

CHICAGO LAWYER®

INSIDE OUT

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HY IS DELEGATION IMPORTANT TO A LAWYER'S PRACTICE?

Martini: Many reasons. First, there are only 24 hours in a day. Delegation enables you to get more done in less time when tasks are broken down into various pieces and done in parallel.

Having people you can delegate to creates leverage, which is essential to staffing matters in an economical way, especially in an era where we must do more with less. It also helps ensure team members are focused. For those tasks that have already been mastered by certain co-workers, you should look for ways to involve other team members who can benefit from receiving training on those tasks.

Susler: It's critical because no one person can do or know it all. Delegation is important for efficiency, economy, training and creativity.

What to do if you are not able to delegate as much?

Martini: You should consider your options in terms of getting the work done that you have. This involves taking inventory of projects, what the deadlines are, how long you it will take to complete, and what you can reasonably expect your schedule to look like, what your other daily obligations will be and what that juggling will look like. If you are in-house, you may be able to send some projects to outside counsel or, if you are part of a legal department, see if others can lend a hand with at least some of the work. If you are in a law firm, think of how to get both immediate and longer-term help, as the "one-person band" model does not generally work in the long run, particularly in Big Law.

Susler: Delegation is not just pushing work down to a direct report or someone more junior. It's a form of teamwork. I am the number two attorney in a two lawyer in-house legal department, with one administrative assistant who supports us with administrative and paralegal type tasks.

I need to rely on my non-lawyer business colleagues to help me do my work, which supports our businesses. I regularly ask them to supply me with information and documentation when needed. For employment issues, I may delegate aspects of investigations to human resources. For safety matters, I may delegate to the on-site safety manager to perform necessary tasks under my supervision and direction. While I do not manage any of those people directly in their jobs, I manage



PASSING IT DOWN

Delegating tasks isn't a sign of weakness

By CHRISTINA L. MARTINI and DAVID G. SUSLER

certain work and delegate to them what I cannot do myself. In-house attorneys often rely on outside counsel. We go to outside counsel to assist us in substantive areas where we lack expertise.

What are the best practices/lessons learned about delegating?

Martini: First, delegation is a dynamic, not a static, concept. Over time, the best delegation evolves as people's skillsets grow. It takes into account how people are learning, developing and mastering various skills.

It's important to strike a delicate balance of delegating the right amount and the right types of tasks. This means mastering the art of breaking projects into smaller pieces, knowing the resources available to you and their respective skills, and project managing each to ensure timely, effective completion.

You also must consider what pieces of a project you will do yourself, whether you are growing through the process and giving yourself an opportunity to shine as well. Making the decision not to delegate at all, or to delegate less than you should, particularly in a professional services environment, is not what clients want. It's taking the easy way out and is self-limiting behavior.

Delegating too much can have its own problems, including taking greater chances with the

quality of the product and losing control of a project. Through effective delegation, you learn what colleagues can do well and where they excel.

Susler: We often think delegating is too difficult and it is easier to do it ourselves. Successful delegation of certain work is essential to our own successful performance. The key is being able to delegate to people who will get the job done.

I learned a key lesson from my father, also a lawyer. When I was 10 years old, I rode with him to his office. He asked who I thought were the most important people in a law firm. I answered, "the partners."

He said no, it is the support staff and you need them to be able to do your job as a lawyer. I learned to treat everyone, including colleagues, regardless of title, with respect. If you do that, they will gladly help and do the work you give them. [CL](#)

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To submit a question, e-mail questions.insideout@gmail.com