

Delegation Techniques

This chapter will enable you to:

- ▶ Consider the advantages of delegating some tasks and responsibilities.
- ▶ Understand the kinds of tasks to delegate and how to do so.
- ▶ Know and use delegation techniques that contribute to a positive market environment.
- ▶ Use delegation of tasks to build the capacity of the market and its staff and volunteers.

No matter how well you are able to “plan your work and work your plan,” you may find that there still is too much to do. That is the time to bring in your most valuable resource—the employees, the board, coworkers, volunteers, farmers, and friends who have committed to helping you run the market. One of the key components of developing yourself as a manager while simultaneously relieving yourself of the time crunch is to learn how to delegate.

Delegating does not mean passing off work and burdening others. Done correctly, it helps coworkers and volunteers build their skills and abilities while allowing you to work on the projects that really need your unique and valuable expertise. Effective management involves combining and coordinating everyone’s efforts and that means delegating tasks wisely.

Why Delegate?

We know that when it comes to physical labor we cannot do everything. While our physical capabilities are finite, our brains’ abilities are virtually unlimited. Dick Lohr, author of the audio seminar *How to Delegate Work and Ensure It’s Done Right* (Career Track Publications, Boulder, Colorado), says, “When you try to

do everything yourself, you are working from the neck down. You are physically limited in what you can accomplish. If you want to free up your own future and free up the future of your people and help them grow, you’ve got to delegate, which is working from the neck up.” As a quick example, think about how long it takes you to clean up after the market. Is there a way you can organize and delegate different parts of the job so that each vendor or volunteer can help with a small task and make the overall breakdown go faster? This is changing a physical job into a mental one. By organizing physical work differently and involving more people in small, manageable tasks, you can accomplish more in less time.

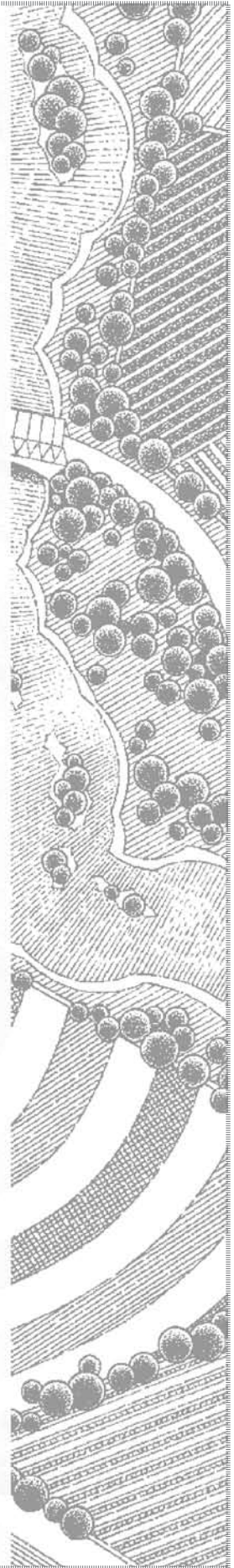
Another way that delegation builds the capacity of the market is by making strategic use of the talents and strengths of the people around you. For example, as the manager, you could spend time learning the necessary software and computer

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skills to set up a computerized system for the market's records or to produce advertisements or you could delegate those tasks to people who already have some or all of the necessary skills. If you do it yourself, you are taking valuable time from another task; if you delegate to someone else, giving them the resources and information they need to do the job, then you can use your time and your assistant's time efficiently.

Despite the advantages, many managers are reluctant to delegate responsibility. Reasons for this include the following:

