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Contract with Other Leaders

If you are the leader of a major change, you will probably need to delegate large portions of the project. There is a big difference between dumping something on someone's desk and actually delegating. I encourage you to hold conversations with each of these leaders. (And you might consider asking your sponsor to talk with you about these critical themes.)

Here are some tips for delegating responsibility effectively. First, three things need to be in place in order for you to delegate effectively.

- 1. They need to understand what this change is all about.** Why now? Why this change? In other words, let them know “why” and “what” before you get into “how” to do it. The middle managers that will be leading portions of change need context in order to make good decisions. Without that understanding, they have to make it up as they go along—guessing why this is important and trying to intuit what's most important every step of the way. Why leave this to chance—explain what's going on.
- 2. They need to understand what's at stake.** What's driving this change—new competition, the need to respond quicker to challenges in your environment, fear that great performance today may not equal great performance in the coming years? What's the risk if you fail? What's the risk if you do nothing?
- 3. They need to trust you (and other senior managers).** If they don't think you will see this through, they will probably do just enough work to keep you off their backs until you turn your attention to something else. You need to demonstrate that you are a capable leader. In other words, you plan to oversee this project from beginning to end. You will fight for resources. You will not be distracted by other new priorities.

Once these things are in place, then you can start handing off. Here are the things to include in your contracting conversation with those who you plan to delegate or assign tasks to.

Create a Contract

A very good way to hand off the assignment is to develop a simple contract with the leaders who will be assigned to plan and carry out various parts of the change. This contract should include:

Common Understanding of Outcome

Make sure that you and the people or groups you delegate to have a common understanding of what is expected. Explain your picture of success. What does it look like? How will you know when you are successful? Remember Robert Mager, who wrote extensively about creating good goals and objectives? He said that a clear goal was one that “if you met it on the street, you’d recognize it.”

Specific Milestones and Completion Date

Explain how they will be able to measure success along the way. What are the metrics you will use? If you don’t have a good answer for this question, then turn to the people you are delegating to and develop clear, measurable milestones in collaboration with them.

Let people know how much detail you will need as they go along. Some leaders want to be in the loop every step of the way. Others prefer minimal updates. Make sure the people you are delegating to know what you want.

Resources

Ask what they will need in order to meet these targets? For example:

- **People.** Who do they need in order to be successful? Perhaps they will want access to an engineer in another location or a marketing whiz from across the country.
- **Money.** What’s the budget for their portion of the project?
- **Access to other stakeholders.** Ask who else they will need to be able to talk to in order to be successful. Often these will be your peers. And you can be the link that opens those doors.
- **Access to you.** Discuss the best ways for you to stay in touch. And tell them the best way to contact you when they have an urgent question.
- **Time.** These people are probably already overworked. You can’t just add another major project and expect it will get done. You’ve got to be willing to readjust priorities. If you don’t, then you risk seeing a lot of projects either die or come in well below expectations.

Anticipate Glitches

With the help of the people you are delegating to, brainstorm things that could go wrong. (Don't pretend that this time will be different than all the others. Plan for the unexpected.)

Identify those glitches that are important to address today. Discuss what you can do to protect against those things happening. What are the early warning signs that this glitch might be about to occur? What contingency plans will you put in place to avert a major problem?

Review

Make sure that everyone is clear about all parts of this contract. Thank people for coming—and then get started. This simple process gets major changes off on the right foot and can save you many headaches, busted reputations, and potential failures. Good luck.

© 2010 Rick Maurer. Rick uses his Change without Migraines™ to advise organizations on how to lead change effectively. He is author of many books including *Beyond the Wall of Resistance*. In 2009, he created the Change Management Open Source Project, a free resource for people interested in change in organizations. You can access the open source project as well as many free articles and tools from his web site: www.rickmaurer.com

The Contract with Other Leaders” is adapted from my e-book *Leading from the Middle*(2008).