

The Real Reasons Ops Managers Should Delegate | 121

Welcome to Lean Leadership for Ops Managers, the podcast for leaders in Ops Management who want to spark improvement, foster engagement, and boost problem solving - AND still get their day job done. Here's your host, Leadership Trainer, Lean Enthusiast, and Spy Thriller Junkie, Jamie V. Parker.

[00:00:29] Why do you delegate? What's the reason and how does that reason influence the details of your delegation? That's what we're digging into today. Jamie Parker here. And in our last episode, we explored the reasons operations executives and leaders don't delegate all the things that hold us back.

Remember, there were three main obstacle categories that we talked about. The first was time. I don't have time. It takes too long. The second was control. A lack of trust or I want it done a specific way. Or maybe I'm just afraid of or nervous about the consequences if it's not done right or if it's done poorly. And then the third is guilt. I don't want to burden my team. So time, control and guilt are all obstacles that operations leaders face when they consider delegation.

So if those are the obstacles, then why should we delegate anyways? What are the reasons or the intentions behind our delegation that would help us to overcome those obstacles? Because this is important. When we delegate, we typically do so for the benefit of one of three things or some combination of them.

First, sometimes we delegate for ourselves, right? For me and my needs. Sometimes we delegate for the individual, the individual. We're delegating to the individual and their needs. And sometimes we delegate for the team or the organization's needs. So these are the three areas that we're going to explore.

And let's start with the benefit of me, right? For me as the leader, you know, when you Google delegation and you start reading blog posts and listening to podcasts, especially all the ones these days that are targeted toward those solopreneurs or small business entrepreneurs, the reason behind delegation is typically so that I can free up my own bandwidth so I can focus on valuable things, right?

Like, Hey, I need to get my workload transferred to someone else to do those tasks that are easier to take ownership of the areas that are easier so that I can focus on these strategic priorities and do more value added things, right? And so we see that a lot in that kind of small business space.

The Real Reasons Ops Managers Should Delegate | 121

[00:02:42] But remember in the last episode when I talked about my client in one of the things that they see happen is leaders will get stuck in working in the weeds. They're making decisions and troubleshooting in areas that they'd like to develop their next level of leaders to own.

And if they do that, it allows leaders to spend time on the strategic priorities and moving the business forward, and not just in the day to day management. In order for leaders to get out of the weeds, they have to delegate some of what they're doing, whether they're activities, tasks, activities or whether it's decisions, decision making, ownership and responsibility or just kind of the full area of responsibility and ownership. Right. That you have full accountability to an area.

[00:03:21] And this is a legitimate reason. I don't want to discount this reason. But remember in the last episode when we talked about guilt being one of the obstacles to delegation, I think that if we rely on this reason alone or this reason is too frequently the initiator to delegate action, that's where that guilt can start to seep in, because it can start to feel like we're delegating for selfish reasons.

I, the leader, am the one benefiting by this delegation because you're doing this work or owning this decision instead of me. And that's why we want to be careful that we don't pigeonhole. Delegation is something that we do just to help me and my own bandwidth challenges, just to elevate the work that I'm doing right.

That's one reason to delegate, but it's certainly not the only reason to delegate. So that brings us to our second category of who we delegate for, and that is the individual. When we delegate for the benefit of the individual, there are several different reasons we could focus on development, confidence and fulfillment. So first up, development.

This is probably the second most common reason I hear people give for why it's important to delegate. The first is to free up my bandwidth to focus on strategic imperatives, and the second is to develop the individual. And delegating for development includes delegating specifically within the growth areas that benefit the individual. Right? It's skill building, whether that's tactical skills or decision making skills.

The Real Reasons Ops Managers Should Delegate | 121

[00:04:51] And what's interesting about these first two reasons to delegate, to delegate the leader's bandwidth or the individual skill development is that you'll probably make different delegation decisions based on what your focused reason is. For example, you might decide a different activity or area of responsibility to delegate, depending on whether you're trying to free up your own bandwidth or whether you're trying to develop the individual skills. In fact, not only will you make different decisions, but you'll probably start from different places.

If I'm delegating to free up my bandwidth, then I probably start by looking at what's taking up my time. I start with the activity, but if I'm delegating for development, I don't start with the activity. I start with the individual with identifying the needs. Totally different starting points depending on which of these top two reasons are most important in this scenario. All right, enough with that whole sidebar about comparing how we would approach it differently, but delegating for the individual, it just it doesn't just stop at development.

