

The Ethics of Delegation

By Olan Hendrix

For a long time I encountered all kinds of resistance when I talked about delegation, and I could not understand it. Why do Christian workers fight the concept of delegation? Finally, one man said to me, "How can I give someone else the right, authority, and assignment to do what God has called *me* to do?" I realized this was an ethical problem. This problem is very real, and I do not minimize it. If God has called me to do something, then I cannot easily or lightly turn away from that and let somebody else take it up.

But I think this ethical problem is answered completely by going back again to the three ingredients of delegation, principally emphasizing accountability. Although I have delegated a piece of work, I retain ultimately the responsibility for its performance. Many times, people have demonstrated to me their frustration because they gave somebody something to do and then, at the last minute, they discovered that it had not been done. Who is responsible? In the final analysis, those who delegated are responsible. I think this answers, then, the ethical question that comes with regard to delegation. If I give somebody else a job to do and have an understanding that they are going to do it, I cannot just turn my back and walk away from it. I am still responsible, and if it does not get done I have to answer for it. Mr. Harry Truman in his Presidential office used to have a sign worth remembering, "The buck stops here." Every manager ought to have that mentality. I am responsible and from this office there is no "passing the buck!" if the person did not so it, it is my fault.

Henry Brandt says, "people do what we *inspect* not what we *expect*." And it simply means that you have to solemnly and relentlessly inspect and establish lines for accountability. You have to accept that the person you have may not be able to follow through on a given assignment unless you continually supervise and check back and give concern, help, and direction. To me, this answers the ethical question.

We are always in a state of conflict concerning what we would like to do and what we are gifted to do. People who have been in the ministry fifty years are still struggling with it. I do not have an easy answer, but I have developed some answers that satisfy me. I have decided never to desire to do anything that requires gifts my brethren do not recognize in me. I am not an individualist. I am a member of the body, a part of the organization. I will continually accept that I tend to have exaggerated notions of my abilities.