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Failure to delegate responsibility a key failure of management

By JOHN KANE

One of the biggest — and most common — management mistakes a business owner can make is failing to delegate responsibility to employees.

If you're like many owner-managers, delegation may be a hard move to make. Your business may represent such a substantial investment of personal time, energy and money, that it is difficult to entrust anyone with its care, and really believe they can guide it in the proper direction without instructions at every turn.

Nevertheless, delegation is essential to success of a business, and is especially crucial to managing the growing concern. Besides improving the efficiency of a business on a day-to-day basis, delegation provides a number of long-term benefits:

- It is a key element of time management. It allows the owner-manager to concentrate efforts on high priority areas. These are the areas crucial to the success of the business — financial and market planning for example — which only the owner-manager can handle.
- It is a prime management development tool, and is an important part of planning for succession. As your employees develop through managing various aspects of the business, they will be able to accept more and higher levels of responsibility. The top job will be much easier to fill when the time comes.
- It provides the business with a broader base of expertise — employees may be more qualified than the owner to handle certain aspects of the business.
- Responsibility and the opportunity to visibly contribute to the total effort encourages employee initiative and loyalty.
- It allows the business to be run in the owner's absence.

Delegation, however, must be approached properly to be effective. If not conducted in a well-thought-out, well-organized manner, it can cause more problems than it solves. Effective

delegation involves five basic steps: Define the Delegation: This involves determining which activities you can delegate, and to whom they can be delegated. If you have made any attempt to manage your own time, you will have an idea of which tasks are low and medium priority, and can therefore be delegated.

If you have been diligent in conducting performance appraisals of your employees you should also have a fairly accurate idea about who can, and would like to, accept responsibility.

The well-defined responsibilities of each employee should be an integral part of his or her job description, and should be kept up to date at all times. You should also ensure that all employees are informed when a task or function is delegated; otherwise people may challenge the authority of the employee concerned.

Define the Authority: The extent of authority you allow employees in decision-making will depend entirely on the operation and the individual. However, in all situations, the limits of authority should be clearly defined, i.e. you should identify those situations in which independent decisions can be made, and also define those which require prior approval.

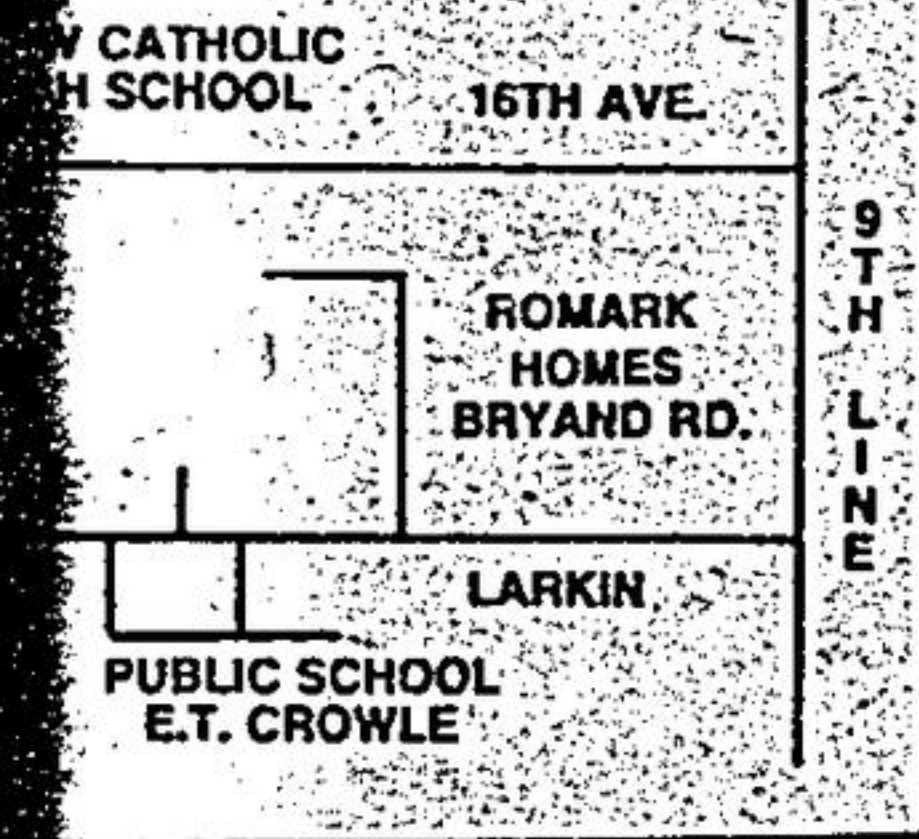
While you should entrust key employees with enough authority that their initiative is not restricted, you should also emphasize that with authority comes accountability.

Act As Advisor: To ensure that employees are aware of the whole business picture, and that they make decisions within that framework, it will be necessary, from time to time, for you to supply facts, answer questions, give opinions or instructions and provide encouragement.

EDITOR'S NOTE: C.A. is a resident of Markham and a Partner in the Toronto office of Thorne Riddell, Chartered Accountants.

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