



Bake me a pie!

By Julie Parker

I asked a friend to bake me a pie. She went away and returned, proud of the delicious beef pie she had made.

“No, no, no! I meant a pie for dessert!”

She went away and this time returned with a lemon pie.

“No, no, no! I wanted an apple pie! Here is a list of ingredients to use!”

My friend again left, this time with more information to tackle the project. When she returned, she had complaints. The pastry did not hold together and the pie collapsed.

“You have used the wrong quantities of ingredients! There is too much butter in the pastry!”

With this information, she left and returned with a fresh apple pie, but more complaints. Despite baking the pie for 45 minutes, the apples were still raw.

“Your method was all wrong! You are supposed to pre-cook the apples in sugar before adding them to the pie casing!”

Who knew delegating a simple task of “bake me a pie” could be so much trouble!

I wonder what the result would have been had I given my friend the full recipe of the pie I wanted?...

Ineffective delegation can result in unmet expectations and frustration for both sides. The one who is delegating the task often complains that “in order to get anything done, I just have to do it myself!” The delegatee is left with feelings of incompetence and develops a resistance to being involved with future projects.

Effective delegation not only allows your team to get more things done but also empowers team-members and helps them become better and deliver outcomes more enthusiastically.

The two common delegation mistakes are to either provide too little direction or too much direction.

Too little direction

If an employee is given too little information to move forward, the completion of the task can easily stagnate: “I don’t even know how to make a start on this project”.



Alternatively, the delegatee may get into the project straight away but soon the results being delivered are far from the actual goal.

Too much direction

Giving too much direction can result in micro-managing the team member through the process. This results in an unintentional dumbing-down process; the team-member is forced to watch on passively as the delegator takes over.

The other disadvantage to micro-management is that team members only ever get one way of completing tasks and are never exposed to the great ideas and experiences that others can bring to successful implementation of a project and the joy of achieving a challenging goal.

Using my scenario of the apple pie, how can we establish a process of delegation that works for everyone?

The framework

Goal > Ingredients > Method > Check-In

Example

I will use an example project to explain the process. Let’s say you want the receptionist to start tracking five relevant key performance indicators on a monthly basis.

Goal

The goal is the result you see once the task is completed. You may think that the goal for the receptionist is to track the key performance indicators, but it’s not. That would be like me simply saying “bake me a pie”.

The goal you describe to the receptionist is your desire to monitor the practice success in select areas so you can act early and make improvements when required. You picture yourself in the first week of each month with an updated report of the previous month’s performance, helping to ensure that the practice is on track to reach the annual goal.

Engaging the team member in the goal and clarifying the purpose of the task will open her mind up to other elements she can bring to the project that you may not be aware of or may not have considered.

Ingredients

The ingredients are the elements the receptionist has available to complete the project. For this example, that would be the software reports section, an Excel spreadsheet and three hours on the last Friday of every month to manage the task.

Does the receptionist possess the skills and knowledge to tackle the project? Are coaching and training required or would someone else be better suited to the task?

Ensure the receptionist has an available computer, printer and support from co-workers so she can work with uninterrupted focus. Give her the authority and the autonomy to “carry on”, rather than awaiting “permission”.

I love that excellent saying in such circumstances: “It is better to ask for forgiveness after the event than permission!”

Method

The method is the way to use each of the ingredients. Does she require training

from the software developer to use the dental software reports effectively? Does she need basic Excel training? Has she been rostered off her other duties in order to progress with the project?

Part of “method” is to decide upon a reasonable deadline.

Check-in

Checking in with your receptionist on her progress is a crucial step in effective delegation. When your they come up against barriers and nothing is done about those barriers, momentum stalls.

Effective delegation requires you to provide your team with everything you have to increase the chances of success. Giving them the autonomy to take the action steps themselves builds motivation and confidence. Whilst I recognise that the project may take longer than if you were to do it yourself, over time you are freeing up your time to work on different, and more important projects.

About the author

Julie Parker's whole career has been devoted to the dental industry, starting in 1987 as a dental nurse. In 2003, Julie became the first non-dentist to buy a dental practice in Australia. She owned and managed her practice in Brighton, Victoria for 10 years. During this time, she more than trebled the turnover and her staff base grew from 3 to 12 members. Julie successfully cultivated a winning team and a winning business. Her business programs on how to accomplish a dream dental business are gleaned from her wealth of experience, intensive education and an inquisitive business mind.

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