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CHAPTER

1

THE JOB OF A MANAGER

We bet you had trouble finding the time to read this book. If so, it's probably because you're feeling serious stress, like many of the nonprofit leaders with whom we work. You're under pressure from funders, your staff, constituents, perhaps your boss, and ultimately yourself, to be getting more done. Too much of the burden of making things happen is falling on you.

Effective management—how you get things done through other people—could help you accomplish more with less stress, but you may not know where to start. And if that's the case, you're not alone. Nonprofit leaders often end up in their roles not because they're great managers, but because they are experts on a particular issue or excel at a specific function like communications or program design. If you're one of these talented, committed people, you may have been highly effective at getting results on your own, but you may now have hit the point in your career where your impact will be more a function of what you get done through others than what you do directly yourself.

Fortunately, good management is pretty straightforward. Our goal in writing this book was to create an easy-to-use manual with hands-on, practical advice and tools that will help nonprofit managers get better results in their work. We'll cover a range of skills, representing what we think are the most important areas for managers to master—from delegating tasks, to setting and holding people accountable to clear goals, to hiring and firing, to staying organized and using your own time effectively. Exercised properly, these practices will make your life much easier.

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Most important, though, not only does good management make your life easier, but it also makes it easier for you to get great results.

Although this probably sounds obvious, as managers ourselves we didn't automatically grasp it from the start. Jerry's first real management experience came at Teach For America, a large, national nonprofit where, as the second in command, he was responsible for managing the day-to-day work of the organization. A former teacher, he had been drawn to management partly because he liked seeing people learn and develop to their full potential. He wanted staff members to be happy and fulfilled in their work, and he viewed it as his job to mentor them so that they grew and developed.

That was fine as far as it went, but Teach For America had ambitious aspirations: it was trying to triple in size, raise the quality of its teachers, strengthen its alumni network, raise more money, and build a stronger organization to make it all happen. Early in Jerry's tenure, when he was more focused on mentoring and viewing his staff members' satisfaction as an end goal, he wasn't always producing the kind of progress that was needed. Most of his staff members worked extremely hard, but not everyone did. And many excelled at their jobs, but in several critical cases, the organization's needs had outgrown his staff members' skills.

*And that brings us
to the fundamen-
tal premise of this
book: your job as
a manager is to get
results.*

One day Jerry was complaining to a friend about how much pressure he was under and how difficult it was to get things done without making people hate him. She looked at him and said, "Well, if you're doing your job, you might just be the least popular person there." With those not-so-reassuring words, Jerry's friend helped him realize that he was thinking about his job in the wrong way. The organization was never going to achieve its aims if he didn't make some people unhappy. He needed to hold people to more ambitious goals, be clearer with people when they weren't meeting expectations, and, ultimately, tell some of his staff members that they weren't the right people for the job.

Through this stage in his work, Jerry came to appreciate more fully what his true job was as a manager. Yes, it was good to develop people, empower them, help them be fulfilled at work, and mentor them. Those things helped make his job enjoyable, and in some cases they helped make his people better at what they did, but ultimately, they were means to an end. Fundamentally his job was to make sure the organization got the results it aspired to. That's why it existed as an organization, and that's what Jerry was getting paid to do. Teach For America's donors funded it to help expand opportunities for students in low-income communities, the students whom Teach For America served needed it to deliver, and that's what his job was about, not to make the staff happy. If Jerry wasn't doing what it took to make Teach For America as effective as possible in pursuing its mission, then he wasn't doing his job.

As it happens, we believe you can get things done *and* be well liked, at least most of the time. In fact, by being clear about what you expect, helping people meet your expectations, ensuring people are in roles in which they excel, and getting everyone aligned around a common purpose, you'll build your staff's morale in the long run. Treating people well also happens to be the best way to sustain your results over the

long haul, because you'll never get good people to work for you otherwise. Time and time again, though, we've found that managers confuse being "supportive" bosses who "empower" their people with being effective managers who actually get things done. And in the short term, getting things done sometimes requires you to make others unhappy with you.

