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# Letting go is hard to do

To keep a business running well, it's important that managers learn how to delegate successfully. While this can be challenging given our Kiwi culture, there are several strategies that can be usefully employed.

Aotearoa New Zealand has a strong DIY culture, which can bleed into leadership styles. Leaders may feel it's more efficient or reliable to just do the task themselves, especially if they're used to being hands on.

Delegation is a growth strategy that costs your business nothing. It doesn't just lighten a leader's workload – it is a powerful strategy that can drive productivity, enhance employee development, foster innovation and improve profitability. Think of it this way – everyone needs to be doing their job for a team to succeed.

It's difficult for construction companies to function smoothly if leaders are doing the work of team members because that leaves them with less time and ability to do their own jobs. Lack of delegation can also lead to leader burnout and negatively impact work-life balance.

## Why leaders struggle to delegate in the workplace

Reluctance to delegate can stem from various factors, including personal beliefs, habits, perfectionism, organisational culture and the nature of tasks. Understanding these challenges is the



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first step towards overcoming them and fostering a more efficient and empowered workforce.

### **The fear of losing control**

One of the reasons leaders struggle to delegate is the fear of losing control. Leaders, especially of businesses they have built from nothing, understandably feel a sense of ownership over their projects and responsibilities, and entrusting others with these tasks can be unnerving.

**Suggested action:** Delegating doesn't mean abdicating responsibility or losing control. Effective delegation requires clear communication of expectations, goals and deadlines. If the buck stops with you, make sure you have regular checkpoints with your employees – but not too many otherwise you are micro-managing – to ensure that jobs are being done to standard. Set clear guidelines so they know what their decision-making remit is and where they need to get approval from you before taking the next step.

### **Lack of trust in team members**

Another barrier to delegation is lack of trust in team members. Leaders may doubt the abilities, commitment or judgement of their staff, leading leaders to believe that they are the only ones capable

of performing certain tasks correctly. This can be a result of past experiences where delegation led to unsatisfactory outcomes.

**Suggested action:** If you can't trust your employees to carry out tasks, either provide them with training and development so they get up to speed as soon as possible or make changes to your workforce so you have the competency and commitment you need.

Using a rugby analogy, if your goal kicker is only able to kick at a 50% success rate, action needs to be taken. Choosing to do nothing and continuing to do it all yourself will see you stay on the merry-go-round of overwork and burnout and result in high employee turnover and low employee job satisfaction from a lack of development in their positions. Trust is built through doing real work – start delegating but with smaller, less mission-critical projects and tasks and keep upping the ante as you and your staff gain in confidence.

### **Time constraints**

Delegation can be time consuming. Leaders need to take the time to explain tasks, provide resources and offer guidance and support. In demanding, time-sensitive environments like the

construction industry, leaders convince themselves that it is quicker and more efficient to complete tasks themselves rather than invest time in delegation. Over time, this is not the case.

**Suggested action:** Adopt a long-term mindset and delegate properly as one of your business strategies to see what happens. Focus on progress rather than perfection and encourage a culture of continuous improvement.

While delegating tasks may initially slow down progress, it can lead to greater efficiency and productivity as team members develop their skills, take on more responsibilities and let you focus on your core role as a business owner or senior leader – bringing in new business and identifying new revenue streams.

In Aotearoa, there can be a cultural tendency to avoid seeming bossy or arrogant. Some leaders may hesitate to delegate out of fear they'll come across as lazy or superior – even though good delegation is about empowering others. Good delegation improves your sanity!

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