5 delegation best practices for nonprofit leaders

Done well, delegation allows not-for-profit executives to focus on their most important tasks, helps to build bench strength and gets staffers out of the office before midnight. But done poorly, it can create more burdens than it eases. Here are five practices all nonprofit leaders should adopt.

1. Choose tasks wisely

Always try to devote your time to the projects that are the most valuable to your organization and can best benefit from your talents. On the other hand, delegate tasks that frequently reoccur, such as sending membership renewal notices, or tasks that require a specific skill in which you have minimal or no expertise, such as reconciling bank accounts.

2. Pick the right person

Before you delegate a task, consider the person's main job responsibilities and experience and how those correlate with the project. However, keep in mind that employees may welcome opportunities to test their wings in a new area or take on greater responsibility. Be sure to consider staffers' schedules and whether they actually have time to do the job well.

3. Perfect the handoff

When handing off a task, be clear about the goals, expectations, deadlines and details. Explain why you chose the individual and what the project means to the organization as a whole. Also let the employee know if he or she has any latitude to bring his or her own methods and processes to the task. A fresh pair of eyes might see a new and better way of accomplishing it.

4. Keep in touch — to an extent

Delegation doesn't mean dumping a project on someone else and then washing your hands of it. Ultimately, you're responsible for the task's completion, even if you assign it to someone else. So stay involved by monitoring the employee's progress and providing coaching and feedback as necessary. Remember, however, there's a fine line between remaining available for questions and micromanaging.

5. Acknowledge the help

A good delegator never takes credit for someone else's work. Be sure you generously — and publicly — give credit where credit is due. This could mean verbal praise in a meeting, a note of thanks in a newsletter or a letter to the person's manager. If the project's size and scope warrant it, consider offering extra time off or a special gift.