Managing

TIME & WORK & FAMILY

FACT SHEET

Delegating

Are you a parent who needs more family cooperation in household tasks? Do you desire help either because you work outside the home, or because you realize that your children must learn life skills to help them in the future?

If any of these statements describe yourself, then giving family members some jobs that you usually do yourself (delegating) will prove to be beneficial. It is common for people to find delegating difficult because of guilt or not knowing how to do it. If you are trying to change roles, such as returning to work after years at home, delegating may be especially difficult.

Why Don't We Delegate?

Take a few minutes to think about your reasons for not delegating some of your tasks at home or work. If you are like most of us, you have some standard reasons.

If I delegate my work I feel like I'm not doing my job.

Stop feeling guilty when you delegate responsibilities. No one can do it all, including you. Other family members help create the work. Why should you have to do it all? You (or another family member) are not superhuman.

It is easier to do the job myself.

Teaching others requires time, patience, and often a lowering of your standards. It may take you more time to teach, and them more time to accomplish the tasks in the short term, but you will gain in the long term.

To teach a 10-year-old boy to wash the bathroom sink, talk him through it the first few times. After he begins to work on his own, occasionally check his work. Make sure he is meeting the agreed upon standards.

It will not be long before you can depend on him to do a good job. For not finishing a job, it may help to have consequences.

I like being recognized for doing the job myself.

Everyone likes to be appreciated. Why not share the enjoyment? When you delegate, thank the family members who performed the tasks. If they receive recognition, they may be more appreciative and more willing to take on other responsibilities.

The responsibility for a task may be too scattered.

If your daughter fails to wash the dishes, it may prevent your son from setting the table for the next meal. Time limits on jobs and checking or following up can remedy this.

Why Should We Delegate?

There are many long-term advantages to delegating. These advantages will benefit both you and the persons you delegate to.

You ease the workload on yourself.

This is not an immediate advantage, but you will see it soon. Do not redo a delegated job even if it was not performed to your standards. If the windows are streaked or the bathroom sink still has toothpaste in it, re-train and work to lower your standards to match ability levels.

You teach someone else skills and responsibilities.

Family members will benefit from the skills and responsibilities they develop—immediately and in the future. Children develop self-confidence when they learn new skills and are expected to be responsible. Your son will think highly of himself when he knows how and is also expected to make his bed, fold towels, and feed the dog.

If you are gone or in bed with an illness, the family will know how to do things. Your daughter will be proud that she can fix a simple lunch for the family. However, sons should also know how to make lunch.

Sons and daughters need to know how to do all household tasks. When they leave to live in an apartment or dormitory, they will understand why they needed to know how to do these tasks.

It is easier to schedule tasks.

When chores are divided among busy family members, things get done on time more often. For example, the first person home in the afternoon can be responsible for starting dinner preparations. This saves mom from having to do it all when she gets home.

Tips for Effective Delegation

Share decision-making.

Call the family together, make a list of things that need to be done, and discuss who will do them. One child may prefer dusting the furniture, while another prefers vacuuming the carpet.

Let the person who is responsible for a task have input on how and when the job is done. For example, if your spouse will be doing the grocery shopping, keep his or her schedule in mind when you set a shopping time.

Family members who feel that they have some influence in decision-making are likely to be more responsible.

Choose the right people for the right job.

Younger children may not be able to lift trash bags, but they can empty wastebaskets.

Train thoroughly.

While vacuuming the floor, you may need to stay with your son or daughter several times to instruct them on the proper technique.

Define responsibilities clearly and set deadlines.

Discuss what is expected, and set deadlines for finishing the tasks. For example, washing dishes includes cleaning the counters and sinks, and the tasks must be done before television can be watched. It may help to write out the responsibilities and deadlines.

Set performance standards.

Accept the fact that you may need to change or adapt your standards. The towels may not be folded neatly, but do not redo the job. Re-train until you see that your child has done his or her best. A child's ability will improve with time.

Help children see how their part fits in with the complete task.

If your daughter is peeling potatoes for mashed potatoes, let her observe or occasionally mash the potatoes after they are cooked.

Let go of authority.

When others become more capable, let them be in charge. As the one in charge of laundry, your daughter may forget to put soap in the wash load. Experiencing that mistake herself will teach your daughter more than if you are constantly watching over her to prevent mistakes.

Remember to say, "Thank you."

After a job is done, acknowledge each person's accomplishments! Make sure you commend and encourage family members as they learn their new responsibilities.

Notice when your son makes his bed well and praise his actions. Do not comment only when mistakes are made, such as when the bedspread is crooked or when the sheets are wrinkled underneath.

Ask yourself if there are things that you can stop doing or can do monthly or weekly.

Grocery shopping may be done less often if you plan ahead. Washing the kitchen floor can be done once or twice a week, instead of every day, if you need time for other things and can lower your standards. No one else will probably notice if you do certain jobs less often.

Conclusion

You may find that delegation of home tasks is difficult to begin, but you will find many advantages in sharing household responsibilities.

Parents will be satisfied because they will have more time for other interests and will have a smooth-running household. They also know that their children are becoming better prepared for future life. Children will benefit by increasing their self-confidence and developing many life skills.

Sharing decision-making, thorough training and follow-up, setting performance standards, and keeping individual abilities in mind are all ways to help delegate work in your family.

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