

Spotlight on Growth: **The Five Levels of Successful Delegation** by Jana Matthews, Founder and CEO, The Jana Matthews Group www.janamatthewsgroup.com

Your company can't grow unless you understand how to delegate.

This plain and simple truth applies to you as well as your management team. Smart delegation helps develop the next generation of company leaders, and frees the current leaders to grow the company.

When managers do not know how to delegate, they often end up micromanaging the process. This makes simple tasks more time-consuming and makes delegation seem like more trouble than it's worth.

Delegating does not mean the manager abdicates responsibility; it means that the employee is given some level of authority to act on behalf of the manager-and that authority can vary from a little to a lot.

Delegation is more complex than simply giving someone a task and assuming they will complete it. The Five Levels of Delegation will help you and your team understand how to delegate successfully. Your employees must demonstrate mastery at each level before you move them to the next level. Be ready to assess their skills at each level, and coach them when they don't get it right. In addition to identifying each level, I've also identified what you might say when you are delegating a project or decision to an employee. Your goal is to get your employees through the initial levels as quickly as possible. You can then move them to Level 5, where you can fully delegate and move on to new roles.

Level 1 - The Report:

This first step puts the information gathering in the hands of the employee, but keeps the decision-making and control in your hands. Start all new employees here. You need to gauge an employee's information gathering skills before you can accurately assess their decision making skills. What you say: "Report all the facts to me, then I'll decide what to do."

Level 2 - The Recommendation:

As the team member gets more comfortable with the process, submitting a recommendation for action is a logical next step. Once you are comfortable that your employee knows how to gather data and information, you can test their decision making skills. However, you retain complete control of the decision that is ultimately made. What you say: "Identify possible actions including the pros and cons of each, and recommend one for my approval."

Level 3 - The Action Plan:

This level puts both the recommendation for action and the design of the action plan in the employee's hands, but keeps you in the role of decision-maker. Since most decisions run into problems during the implementation stage, it's useful to discuss the proposed Action Plan with the employee before implementation begins. It gives you a chance to coach employees on implementation strategies, anticipate problems they might run into, and discuss ways to deal with those problems. What you say: "Let me know what you intend to do, but don't take action until I approve the plan."

Level 4 - Make the Decision:

By the time you reach this level, you have greater trust and comfort with your employee's decision-making and implementation skills. You can now let the team member "fly solo" and make the decision without you, reporting back to you only on the outcome. Your direct involvement has decreased, allowing you to focus on other issues. However, you should monitor progress and expect periodic updates. Hold the employee responsible for briefing you on the outcomes. What you say: "Decide what to do, take action, and then let me know how it all works out."

Level 5 - Full Delegation:

Employees handle decision-making and are fully accountable for the outcome. At this stage, there is one caveat: "No Surprises." Tell employees that you expect them to report back if they encounter any problems. Once a task is fully delegated, you can move on to new roles and responsibilities, things that only you can do. What you say: "I trust your judgment and I know your decisions will match our visions, values, and strategy. No further contact with me on this issue is required. But remember: 'No Surprises'." Delegation is a continually evolving process. Focus on the things that only you can do and continually look for projects and responsibilities that you can delegate. As one entrepreneur said recently, "If it can be delegated, it must be delegated."



Delegation frees you to address new challenges. As your company grows, make sure your team delegates, using the same Five Level process described above.

If this seems difficult, don't be afraid to seek outside help with delegation. Your company's growth depends on smart delegation!



About Jana Matthews

Dr. Jana Matthews, founder and CEO of The Jana Matthews Group, is an international expert on entrepreneurial leadership and business growth. Based in Boulder, Colorado, she works with corporate executives all over the country to unlock the growth potential of their companies. The founder of three companies, Jana is the co-author of *Leading at the Speed of Growth*, *Building the Awesome Organization*, and *Lessons From The Edge*.

About The Jana Matthews Group

The Jana Matthews Group provides consulting services and programs for growing companies. Their work with CEOs and Executive Teams focuses on building flexible, innovative companies; developing high performance employees; and achieving and sustaining long-term growth and continued profitability. For more information, visit www.janamattthewsgroup.com.