

Delegating Authority

Lesson Objective: Comprehend the importance of delegating authority effectively to your staff.

Desired Learning Outcomes (DLO):

1. Define delegation of authority.
2. Understand of the relationship between authority and responsibility.
3. Discuss the benefits of delegating authority.
4. Discuss the “when, what and who” of delegating authority.
5. Describe the actions steps to effective delegation of authority.
6. Describe the pitfalls to avoid when delegating.

Scheduled Lesson Time: 50 minutes

Introduction

As commander, you are ultimately responsible for everything that happens in your squadron. Delegation is a powerful tool that enables you to complete more tasks, build up personnel, raise morale, and achieve more. Delegating authority is a necessity as it will be impossible for you to do all tasks yourself. Delegation of authority requires you to know how to implement it effectively and the confidence to apply it freely.

Commanders need to keep their eyes open and be available to address the “big issues” that require their level of authority.

They must perform leadership and the skills associated with overall mission success while still being familiar with the day to day workings of the unit as those that they have delegated to carry out the lower level tasks that support the “big issues.”

1. Delegation Defined:

There are several excellent definitions for this concept. Among these include:

A. According to the US Department of Defense, the definition of delegation of authority is: The action by which a commander assigns part of his or her authority commensurate with the assigned task to a subordinate commander.

B. USAF Air University cites: the dynamic balance between a commander directing operations and allowing subordinates freedom of action.

C. FEMA defines delegation as the granting of authority in order for a subordinate to carry out tasks.

It is in your best interest and your *obligation* to properly assign to your staff the many tasks which make your unit run smoothly. You cannot be an effective commander without knowing when and how to delegate authority.

When you delegate authority, you don't abdicate your responsibility. As a commander, you simply extend an umbrella of authority over your staff to complete required tasks. When

you delegate authority, you and your staff are able to handle the day to day chores and problems as they arise.

2. The difference between authority and responsibility

Before digging deeper, let's begin with some definitions to focus the conversation.

Definitions

1. Authority in CAP, as in the military, is the right to exercise control or command over subordinates by rank or assignment.
2. Responsibility is the accountability for a particular task, thing, or person.

Relationship between these concepts:

1. One cannot have authority without responsibility.
2. Authority is the power to act. Responsibility is the duty to act.
3. Authority can be delegated, responsibility cannot.

The following will attempt to illustrate the relationship between *authority* and *responsibility*. The first step is to convey the understanding that authority means to command or have control over something or someone and thus a commander cannot have authority without responsibility for that command. In order to have control over something, there is an implicit possession of some kind, and thus there is inherent responsibility.

- *You cannot have authority without responsibility.*
- *You can have responsibility without authority, but it's not advised.*

To illustrate, you have authority over your own life. You have the power and authority to choose what you want to do in most situations. You are responsible for those choices. In order to have authority over something, you must also be responsible for that thing.

Now, when you have responsibility over something, you are accountable for what happens to that something - be it a deadline, production quota, conduct of staff, possession of resources, etc. In the inverse, can you have responsibility over something or to do something, but not have the authority to garner support and get the job done?

That answer is yes. Personnel are often given a task and told that they have to go to someone else, such as the commander, in order to get the job done. IE. A Senior Member is assigned as the Professional Development Officer (PDO) and is tasked to sit down with all the seniors in the squadron to update their training records. If the other senior members do not know that this is what the commander wants, and the commander doesn't give the PDO the authority to complete the task through the commander's known support, the task will not get done in as timely manner.

Why? It is because the commander has not empowered that staff officer with the authority to speak in the commander's name. Alone, the PDO cannot compel the staff to switch their priorities. The commander must allow him to act through open communications granting the required authority and making that authority known.

Simply being assigned as a staff officer implies an inherent amount of responsibility. The Personnel Officer, for example, is responsible for maintaining member records and handling personnel, promotion, and awards actions. The Deputy Commander for Cadets is responsible for the administration of the Cadet Program within the unit. The amount of authority they have is up to the commander and needs to be communicated to all pertinent unit personnel affected by the duties the subordinates perform.