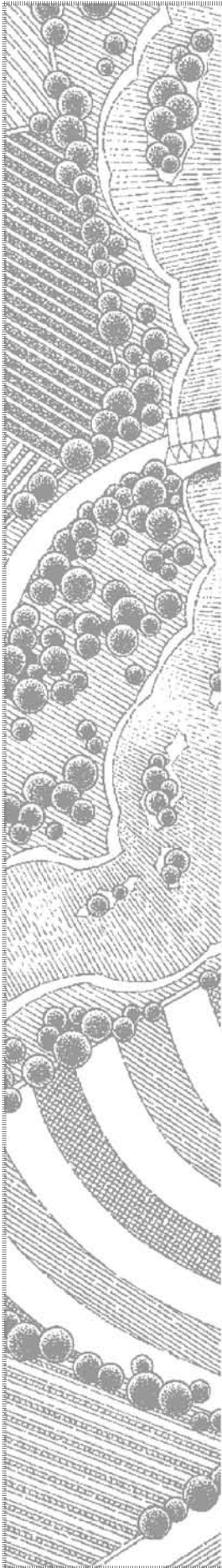
- Many managers want to do the things that are quick, rewarding, interesting—in other words, the fun jobs. However, these may be the best assignments to delegate. If you continue to cover all of these types of jobs, you may find yourself out of time before completing more important tasks that cannot be done by anyone else.
- Managers worry that they will lose control and authority. Effective delegation, however, can actually increase both. By bringing in more people, you can accomplish more and you can supervise and exercise authority over the results.
- Managers sometimes think that their staff members do not have a sense of the big picture and so will not make decisions that factor in all the different consequences. While it is true that an assistant likely has less overall knowledge than a manager, the only way for an assistant to gain that knowledge is through exposure and experience. Judicious delegation involves providing the necessary information to get the job done and supervising so that errors can be corrected during the process of carrying out the task.
- Managers often think that their way of doing something is the best way and therefore see it as the only way. If this is a trait you recognize in yourself, consider the cost in tasks that are not undertaken or completed because you simply do not have time for everything. Such tasks might better be completed, even if they are done in a different way. Figure out what needs to get done and who can do it. If there are tasks that can be done in several different ways, give your assistant the resources and tips needed to get started but give enough autonomy to allow him or her to decide how best to work as long as the work is done within the established time line and gets the desired results. Make yourself available if for questions and guidance.



How to Delegate

Learning to delegate takes time and practice. Start with jobs that do not crucially affect the market's budget and will not make or break an event. Then, as your assistants gain skills and experience, and as you gain comfort in supervising them, more and more assignments can be delegated. It takes work to be a good delegator, but it is well worth the effort in time you save, in the level of involvement you share with your community, and in the popularity of the market. The following nine steps will help you become a great delegator:

- Make sure you are clear about the objectives of the project and the results you want.
- Clearly communicate the job, giving expectations and due dates. Ask your assistant for ideas. He or she may have good input and asking the question and hearing ideas also ensures that the task is understood.
- Offer advice but do not tell your assistant exactly how to do the work—give some room for creativity. Train your assistant, if necessary, and fill him or her in on the needed facts and anticipated complications.
- Remember to build confidence and enthusiasm, so pick jobs that are suited to the individual's interests and abilities. Explain why he or she was chosen and why the project is being done. Discuss how it fits into the bigger picture as putting assignments in a context makes them more meaningful.
- For large, important projects, establish a budget, timeline, and process for reporting progress.
- Get a commitment and make sure your assistant has the time and interest to follow through.
- Be available to offer guidance, feedback, and other necessary support.
- Take time to evaluate the finished product for the benefit of you and your assistant. Recognize the lessons that both of you learned.
- Find someone who is a good delegator and use that person as a role model. Practice, observation, and feedback are keys to mastering delegation. You may approach the person you have chosen as a role model and ask her or him to mentor you in gaining that skill. Mentoring can be a simple, time-limited arrangement involving a phone call when you are having difficulty—for example, when you are unsure how to supervise someone whose work needs improvement. Experienced managers are often willing to share their knowledge and appreciate being asked as long as mentoring is not so demanding that it interferes with their own work.



Encouraging Participation

Like many managers, you may feel that there is no one to whom you can delegate tasks. This is a problem for small and large markets alike. During the height of the market season, vendors are often too busy with their own farms to help with many of the market's needs. When the whole community seems strapped for time, it is difficult for a manager to ask for help. You need the support of your community and vendors, but it takes time to build. Following are a few steps you can take to encourage volunteer participation.

List the Markets "Assets"

At the beginning of each market season, ask your volunteers, board members, and vendors to give you a list of their "assets." What are their strengths? What previous jobs have they had that give them skills in helpful areas? What do they like to do? Then when crunch time comes around, you will have some idea of people's strengths, interests, and experience and who may be willing to help.



Make Tasks Quick and Clear

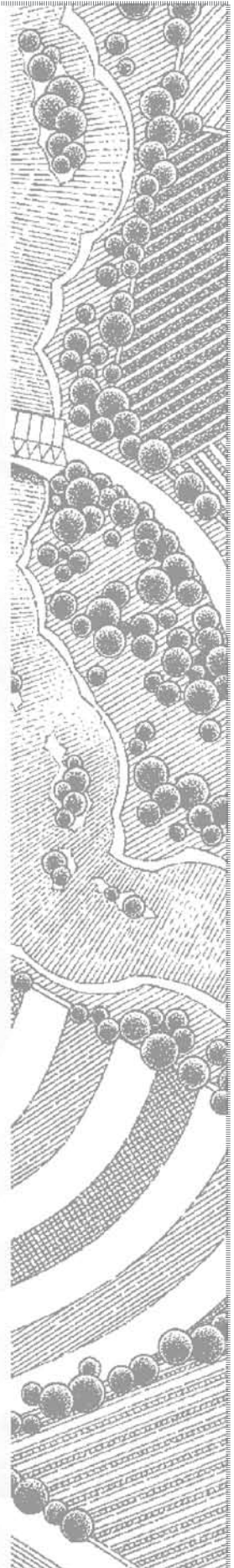
When you ask busy people to help you, make sure the tasks you develop are clear-cut and short-term. Even if the overall project from your perspective is long and in-depth, breaking it up into smaller segments allows each person to handle it bit by bit. This makes it much less intimidating and easier for people to agree to the task.

