogance.

To a less extent, resistance to delegation may also come from subordinates who are unprepared for challenging tasks. I once chaired a committee that was mandated to select and assign chief store keepers to six warehouses. A good number of candidates were scrutinized rigorously to identify the most suitable ones for the posts.

Prior to issuing the letter of assignment to the selected chief store keepers. I decided to have a brief discussion with each one of them; Five of them thankfully accepted their assignments while the sixth one rejected the promotion without giving reasons.

When pressed to state the reasons for his reluctance to be promoted, he said, "All the chief store keepers who had previously held the post to which I am being promoted are already in jail. So. I am a responsible family man and do not want to go to jail." He was finally persuaded to accept the assignment and I am told he has not landed in jail. Instead, he has become a successful warehouse manager of good repute.

Conclusion

Delegation involves the transfer of authority, responsibility and accountability to subordinate. It is a principle known to mankind for a long time. Man applies delegation voluntarily when he turns over responsibility to his fellow man. If he obstinately resists delegating, incompetence that comes with old age will finally force him to do so at a high cost to the organization. Orderly succession and smooth transfer of experience are lost. Old age-induced delegation is likely to be difficult and painful both for the delegate and the delegator. It is wisdom to heed the management maxim that runs "delegate so that you don't abdicate"

References

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