Simply stated, **authority = freedom of action**. When the commander delegates authority, to empower staff to fulfill their responsibilities as staff officers and as experts in their functional areas, the commander gives them the freedom to do their jobs. Their job is to do the day to day work which makes the squadron function. Your job as commander is to make the squadron run smoothly.

3. Benefits of Delegating Authority

A. Benefits to the commander:

1. Commander is freed to focus on more important aspects of the mission.
2. Can focus on the big picture vs. getting caught up in the details.
3. The risk of personal burnout is diminished.
4. The commander is viewed more positively by subordinates.

B. Benefits to the unit:

1. Effective delegation gets more done in less time.
2. Delegation increases team capacity.
3. Delegation develops subordinate professional skills.
4. Unit morale is improved through delegation.

Benefits to the Commander

Commanders are usually extremely pressed for time due to the many tasks they are required to complete. They are responsible for tasks needed by Wing HQ, the squadron, individual members, and even community duty related tasks. The primary role of commanders is to ensure overall mission success. Commanders must keep their eyes on the big picture of the overall mission and be available for tasks at their level of authority or requiring their skills.

Delegating alleviates the drain of time that commanders could allow to happen if they attempt to handle too many smaller tasks that do not need the commander's specific attention. This allows the commander to focus on the leadership functions across a broader number of areas and on more important tasks.

Commanders who delegate effectively are much less apt to burnout. Commanders that try to do too many tasks often end up with personal issues such as: possible fatigue, missed deadlines, errors, etc. These injure the commander and the unit.

The USAF and CAP have determined that commanders that delegate are more highly thought of by subordinates than those commanders that try to do it all themselves. Surveys of subordinates indicate that commanders that delegate are thought of as being more mission

oriented, professional, caring, team oriented, and thought of as a mentor. These aspects of being a leader all promote personal and unit success.

Benefits to the Unit

Units where the commander delegates have proven to be able to sustain accomplishing more in less time than units where the commander attempts all or most of the work alone. There are many deadlines that must be met in CAP. There are regulatory deadlines, mission essential deadlines, logistical deadlines, training deadlines, and many more. Commanders that do not delegate risk missing deadlines and preventing missions from being accomplished due to unit or personnel down time until the tasks can be completed. Delegating substantially improves the unit's ability to make all necessary deadlines.

As subordinates take on tasks the unit's capacity to complete tasks grow as more personnel can simply do more tasks than one or a few can achieve. Subordinates that receive delegation often become more efficient with those tasks and thus complete them faster.

A commander that delegates is also developing the skills of his subordinates. It is on-the-job-training. The commander can choose the appropriate level of delegation based on a subordinates skills, knowledge, and experience and increase the level in subsequent delegations until the subordinate is highly qualified to take on tasks independently. IE. A commander may use a level system such as the one developed by Michael Hyatt following:

Level 1: Do exactly what I have asked you to do.

Level 2: Research the topic and report back.

Level 3: Research the topic, outline the options and make a recommendation.

Level 4: Make a decision and then tell me what you did.

Level 5: Make whatever decision you think is best.

When commanders delegate authority effectively the unit's morale increases. Subordinates feel trusted by their commander. They feel important and part of the mission's success. A true spirit of teamwork is developed.

The effective use of delegation also allows a unit to continue functioning in the absence of the commander. Personnel can continue to perform their tasks. Deadlines can be met and standing orders and procedures carry on in performance.

4. "When, What and Who" of delegating authority.

The importance of empowering your staff with the authority - freedom - to do their jobs effectively cannot be understated. Commanders must not only know that delegating authority is essential, but they must also know how to perform it effectively. Commanders must be able to discern what can be delegated, when it can be delegated, and equally important, to who it can be delegated. This is essential in order for the task to be completed properly and to take care of the personnel and the mission. The commander is the final person responsible for what happens in the unit. The commander must be aware of everything that happens in the unit.