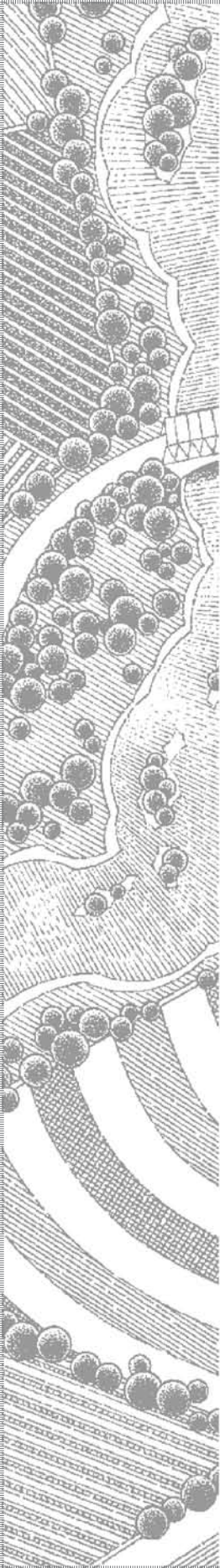
Make Tasks Consistently Short

Another way to have help through the season is to ask a number of assistants to be in charge of minor repetitive chores every week. In this way, their assignment is long term but still easy to handle. For instance, none of the vendors would have time to help you hang signs every market morning. But if each was in charge of the one sign nearest to their truck, they could do it every time.

Build Support

The best way to have a large volunteer force to whom you can delegate jobs is by encouraging support throughout the season. Kas Gurtler, market manager in Port





Townsend, Washington, says that delegation fortunately is not a problem for her because not only does she have a large and active board to back her up but she also has many “friends of the market.” Their Friends program invites the community to become members by paying an annual fee that gives that individual the right to vote on market issues. Members of Friends of the Market are interested in the market being a success, shop there regularly, and are a ready source of volunteers when needed.

Show Appreciation

Be sure to thank your volunteers when they have helped. Send a card or include their name in the market’s newsletter. Mention their help in front of others—it always feels good to be recognized. Even something as small and simple as mentioning them to shoppers on market day can help a person feel valued: “Do you like the new banners? Joe here and his family volunteered their time to put those together.”

Celebrate Volunteerism

End-of-the season parties and celebrations are opportunities to appreciate the time others have put into the market. Whether it is a Boy Scout troop, the city, or senior citizens that helped out, throwing a party in honor of your volunteers makes them feel better about assisting you again next year.

Jobs That Are Good to Delegate

Some tasks are ideal for delegation. Whenever you can, take the opportunity to share them with someone else. You may find that certain individuals are especially adept at detail work, phone calls, or artwork. Which is great—because those are the types of assignments that you want to pass around. Jobs to delegate include:

Repetitive tasks. Those “I have to do it again . . .” jobs seem boring, in part because you have done them a million times. Other people may have fun doing them for a while. And before they get sick of it, have them help train someone else.

Gathering information. Whether it is calling around, handing out a survey, or searching the internet, another person can help. Often that person’s approach is different than yours, which may lead them to find new information. It also helps your assistant learn more about the topic and get a better overall perspective on a market issue.

Job-building skills. Delegation is important not only to help you manage your time but to also help others build skills and expand their knowledge and interests. Assignments that help someone move ahead, train for future employment, or just learn the ins and outs of the community are helpful to you both. There may be a high school or college student in the area who would like to work in community development, agricultural extension, or city government who would like to be an intern.

Time-consuming details. The time to form the idea of a project is often much shorter than the time it takes to perfect the details, especially if it is intricate, colorful, or in need of many edits. Intermediate steps can be completed by someone else, though you should maintain control over the final result.