A second reason you might delegate for the individual is to instill confidence or to build trust. And this can help the individual gain confidence in their work and their contribution and their value. Or it can help others to gain confidence in the individual. And finally, a third way you may delegate for the benefit of the individual is based on joy or fulfillment.

[00:06:22] You may consider delegating tasks, activities, decisions or areas of responsibilities to an individual because that's the stuff they love and it increases their job satisfaction and fulfillment when they get to do that work. So three possible reasons we may choose to delegate that are centered on the individual. It could be to develop their skills or capabilities for their growth. It could be to instill confidence, or it could be to increase fulfillment.

So we talked about why I might choose to delegate for my own benefit and why I might choose to delegate for the benefit of the individual. The third area I want to talk about is why I might choose to delegate for the benefit of the team or the organization. First up is speed or efficiency, as some people are better and faster at some things. We have all seen this.

We've all experienced this. You know something that can take me hours someone else can knock out in

The Real Reasons Ops Managers Should Delegate | 121

20 minutes. Right? You've been there for sure, right? Sometimes you will arrange work and delegate responsibilities in a way that leverages these strengths. It speeds things up. It creates efficiencies, which makes things better for the team or the organization. It can kind of be the path of least resistance. So sometimes that's how you're going to choose to delegate. Second reason is we may delegate to balance the workload.

If some members of the team are overburdened and some members of the team are under burden, then we may want to redesign work responsibilities to balance that workload across the team.

[00:07:55] Third, we may delegate for the benefit of the team and the organization by creating more flexibility. If we improve individual skills and grow their capabilities, then more people can do more of the activities. More people can effectively make more decisions. And now the team isn't finding themselves dependent on an individual. I know you've experienced this.

There's that thing that only one person knows how to do and then they're out sick and the work comes to a halt or the decision process comes to a halt. I call these single points of failure because they're dependent on that one person. And in fact, every single one of my clients has some level of these, some more than others. But every single one of my clients has identified single points of failure where they have knowledge or skills or capabilities that are stuck within an individual.

So delegation grows both the individual capabilities and also the collective capabilities to give the team more flexibility in how to get work done. Fourth, we may delegate as a mechanism for team building when one member of the team is helping another member of the team to learn, it can increase the collaboration, the relationship building and the trust amongst the team. Fifth, and finally, for this point, another benefit for delegation, specifically for the team in the organization is that we may choose to delegate in order to spark improvement or find better ways of working.

[00:09:28] Can you think of a time when one person was responsible for something for a long time and then that just kind of became the way we always do it? But then when that responsibility was moved to someone else, it brought a new sense of curiosity and it created space to improve the process. So when we choose to delegate for the benefit of the team or the benefit of the organization, we can consider these

The Real Reasons Ops Managers Should Delegate | 121

specific possible reasons.

First, improve the speed or efficiency. Second, balance the workload. Third, to create more flexibility. Fourth, to encourage team building and fifth to generate better ways of working. All right. Let's go back to the first question I asked on this podcast. Why do you delegate? What's the reason? The truth is, there isn't one answer. Sometimes you delegate for the benefit of yourself.

Sometimes you delegate for the benefit of the individual, and sometimes you delegate for the benefit of the team or the organization. The question is how intentional are you about that reason and how does that reason drive your delegation decisions and actions? When you create clarity for yourself about the primary reason you're delegating, then you can make decisions and take actions that are aligned with that goal. I mean, let's go back to what we said earlier in the episode.

[00:10:51] If you're delegating to free up bandwidth for yourself, you start with the activity. But if you're delegating to build skills for the individual, you start with the individual needs. If we take that further, if you're delegating to encourage team building, you start with the team's needs.

I say all of this because conventional wisdom is to start with the activity or the work responsibility to start with what you're delegating and then go from there. And in my opinion, that isn't always where you start. You need to start with your reason for delegating in this instance, this quarter today. Why am I choosing to delegate? What is the primary reason? Because that will drive everything else.

Once I am able to clarify the reason for this delegation, then I'm able to make better decisions and also to help myself overcome those obstacles that can normally stand in the way. All right. That's it for now. I want you to think about how you delegate and how the leaders on your team delegate. And what are those reasons? How intentional are we? How much clarity do we have and how do our reasons drive or not? The way we choose to delegate? Those can be some great discussion points. And in the meantime, remember, you can always head over to process plus results. Dot com forward slash podcasts to pick up show notes and links to any of the relevant episodes. All right. Until next time.

The Real Reasons Ops Managers Should Delegate | 121