

What is Delegation?

By Olan Hendrix

Delegation is one of the activities under the heading of Management Organizing. There are three components. But first, what do we mean by delegation? In a recent book, *The Effective Executive*, Peter Drucker listed three diagnostic questions for the effective managing of time. When Drucker first got into management consulting, he realized that he had to have some way of quickly sizing up an organization, what it was doing, what it was like, and what its needs were.

1. What am I doing that really does not need to be done by me or anyone else?
2. Which of the activities on my time log could be handled as well, if not better, by someone else?
3. What do I do that wastes the time of other people?

Amplifying on these three points, Drucker went on to say that he discovered that a well-managed plant, office, business, organization is always dull-DULL! The recurrent crisis is by far the most common symptom of poor management. I think he is right.

Many attempts have been made to define delegation. One, for example, says, "Delegation is giving others the right to make your decisions." Another says, "Delegation is to give authority to accompany responsibility." "Delegation is having other people do part of your work" is still another. I think all of these are inadequate. I would like us to agree on L. A. Allen's definition that, "Delegation is entrusting responsibility and authority and establishing lines of accountability."

Delegation is learning how to identify the work that we are doing and devising methods of passing these pieces of work on to other people but maintaining a management check on these activities.

One of our Japanese pastors came to me and said, "Mr. Hendrix, I would like to ask you a question." I braced myself. He said, "There is an old Japanese proverb and I want to ask you if you think this proverb is true and accurate. It goes this way: 'A wise prince or lord knows even how many ashes are in the stove in the kitchen.' Is this a good proverb?" I tried to figure out what he was getting at and answered, "No, that is not a good proverb. A wise prince or lord does not necessarily know how many ashes there are in the stove, but he knows he has someone who does know how many ashes are in the kitchen stove." The pastor smiled. I am afraid I gave him some ammunition against some of my colleagues. Not that he needed it- I think he had enough of his own.