

Your Personal Coach

By

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Dear Kathleen,

I'm exhausted. I'm feeling let down by just about everyone in my life. I try to delegate in appropriate ways but still, I have to follow-up on just about everyone. Here's what happened this week: Both my teenagers stayed home while my husband and I traveled. When we returned late at night, not a single door was locked as I had asked the kids to do. My husband assured me he would take care of the lawn before a cookout we were having but "time got away" from him and our guests schlepped through the weeds on the way to the backyard. My secretary guaranteed that she had inserted the new budget into a proposal, but when we printed (fifty copies!) she had included the old one. We had to strip every one of those apart and add the right information. I returned home at 3:00 AM. I promise you, I'm not a perfectionist or a control-freak. What can I do?

-- Tired of Following Up

Dear Tired,

I'm glad to hear you say that you're not a perfectionist and that you are not trying to control people and make them follow your every process. Understandably, you are tired. Sometimes I think it takes as much – if not more – energy to follow-up on people, than it does to do the task yourself. So, let's look at some of the essential "rules" of delegating responsibility.

First, delegate the task to one person. Don't ask both your teenagers to lock the doors. Assign this important responsibility to one or the other of them. It's easy to diffuse responsibility if more than one person is accountable. You've probably already heard: "I thought he was going to do it!" "No, she said she would do it!"

Next, make sure you've delegated to the right person and clearly tell him/her what you expect to be done. I recommend asking him/her to repeat what you've asked so that there can be no possibility of a miscommunication. For example, make sure that your husband understands that it is important that the lawn be mowed before company comes. Let him know that this is important to you and that, if he thinks there might be a time crunch or a problem getting this task accomplished, the two of you can come up with an alternative. This will hopefully avoid your scrambling around looking for a neighborhood kid to mow the lawn as the guests are arriving.

Ask for ongoing feedback. For example, when you speak with your secretary as he/she is preparing your proposal refer to the important change in the budget. Ask questions like: "Have you had any problems inserting that new budget?" or "Are there any resources you need to prepare the proposal with the new budget?" Then carefully listen. Often, people will give you a conscious or inadvertent heads-up to potential problems. Let your secretary (or your teenagers or husband) know that you are available to discuss any difficulties that come up.

Finally, there must be consequences for a failure to live up to one's responsibilities. Let your teenagers know that they can stay home alone only so long as they can handle that responsibility. Give them another chance, but if they mess up, let

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them know that a neighbor will look in on them, or they will spend the weekend with friends or relatives the next time you go away. If your husband can't live up to his word about his chores then have a gentle discussion and make new arrangements. If he hates this yard work then let him pay for someone else to do it. Compliment your secretary on the good work he/she does, but make it clear that putting an incorrect budget in a proposal is a major problem. Explain why: that it makes you and your company look incompetent, or worse, requires it to perform work that is not adequately reimbursed. Make sure that he/she knows that you'll be watching their work carefully in the future.

Reward all these folks when they do what they've agreed to do. And praise them on the basis of results, even if their process is different from your own. If your husband gets the lawn mowed by getting up at 6:00 AM instead of doing it over the weekend -- like you might do it -- that is fine. People have to find their own process. Let them know you are proud/pleased/happy with the outcome.

Delegation is a one-to-one relationship that requires trust, commitment, and a verbal contract. You might remind your husband, kids, secretary and others to whom you have delegated tasks that taking responsibility and living up to our word is a measure of our character.

Send your personal coaching questions to kathleen@fullpotentialliving.com or call 473-4004. Kathleen is a personal and executive coach, clinical psychologist, and writer. (©2005 Kathleen Brehony. All Rights Reserved.) Columns are archived at www.fullpotentialliving.com.