

THE DELEGATION POCKETBOOK

By Dr. Jon Warner

Drawings by Phil Hailstone

“Delegation has always been a bit of a ‘hit or miss’ affair for me in the past but this pocketbook has given me a much better appreciation not only of what I should be doing but also how. I have already started to see better outcomes as a result.”

Helen Lewis, HR Director, Healthnet

“Finding the time to delegate has always been a big personal challenge. However, after carrying out several of the exercises and suggestions in this book, I quickly realised that over half of what I was doing could be done by others. This has helped me make much more effective use of my time.”

Sue Casanovas, Training Manager, Kingston Hospital NHS Trust

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DELEGATION STYLES

Earlier in this section, we talked about the different styles you can use when briefing someone. Although you *may* approach each opportunity to delegate in a different way, most people consistently utilise one approach or single style of delegating each time; one that may not always be appropriate to the situation.

Such style differences exist along a continuum. At one end of the continuum, a task or project may be delegated in name but not in practice. In other words, involvement in the work by the delegator can remain relatively high, and the person to whom the task has been delegated is left with very little room to do the job as he or she sees fit. This is called a **controlling** style.

At the other end of the continuum, a task is delegated with high levels of planning, care and involvement with the other person. This is called a **collaborative** style. In between these two extremes are what we call a **tentative** style and a **participative** style.

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DELEGATION STYLES

QUESTIONNAIRE

In order to assess which delegation style you tend to adopt the most, what follows is a short questionnaire (adapted from a more in-depth online assessment). Your task is simply to review this list of 12 statements and identify the four that you think most reflect your general behaviour when it comes to delegating.

1. I like to look for individual strengths and delegate important tasks that I know will be challenging to the person concerned.
2. I talk to individuals about their relative skills and interests as a basis for discussion about future workload handling.
3. I like to delegate, but I worry about whether people have the skills and time to do the work well.
4. If a task I have delegated is likely to fall short of a target or to be late, I step in to help.
5. I give people the room to do a delegated task as they see fit, but stay around for advice if it is needed.

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DELEGATION STYLES

QUESTIONNAIRE

6. I often ask people if they would like to be involved in some delegated tasks.
7. I occasionally get involved in a delegated task if I see a person does not have a lot of confidence.
8. I delegate small and relatively minor tasks from time to time.
9. I work with individuals to discover what they feel capable of handling.
10. I check up on people frequently when I have delegated a task or project.
11. I tend to delegate to people when the task is clearly defined and well within the individual's ability to handle it.
12. I tend to delegate to people as a last resort when I can't do a task or project myself.

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DELEGATION STYLES

QUESTIONNAIRE: RESULTS

So how did you do?

In the assessment, questions 1, 5 and 9 relate to a **collaborative** delegation style. If you picked more of these questions than others, this is the style you seem to prefer.

Questions 2, 6 and 10 relate to a **participative** delegation style. If you picked more of these questions than others, this is the style you seem to prefer.

Questions 3, 7 and 11 relate to a **tentative** delegation style. If you picked more of these questions than others, this is the style you seem to prefer.

Questions 4, 8 and 12 relate to a **controlling** delegation style. If you picked more of these questions than others, this is the style you seem to prefer.

The next page gives you more information on the different styles.

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CONTROLLING STYLE

So what does it mean to have a strong preference for one of these styles when delegating? The following descriptions briefly explain the basic characteristics of each of the four delegation styles:

Individuals with a **controlling** delegation style are likely to give tasks or projects to others on an occasional basis. However, when they do so, they often strongly supervise so that they can potentially better control the quality of the input effort and the amount of time that the work takes to complete.

The downside of this approach is that the supervision of work effort can be overdone. Individuals feel micro-managed and as if they are not fully trusted to perform the task or project alone.



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TENTATIVE STYLE

Individuals with a **tentative** style are likely to be willing to delegate work more frequently but will have several reservations. These reservations may extend to doubts about the other person's experience, capability or work quality. Consequently, it takes longer to delegate a task, or only part of a task is actually offered up.

