

To Delegate or Not

Rather than *whether or not* to delegate, the practical issues that growers, ranchers, and supervisors face are *what* to delegate, to *whom*, *when*, and to *what extent*. With all the work there is to do on an agricultural operation, there is a great range of tasks that must be delegated. The *what*, to *whom*, and *when* questions largely depend on task characteristics. Implementation of all delegation decisions can be supported with job descriptions, policies, and training.

Figure 4.2 presents a simple way of differentiating tasks according to their complexity (high or low) and frequency (one-time or repeatedly). Of course, both of these variables have more than two possible values.

The example tasks in area A are relatively easy and infrequent. Supervisors assign them as day-to-day needs arise. Tasks in area B—repeated but not complex—are the ones most usually delegated, often by being identified as a regular part of the job. There is every reason to entrust these duties to non-managers for routine performance.

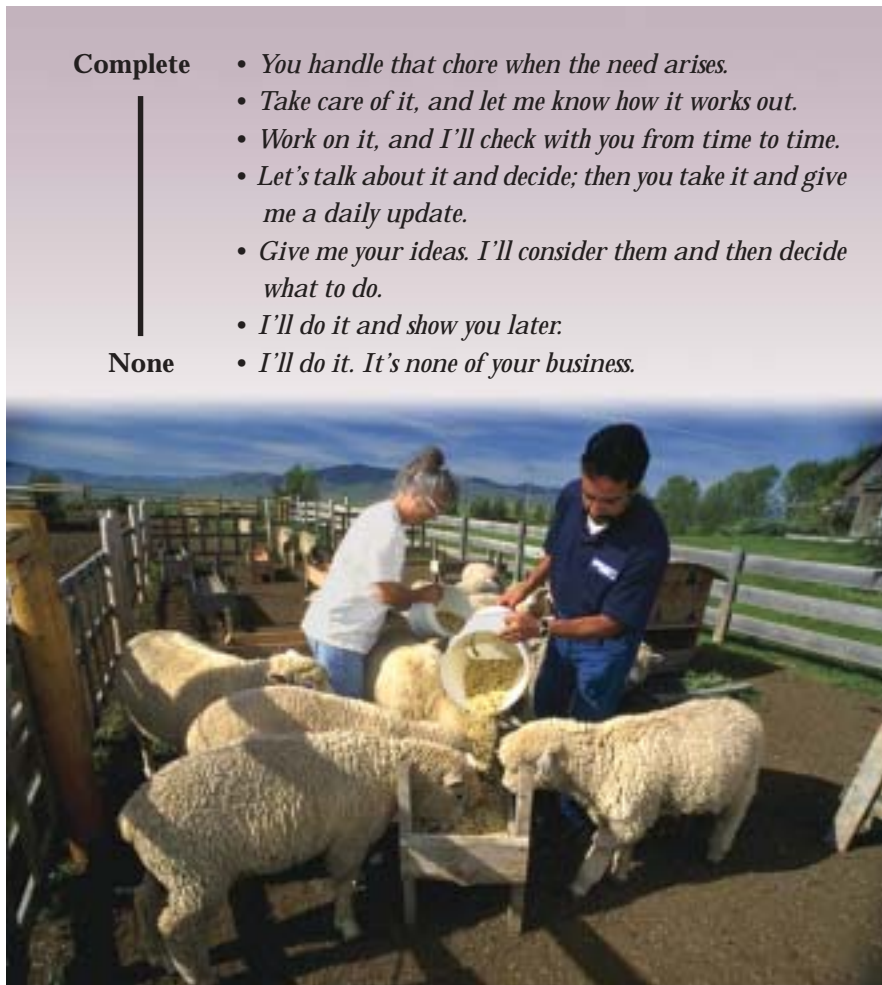
The complex, infrequent challenges of area C are the ones that managers are most inclined to either handle themselves or contract with someone who has special skills. Sometimes these tasks can be structured into less complex component parts that can be assigned or shared by several people. As in C, tasks in area D are complex, but because they come up often, there is a greater advantage to having personnel capable of doing them within the farm or ranch workforce.

Figure 4.2. What to delegate? A two-way classification.

Complexity	Frequency	
	One-time	Repetitive
Low	A • take that box to the house • pick up sales agent at the airport • tell Dad I'll be back late	B • check the tractor fluids • milk the cows • reorder when supply dips
High	C • create a safety program • design a new field pack machine • teach her how to drive	D • develop the ranch budget • maintain the combines • mix/apply the right herbicides

Delegation does not always look the same. The matter of to *what extent* is really the crux of the decision to delegate at all. Workers can be entrusted with different degrees of responsibility on a task. A range of degrees, from complete delegation to none, is exemplified in Figure 4.3.

Figure 4.3. Degrees of delegation.



Delegation and Personnel Development

A greater degree of delegation is more appropriate for simpler, repetitive tasks and when capable, reliable people are available to perform the work. As the capacity of your staff grows, duties can be delegated more completely and with more confidence. One approach to fostering such development is to identify employees with greater potential and give them increasingly difficult and more important tasks over time, perhaps using the scale above as a guide to judiciously raising the bar. Most people respond positively to being entrusted with a responsibility they feel capable of handling reasonably well.