

3 Ways to Have Employees Help Grow Your Business

Are they simply impractical theories or can they really make a difference to the bottom line? No secrets here, the 3 are - giving instructions, delegating and empowering. The thing about them – delegation and empowerment at any rate - is that while we know we should use them more, we don't.

Is that because they take time, often result in frustration and seem to have no long term payoff? But what happens if you look at when and how to use each of them like any other business issue - in terms of Investment, Risk and Payoff?

Giving Instructions

We give instructions when we want a fairly simple task completed relatively quickly and, usually, only once. For example we tell someone to fetch the days' invoicing/sales numbers from accounts. A nice thing about instructions is that they can be given to anyone, regardless of their skill level or their length of service with the Company, whether they are hourly paid workers or salaried Vice Presidents.

When we give an instruction, we tell someone what has to be done; how it has to be done; to what standard; when it has to be completed and to tell us when they're finished. Then we ask them if they understand and have any questions. So the:

- **Investment** is a little time to think through the instruction, some more to give it and make sure it was understood and then a little more to check the job was done properly. Usually, completing the task will require no resources other than those we would use or spend if we were doing the job ourselves.
- **Risk** is that the task won't be done to our standard – for example the employee may bring only some pages of the report and/or may be delayed in their return. But the worst case is that, even if the instruction fails completely, the job can be redone. Not a desirable option but nevertheless a recovery route, keeping the impact on the Company relatively low.
- **Payoff** is that while a task is done without us having to do it, in the bigger picture, that task has a relatively small impact on growing the business – but then the investment and risk are also relatively small.

Delegating

When we delegate, the task may be more complex, it may take more time to complete and may not be required immediately. It may be a project – for example finding external salary rates, comparing them to company rates - for comparable positions – and presenting conclusions and recommendations to us.

We tend to delegate to employees we think are capable of completing the task or project well. So we delegate either to employees we've had the time to get to know or who can demonstrate (or claim to have) experience with the task, functional area or subject matter.

Here's where it gets complicated. Delegation looks so easy – but isn't. It's like playing golf, squash, hockey, tennis or curling. They're all skill based activities which require practice - and the more we practice, the better we get. There's another similarity.

In each of those games we use different clubs or strokes in different situations. So why wouldn't we delegate in different ways depending on the situation?

The first time we delegate a job to someone, and/or have them supervise other employees, we keep a close watch on the situation. The same thing applies when we use someone to whom we've successfully delegated in the past in a new area of the company. Let's call that Delegation 101. As we gain experience with the employee and/or they gain experience in the area, we invite their suggestions about all aspects of the task, but we make the final decisions. For example we discuss how the job is to be done with them before telling them/agreeing how it will be done. Call this Delegation 201. When we work with someone whose capabilities we know well, we give them much more freedom to use their initiative – asking them, for example, how they will do the job and drawing out the learning experiences when the task has been completed. This is Delegation 301.

When we delegate we remain responsible for the accurate completion of the project – not the person to whom we have delegated. So, even when we work with an employee who is very experienced, we use Delegation 301 - because giving them more/total freedom is actually abdication on our part. When we delegate the:

- Investment in time is greater than when giving an instruction - getting to know the individual's capabilities; answering questions and following up. We also have to think about how to deal with the employee if the job is not done well. We can't be so negative that the employee will never take on a project again. And more complex tasks require more resources, meaning more cost for the Company.
- Risk is that if the project isn't completed to the required standard, it will have more impact on the Company, for example if the recommendations from the salary survey are inaccurate, there could be financial and morale issues. So, to avoid an unhappy ending we have to check progress regularly - despite the temptation to delay or to stop checking in.
- Payoff When we delegate, employees tackle more complex and fulfilling assignments, giving them the opportunity to hone their judgement and business skills and get a better understanding of how the company works and what its priorities are. We can recognize good performance, gradually building our employee's self-confidence and feeling of engagement with the company. Finally, as we progress to Delegation 201 and 301, the company gets the benefit of new ideas or ideas that might never have been brought into play. The payoff – like the investment and the risk – is bigger.

Interesting way to look at an old issue? Then look for empowerment next month.....

To take issue with anything I've said or to share your experiences, send me an email at jimstewart@profitpath.ca or call me at 416-258-9610.