The downside of this approach is that the feelings of reservation are often visible for others to see. This does little for the confidence of the person asked to do the work, who may even question the value of starting the task at all.



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PARTICIPATIVE STYLE

Individuals with a **participative** delegation style usually delegate work frequently, as a prime means to help individuals work in teams and experience different tasks, to which they may have had little or no previous exposure. People working in this style like to stay closely involved with the person to whom the work is delegated.

The downside of this approach is that not every delegated task lends itself to teamwork and the individual may not appreciate such close participation, having been asked to work on a delegated project.



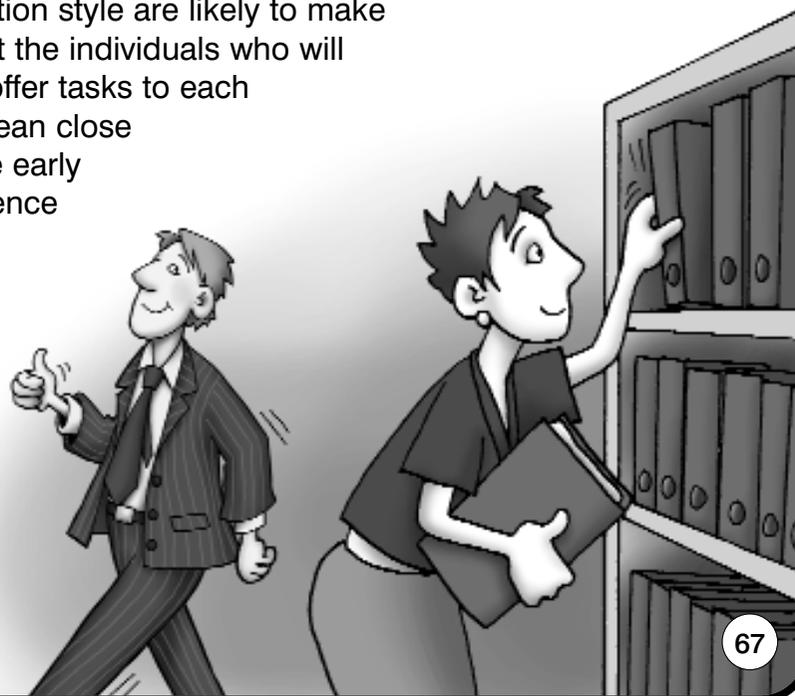
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COLLABORATIVE STYLE



Individuals with a **collaborative** delegation style are likely to make a much more careful assessment about the individuals who will benefit from delegated work and then offer tasks to each person on a selected basis. This will mean close collaboration with each individual in the early stages, to determine how much confidence he or she has in doing the task, and subsequently collaborating as much or as little as necessary.

The downside of this approach is that some individuals may feel (for good or bad) that they are always the ones selected for delegated tasks.



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UNDERSTANDING YOUR STYLE



The benefit of knowing a little more about your preferred style is potentially to help you to develop, or further hone, your delegation skills in the future. The use of controlling, tentative or participative styles in particular is likely to be sub-optimal, at least to some extent.

A good delegator should consequently try to move along the continuum and aim to operate in a more collaborative way wherever possible. You can do this by thinking about how to make your preparation for delegation more effective, in terms of selecting the right tasks and choosing the most suitable people. Finally, try to work supportively and collaboratively with those entrusted with the work.

About the Author

Dr. Jon Warner

Dr. Jon Warner operated as a senior professional manager, with over 25 years' experience in a number of major multi-national companies in the United Kingdom, Europe, the United States of America and Australia. This experience has included time as a senior staff manager in human resources and a number of line roles with responsibility for large groups of people. During the last 10 years Jon has been involved in broad ranging organisational consultancy and the pursuit of best-practice leadership. This consulting has taken him into a number of major organisations such as Mobil Oil, HSBC, BTR, Qantas, Barclays, United Energy, Air Products and Chemicals, Avon Products and Lloyds TSB. Jon Warner is also Managing Director of Team Publications Pty Limited, an international training and publishing company committed to bringing practical and fun-to-use learning material to the market.



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