

**Harvard
Business
Review****Delegating****How to Tell If You're Delegating
Too Much — and What to Do
About It**

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Summary. If you find yourself frequently miscommunicating with your team, hearing about issues at the last minute, or misunderstanding how your team sets priorities, it may be a sign you've delegated too much. To get re-involved, start by taking on a symbolic project that... [more](#)

Everyone knows leaders should delegate to ensure that they are working on the right projects and deliverables. But if you find

yourself frequently miscommunicating with your team on deliverables, hearing about issues at the last minute, and misunderstanding how your team set their priorities, it may be a sign you've delegated too much, leaving their employees to feel abandoned and unmotivated. At that point, it's important to take back responsibility for certain tasks to insure you're providing your team the guidance and structure they need. Here are three steps you can take.

Take on a symbolic project. Obviously, you don't want to overcorrect and start doing a myriad of low-level tasks in order to reconnect with your team. But taking on a symbolic project or task can be a visible way of demonstrating your re-engagement, as well as helping the company and advancing your own learning goals. For instance, I coached one senior advertising executive who realized she had delegated too much. She decided to get back into the details by learning a new piece of software. This gave her a new skill to share with other leaders in the company and her own team. Her time spent on the software also helped in the long run because when it was time to delegate, she understood all of the specifics of getting the work accomplished.

Reset with your team. One CTO I coached realized he'd been delegating too much because he no longer had proper visibility into what his teams were working on. He'd been frustrated that departmental projects he had delegated — such as a dashboard and internal training, (which he felt would differentiate their department in the marketplace) got lost and forgotten with looming client deadlines. To combat this, he scheduled an offsite to reconfirm the vision for the department and get everyone on the same page again about goals and expectations.

He realized through the offsite process that his team hadn't understood the rationale or urgency behind the internal projects. Afterward, he could follow up more effectively and make smarter determinations about where he could delegate without going too far, and his team was much more willing to focus on internal

projects, as well.

Recommunicate the vision. The biggest over-delegation risk for leaders is leaving the vision or culture of the company to others. Of course, most leaders don't think they've done this. Instead, they believe they've delivered and communicated the vision innumerable times. And yet, their teams are confused and missteps occur with delivering the work on a consistent basis. If you're noticing that output on projects has stalled, there's excessive disagreement on tasks and process, or unexpected and inconsistent behavior among team members, it may be a sign that you've over-delegated the vision to the point where team members feel they're interpreting it or making it up on their own. A particularly obvious clue is receiving repeated questions from different team members asking you to clarify the vision.

For example, one CMO told me a story of how he had been working on a key partnership initiative for his company. He believed the partnership fit with the overall vision of the company laid out by the CEO. Unfortunately, the CEO had over-delegated the vision to other members of the executive committee and didn't properly communicate a shift in his revenue strategy. When it was time to present the partnership to the board, the CEO rejected the work because it didn't track with his new vision and the partnership stalled, wasting the CMO's time and causing needless conflict and frustration.

As a leader, to combat this form of over-delegation, make sure you're using every public communication opportunity you have to stress and reinforce the message. For instance, you could remind people about the overarching vision at the beginning of a project, during town halls and other forums, at senior leadership meetings, or periodically through email communications. Without this approach, there can be a cascading effect of morale issues, loss of creativity, and a lack of teamwork. But most, importantly, there is a loss of credibility for the leader.

While there are times as a leader to step back and delegate to let teams grow, *over* delegation can backfire. By using the steps above, you can ensure your department, team, and company are moving in the right direction together.

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