The contractor in authority always has more responsibilities than time to carry them out. That’s why those contractors who can’t delegate well simply can’t get all their work accomplished. Too often they make the mistake of thinking no one else can make decisions or handle an important task. They’re wrong, of course. This attitude offends and discourages subordinates and hurts the overall managerial performance too.

In today’s competitive workplace, many contractors fear losing authority to an up-and-coming subordinate by delegating too much. They jealously protect their power. The end result? Job stress for them; and a better delegator gets the nod for the next big promotion.

If you’re feeling harassed and tired, you’re probably carrying more than your share of responsibilities on the job. Job stress is higher for non-delegators. First, decide exactly which of your tasks can be assigned and which can be performed by you alone. No, that’s not as difficult as it seems. Generally those jobs which should be delegated include:

**All routine tasks.** If a superintendent is performing the routine work tasks, then he should be receiving the same hourly wage as the workers hired to perform those tasks. Sometimes temporary work conditions, such as employee illness or mechanical breakdowns, cause say, a foreman to assume a line worker position. But if this happens very often, something is wrong.

**Time-consuming jobs.** A lengthy, repetitive assignment should be handed to a suitable subordinate. This includes training new workers, preparing some reports, and other duties. The jobs in this category probably require more skill and responsibility than the routine tasks, so they should be assigned to well-chosen subordinates, not routinely given to everyone in the workforce.

**Tasks designed to upgrade performance.** Some office workers might be ready for promotions or new job classifications. Their skills at routine...
“Those that rely on a steady flow of entry-level workers, such as construction operations, will feel the pressure the most. They will be faced with higher wages and can expect that the better motivated people will move on to better jobs sooner than has been the case in recent years. This will leave . . . marginal performers . . . and with reduced skills.”

tasks are high; and the contractor thinks they might be ready to develop new skills. By assigning these workers job tasks outside their special skills areas, he gives them a chance to grow.

This kind of delegation is riskier than the others and requires more supervisory monitoring.

Some Are Kept . . .

Some jobs simply can’t be delegated. Personnel problems and job assignments should never be handled by subordinates. If you’re confused about which tasks can be delegated and which can’t get out the job description sheets. Those things listed under your job classification are yours. They include planning, supervising, organizing, and plotting workflow. They do not include getting the work done.

Once you’ve decided that a task should be delegated, how do you know who can handle the assignment? Many contractors play it safe by never assigning tasks beyond the reach of subordinates. That method only works for routine chores; presumably any member of the workforce can handle them. But sometimes you have to take a chance by assigning work you’re not absolutely sure the employee can handle.

Display confidence in the worker. Let him know you think he can handle the job but you’re available for consultation if he runs into trouble. Monitor the work without appearing to hover over his shoulder.

The obvious method of delegation is to assign jobs within the worker’s proven abilities range. Help the worker grow in his job by occasionally giving new jobs, even if he isn’t in line for skill upgrading and promotion. This kind of delegation alleviates job boredom. It takes a little more time to plan such a schedule than routinely assigning the usual chores to Harry, Fred, or Ann. The contractor has to take time to think about past assignments, performances, and even worker preferences.

But we’ve only talked about your half of the delegation process. Where does the worker fit in? Is he going to accept passively every directive? Occasionally someone will tell you, “I don’t want to do that job,” or “I can’t do that job.”

Listen to what your employees are saying. Without their real cooperation, delegation doesn’t work. The employee may be expressing doubt in his ability; and need you to provide encouragement. Or he may be saying, “I’m tired of these tasks. Give me something else.”

One supervisor says delegation works best when the employees make a verbal commitment to the task. “I ask them to repeat the directives to be sure they’re understood,” he says. “That’s standard procedure. But then, I ask them to guarantee the work assignment for me. When an employee actively accepts a project, he does a much better job.”

Must be Clear . . .

It goes without saying that good delegation requires clear communication. Spell out the details of the assignment, the deadline, and the job objectives. Why is the worker being asked to do this task in this manner? If he understands those points, he’ll work better.

Don’t ask for rush jobs, unless they’re absolutely necessary. And then explain the reasons behind the hurry.

Some large jobs need to be broken down into more manageable tasks, with separate time goals. You also may need to use this delegation approach when you’re assigning difficult work or those skill-upgrading jobs. Otherwise, you can be faced with a real problem at final deadline time.

When you’re delegating work, make suggestions, but remember to leave the worker some creative space too. He should be able to make some decisions about how the work is to be handled. Effective delegation is one of the most important managerial skills. You can improve morale, increase productivity, and ease your job stress if you know how to delegate wisely and well.