Delegation is a matter of perspective. Before any delegation occurs, the commander must make the decision about how far the extent of the delegation is desired to go. The amount of authority the commander delegates will vary from person to person and situation to situation. Commanders will monitor a new Administrative Officer who's just completed Level I much more

than a proven veteran Personnel Officer who's been successfully completing delegated tasks in the squadron for 10 years. Commanders will be much more involved with the Testing Officer investigating a possible test compromise than if the testing Officer dealing with a question about which quiz to select in the Learning Management System (LMS).

When to delegate authority

1. When the time required to perform a task exceeds your time available.
2. When the required level of expertise exceeds your level of knowledge.
3. When the task is permitted by regulation to be delegated.
4. When the task will not expose the subordinate to blame for loss in unit morale or other criticism for attempting to carry out your instructions (don't place upon a subordinate something controversial that you may fear doing).

A commander should delegate when time is of the essence and a deadline cannot be met through the commanders handling of the tasks solely. Several people can divide and accomplish the work faster provided the assisting member is trained to perform the task.

There will be times when a task is encountered and a subordinate will actually have more expertise than the commander. This is another time that delegation should occur if allowed within the regulations. There is no need for a commander to try to prove superior knowledge. The respect of subordinate's expertise will demonstrate confidence on behalf of the commander as well as build a positive working relationship with the subordinate.

A commander must always check to ensure that the delegation of a task is permitted in CAP-USAf directives. A commander can only delegate those tasks that regulations do not require the commander to perform alone.

Finally, delegation of authority should only be give when the task will not fall back on the subordinate in a negative manner. Commanders cannot assign a task that will result in criticism, blame, or other negative consequences from attempting or carrying out the delegated task. Commanders must never delegate a difficult or risky task that has high potential for negative perceptions or outcomes, because the commander is fearful of carrying out the task. The commander must take on such hard decisions and tasks and protect subordinates.

What to delegate

1. Authority to develop important initiatives and projects.
2. Oversight of certain staff functions.
3. Completing supporting details of a larger function.

Commanders have a wide range of tasks that can be delegated. It is impossible to list all of them. Commanders can delegate those tasks related to completion of supporting details, planning tasks, steps or stages in unit initiatives or projects, and oversight of certain routine staff functions. In general, a commander can delegate anything allowed in the regulations that does not need the commander's unique authority or skills to be completed and does not create a negative outcome for the subordinate tasked.

Who to delegate to

1. A subordinate that is motivated to do the task.
2. The subordinate has the necessary skills.
3. The most qualified subordinate available to do the task.
4. A subordinate with a background or experience in the task area.

The commander should always select a subordinate that is motivated to perform the task or in which such motivation has genuinely been developed before the task is assigned. Unmotivated subordinates will be reluctant to do the work and thus will miss deadlines, errors, or other issues may result.

Subordinates that are selected to carry out a task need to possess the minimum necessary skills. Commanders should ensure that subordinates not only have the paper certifications to perform the task at hand, but the practical working knowledge and skills to do so effectively.

The most qualified subordinate available to do the task is the one that should be selected for delegation. There are times that a commander may select another subordinate for development purposes, but when the mission is of prime consideration or the task will be handled on a long-term basis, the most skilled subordinate should be assigned.

When formal training is not a prerequisite for a task to be delegated, the commander should determine which subordinate possess the greatest degree of experience or related background knowledge in the task area.

5. Steps to Effective Delegation of Authority:

As discussed previously, the commander must discern as to what will be delegated, when it can be delegated, and to whom it will be delegated to as the initial steps in effective delegation of authority.

The next step is for the commander to state the desired outcome very carefully and clearly (“What does ‘right’ look like?”). Steps must be taken to clarify the outcomes and any directions given to the subordinate. Poor directions or inadequate conveyance of the desired outcome(s) will often result in the work being done incorrectly or not meeting the desired level of expectations. It is the commander’s responsibility to ensure clarity and understanding occurs in both directions and expectations.

Another area that the commander is responsible for is the ascertaining of the level of commitment the subordinate has to the task being delegated. The commander should ensure the subordinate is motivated and has a clear understanding of the scope of work. No surprises should be thrown at the subordinate.

