



How not to delegate!

TN15 Training Notes series: Management

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You've probably read several articles listing principles on how to delegate well.

These short case studies take a different line. They describe what it feels like to the 'delegatee' when the 'delegator' mucks it up.

You are sure to have been in something like at least one of these situations yourself – or seen something similar happen to others in your church. But you'd never be the person who caused the problem, would you? *Would you?*

Are you brave enough to study each of the six case studies and then answer the questions that follow? It might just be a revealing exercise. To encourage honesty it's best done in a group.

Six case studies

A **Marie**

Susannah is a busy person with a senior management job. She is organising the church's weekend away and is delighted when Marie offers to help. Susannah asks her to type and design the promotional brochure.

Marie duly spends several evenings producing the leaflet on her own laptop and rather basic printer. She later hears that Susannah has criticised it at the Church Meeting, apologising that it is not up to the required standard. But Marie, who did her very best, has no idea what this standard is.

B **Joe**

Joe takes over the enquirers' group from the Minister. This starts to produce a steady stream of new members for the church. The Minister is only too happy to take the credit even though he is hardly involved with the group now.

Then one day Joe makes a misjudgement over someone. This results in strong criticism of the church from a prominent member of the local community. The Minister is quick to put the blame on Joe and makes it clear to everyone that it was all Joe's fault.

C **Phil and Chris**

Phil and Chris fall out over the barbecue and it's quite dramatic. Both clearly thought they were supposed to organise it and neither is in any mood to give way. The Minister tells them it's none of her business and they must sort it out as best they can.

D **Charlie**

The Music Director asks Charlie to set up projection slides with special background visuals for a range of Psalms and prayers. The Director explains exactly how it is to be done and when Charlie makes some small changes to improve this the Director reworks the slides himself back to the style he had asked for. He then asks to see each slide as it is done so that he can approve it before Charlie moves on to the next one.

E **Stephanie**

Paul leads the range of children's groups but is a rather casual person. He asks Stephanie, a 17-year-old who has offered to help lead the 5 to 7s group, if she will do the session in two weeks' time, number six in the book, and gives her all the materials. Stephanie spends hours preparing ten days in advance as she is very conscientious.

Two days before the relevant Sunday Paul sends her an email to inform her that he forgot to say that all the groups are skipping one session to tie in with Harvest, so when she prepares would she please do session seven.

F **Dawn**

The Curate asks Dawn to take over the missionary prayer meeting and gives her a manual he has prepared on how to do it. But she is a creative person and soon makes some changes to the evening's format. These are greatly appreciated by most of those who attend.

The Curate gets to hear about this from one disgruntled and influential member of the Church Council who is also on a national church body. The Curate reports this to the Vicar who tells Dawn that she had no right to change the format and that he is asking the Curate to take the meeting back again.

Questions to answer

There is not much detail given in each case study, so your answers may depend to some extent on additional information that you provide yourself. Answer these before reading the notes that follow.

- 1 In each case study what mistakes have been made, and by whom?
- 2 How could these mistakes be avoided in future?
- 3 If you were to advise all the parties as things stand now, what would you say?
- 4 If you are the 'delegator', which one or more of these six situations (not necessarily the specific context cited in each case) are you most in danger of causing yourself?

- 5 Would others who know you well agree with your answer to the last question? (Ask them!) If not, why not?
- 6 What do *you* need to do to avoid causing these kinds of problem in future?
- 7 What other kinds of problem have you seen in similar situations?

Notes on the case studies

Only to be read after tackling the questions above.

Marie

Marie is the willing helper whose standards do not match expectation. But this is hardly her fault. Susannah, as for all of us, needed to:

- 1 Explain the task clearly in a way that Marie could understand and allow her to ask questions.
- 2 Clarify any need for deadlines (and whether this is a one-off task or an ongoing assignment).
- 3 Make clear what standard is required if this is an important issue – the key point in this particular case study. But is the standard Susannah wants unnecessarily high (she might be a perfectionist)?
- 4 Give honest feedback afterwards, one-to-one.

Joe

If you delegate you cannot take credit without taking blame too. But what seems to be absent here is any attitude of longing to see others succeed and of building them up so they can take on more responsibility. Delegating is far more than dumping work you do not want to do yourself on someone else. It is a long-term means of developing people to be the best that they can be in service for God and that comes with risk that things will go wrong at times along the way.

And where comes training and back-up? Joe may have made a misjudgement because the Minister had not trained him sufficiently well, or supported him enough, or been available for advice when required.

Phil and Chris

This really does look like dumping rather than delegating, plus a lack of clarity. Let's assume that the Minister here had asked them to organise the event in such a way that both had assumed the request was to them alone. That was the first major error and some apology is called for. But she then compounds it by washing her hands of the issue instead of recognising responsibility and seeking to sort it out. If you delegate you simply cannot walk away – though many people seem to think they can.

Charlie

Here is a common case of micro-management. The Music Director is making it clear he has little trust in Charlie and although some people need detailed help at the start (and others don't!) the Director here seems to be more interested in the style than the outcome. Having your effort reworked by your supervisor is particularly demoralising. It can be very uncomfortable to work under someone like this if you are the kind of person who needs to be given some freedom.

Stephanie

The mistake here is, first, to make decisions at the last minute when dealing with people or to forget to inform people who need to know about key decisions that have been made. Little upsets conscientious people more than last minute changes to plan.

But, secondly, there seems to be a lack of support or mentoring in any sense. Once again this looks like dumping more than delegating.

Dawn

When asking someone to undertake a task define the end product much more than the means of getting there. In other words tell them what the end-point looks like, not the how of reaching it. Then expect it to be done differently. Let them know too how much authority they have to change things or do them in new ways. Misunderstandings here cause problems down the line.

So two different points come through all these cases:

1 **Attitude**

If you delegate you are seeking to develop people to reach their potential and in the process growing them in both faith and practical service. They are to increase and you can decrease. That applies even if you could do the task better than them, if you are then set free for something else only you can do. This calls for trust and taking risk, for love and humility.

2 **Process**

There are key lessons to learn as a delegator such as clarity of instruction, time and skill given to training, level of authority being given, means of feedback, understanding different personalities from yours, review afterwards, and saying thank you.

Delegation is a long-term investment, not a quick fix.

These notes are available at <https://www.john-truscott.co.uk/Resources/Training-Notes-index> then TN15. They cover one aspect of possible training events for Ministers or churches on topics such as managing volunteers or lay ministry. See also Training Notes TN24, *Church members can burn out too*, TN30, *How to give and receive criticism*, TN31, *Affirming volunteers*, TN101, *Working with a No. 2*, and TN120, *Lessons for leaders*. Compare Article A32, *Be creative as a line manager*, and A45, *How to lead a team at church*.

John's resources are marked for filing categories of Leadership, Management, Structures, Planning, Communication, Administration. File TN15 under Management (with a link to Leadership).

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