Jobs NOT to Delegate

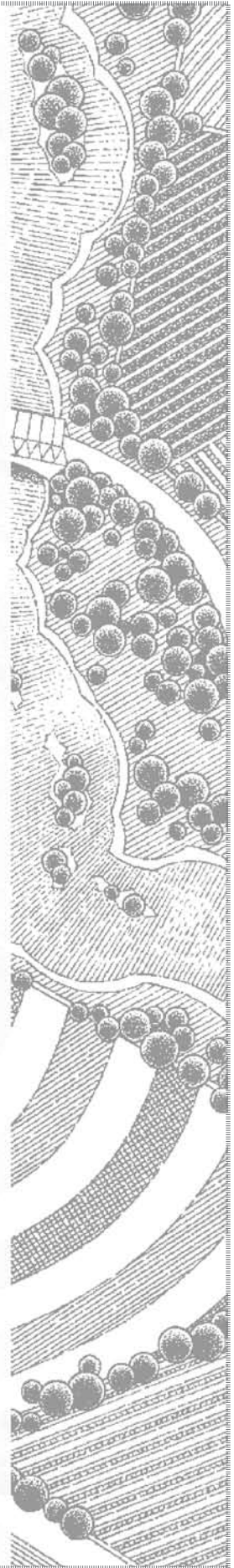
Setting long-term goals and a vision are things that can be done only by the market manager or by the board, depending on how active the board is. It is important to get input from others and to involve vendors, the community, and city officials in the process, but management has the ultimate responsibility for directing the market. You, as the manager, are the one with the broad-based knowledge and well-rounded perspective that is needed to plan for the future of the market.

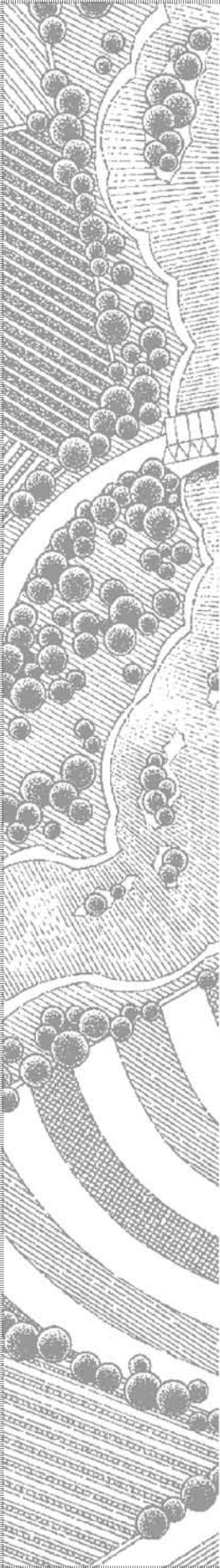
Three other key management responsibilities should never be delegated:

- ▣ Feedback, whether positive or negative, should always be given by the manager.
- ▣ Do not delegate the responsibility to discipline or fire someone, as appealing as it may be to let someone else deal with it.
- ▣ Never delegate jobs that are expected to be politically sensitive. For example, a task like dropping off fliers at the town hall and other government buildings may be a great one to delegate. But if relations with one of the officials are tense and he is likely to put the volunteer on the spot, you should take care of that building yourself.

Fairness and Morale

It is important to remember when delegating jobs that your volunteers and employees will be interpreting your choices. For instance, if you make a decision about which task to give somebody, others may feel it was done unfairly. It is quite natural as a manager to continuously rely on a few dependable assistants, but con-





sider that other members may see you as having favorites or feel there is a group of insiders who control the market. Do some community members feel that their voices are not being heard in the organizational process? Do farmers resent feeling that they are not involved enough in decision-making? Like many other tasks a market manager has to fulfill, delegation is a matter of balance between your managerial needs, the interests and perspectives of others, and the conditions in which you are operating.

If you continually delegate a majority of tasks to the same individuals, it may be interpreted in another way—as a sign of disrespect instead of trust. You may be sending the message that you believe these individuals have nothing better to do or that their own work is secondary to the assigned tasks. If the jobs that are delegated are not considered meaningful, then assistants may feel undervalued and disliked.

Managers cannot anticipate with certainty how assistants will perceive assignments. Something you consider fun and creative may seem to your assistant as excessive and unnecessary. Likewise, a serious and important job may be something you delegate to help a person gain skills, but they may see it as an impossible burden that you did not want to take on yourself. Failing to take note of such perceptions can leave well-intentioned managers with a load of work and no one to help. Keep in mind, though, that how you delegate work is one factor among many in the overall environment of the market; if you are straightforward, respectful, and skilled in communication and other management skills, creating a generally positive atmosphere, then your staff, vendors, and others will give you leeway for trial and error as you learn to delegate.

Conclusion

As a market manager, you may be working with a board of directors, volunteers, friends, community members, local government offices, and farmers. It is important to be sensitive to the messages that are conveyed by delegation. It is an important tool for your job, and you and the market can benefit greatly from your skillful use of delegation. Only in large, urban market offices is there likely to be a manager with a number of actual employees so most managers rely on people volunteering their time. Even for the smallest of markets, the workload needs to be shared. By becoming a good delegator, you can share the work appropriately, judiciously, and effectively.