The next step is for the commander to provide the subordinate with the freedom to act through the actual delegation of authority. The commander must make affected personnel aware of the delegation and the commander intent by the delegation. In that way, the subordinate is known to be acting on behalf of the commander and to what extent the authority extends. This allows freedom of action and prevents abuse of the authority granted.

The level of skill and knowledge combined with the sensitivity of the task will dictate the degree of monitoring and coaching that the commander must perform. All delegation must be monitored. A commander should never just allow delegated tasks to be done without quality checks. The subordinate is performing the tasks in the commander's name and the commander is responsible for them. Failure to monitor is reckless and negligent. The commander should coach, not direct. Asking subordinates "what" and "how" questions as to what they are doing currently or have done and how they will proceed next are appropriate. The commander should get subordinates to develop their own acceptable plan of action and have them find their own solutions. Commanders that direct them step by step or provide answers are not developing independent action and are still doing the work themselves.

Along with monitoring, the commander should maintain accountability over the subordinate to ensure the task is being completed properly. Benchmark checks should be made. The commander should make sure the subordinate has the necessary resources to complete the task. Measures should be provided to confirm progress and quality. These measures should be checked at different points in the process, not just at the final completion stage. This will avoid unwanted surprises and give feedback and reinforcement to the subordinate performing the task.

Upon successful completion of the task the commander needs to praise, recognize, and reward the subordinate as appropriate. This builds a positive working relationship, increases morale, and further instills greater motivation to work on the next task.

6. Avoiding common pitfalls when delegating authority

The following is a list of common pitfalls that commanders need to be aware of and take precautions not to commit when delegating authority:

1. Incorrect task for delegation - Commanders need to ensure they have used the effective principles for task identification before delegating. Failure to do so results in task failure, personnel issues, negative effects on larger missions, and poor reflection on the commander.
2. Unclear directions and/or expectations - When commanders deliver directions and outcomes that are not clear, confusion happens. Commanders who are angry when the final product is complete and the result did not meet expectations, should be mindful that it is often due to the commander's own failure to communicate properly.
3. Failing to delegate developmentally by level - Placing too much authority on an inexperienced subordinate will create opportunities for mistakes due to lack of training and knowledge.
4. Supervise too closely - Over directing is the same as doing the work. It undermines the confidence and motivation of the subordinate.
5. Improper selection of subordinate - Choosing the wrong subordinate for the task due to lack of motivation, skill, knowledge, etc. may result in the task not being completed correctly or in a timely manner. The principles of subordinate selection are essential to delegation success.
6. Failing to monitor - Commanders that fail to monitor miss opportunities to coach or make adjustments in communications/directions or in clarity of outcomes to ensure the final product is at completion. Monitoring controls the work pace and prevents some subordinates from moving too far afield or too far in front of the team.

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7. Deliberate redundancy - Commanders that intentionally assign the same task to multiple personnel risk insulting the subordinates. These actions may make one or both feel that they are not trusted.
8. Failing to anticipate radial impacts - Commanders need to predict that effects of delegation on others in the unit. Communications must take place to make sure all understand the commander's intent of the delegation and the extent of the authority delegated.
9. Swooping in to save the subordinate - Commanders should coach and guide subordinates to solve problems and set up effective action plans versus taking over to make sure it is done correctly. When commanders step in they demonstrate a lack of trust, risk embarrassing the subordinate and lower motivation and morale.
10. Assigning responsibility in excess of authority or control - Commanders that delegate tasks that exceed the legal authority of the subordinate doom the subordinate to failure, because either the subordinate cannot carry out the task or other members will not participate as needed.
11. Overwhelming subordinate's work capacity - Assigning too much to a subordinate will result in the same shortcomings in the subordinate that the commander is trying to avoid.

Exercise: You will take part in a classroom exercise. No additional preparation is required.

Lesson Summary and Closure

Commanders who delegate authority will find it gets easier with proper use. The more delegation that occurs, the stronger, more competent, and loyal the staff will be. Delegating is an essential function of command. Delegation takes planning to implement key steps while maintaining awareness of possible pitfalls. When done effectively, delegation enhances personnel development, unit morale and performance, as well as mission success.