Two examples from clients of ours might help illustrate what happens when managers do, or don't, fully feel the weight of responsibility for getting results in their realms. In the first case, the manager oversaw the field operations for her organization. When the organization realized that it needed to shift resources from one part of the field program to another in order to improve its results, this manager made only incremental changes in staffing levels to meet that need—changes that would certainly not suffice to generate the results needed. At a meeting with the head of the organization, the field manager explained her plan, saying, "Imagine the uproar if I had proposed really shifting people around." Her explanation made it clear that she was weighing the potential staff reaction to changes (or, perhaps more accurately, her own discomfort with that reaction) more heavily than the important results that the organization needed her to generate. Fortunately, the field director's own manager caught the issue before it was too late and insisted on more dramatic changes.

In contrast with this approach, our client in the second case did what it took to get results. This client is the executive director of an organization whose work gets carried out through multiple state offices, with those offices overseen directly by a regional director. The executive director and the regional director had agreed on ambitious, critically important goals for what each state office would produce over the coming four months, before the organization's next fundraising cycle began. But after only a couple of weeks, it was painfully clear that the regional director was proceeding under business as usual and that the state offices were nowhere near on track to producing the results they needed.

In this kind of situation, many managers would continue to work through the regional director, checking in periodically, hoping the regional director would deliver in the end, and perhaps blaming him if he didn't come through. In this case, though, the executive director understood that if the hoped-for results did not materialize, he himself was ultimately responsible. He was not simply a passive overseer of the results the team generated, but was ultimately responsible for those results himself. He also understood that in this case, the results had to happen: the organization would not fulfill its mission without them, and it would not be able to raise funds to keep supporting itself. Given that, the executive director took a much more hands-on approach, one that many management books might suggest was micromanaging. Among other things, he insisted that he and the regional director conduct daily calls with each of the state offices to discuss what steps the states were taking to produce the results. After just a few days, the energy at the state level changed, and within a couple of weeks, dramatically different results began to appear. The regional director, who was initially not thrilled with what he viewed as the executive director's heavy-handed approach, learned a valuable lesson about how to generate results. And once the new plans were on track,

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the executive director was able to step back and take a more normal approach to managing by working through his regional director.

When we highlight examples like these and stress the importance of being results oriented, people sometimes ask us whether that means we think nonprofits should be run like hard-nosed businesses. Our answer is that because the work nonprofits do is so important, we need to be *more* hard-nosed about management than for-profit enterprises are. Given what nonprofits do, we have a moral imperative to commit to strong, effective management practices because what's at stake is much more important than a business's bottom line.

And that's the main reason we wrote this book. We want to see more strong, effective nonprofits that are changing the world.

This book contains the tools you need to make it easier for you to get results. We intend for this book to be helpful to new managers as well as to those who have experience and need a refresher, and to managers of individual teams or departments as well as to executive directors of entire organizations. You won't find information on fundraising or working with the media or other topics on specific functions already covered by myriad other books. Instead, you'll find step-by-step guidance on how to manage any single area or an organization as a whole.

As we noted earlier, management is how you get things done through other people. (When you're doing it yourself, it's called "work"!) There are three components to that definition of management: getting things done, the other people, and you. We've divided the book along the lines of those three pieces, covering in each part the practices in which the best managers we've seen excel:

- *Managing the work.* We begin with the things you're getting done because this is what most people think of when they think of management, and it's the most immediate challenge that most new managers face. We'll start with the most specific level of things you might want to get done, which is looking at how you delegate a discrete task or project. We'll then look at how you can assign bigger pieces of work and broader responsibilities by using meaningful roles and clear goals with concrete measures of success. Then knowing that beyond the things you discuss explicitly with your staff, there are thousands of tiny actions that people take every day within your organization, we'll examine how you can use culture to guide your staff members on those items. Finally, we'll bring it all together by looking at a couple of easy-to-implement management systems that help you stay on top of it all.
- *Managing the people.* Using practices to make sure you have the right "other people" to get things done for you may be the single most important lever you have, and yet it's the area most neglected by managers. We'll discuss how to build a staff of superstars: hiring them, developing them, and making sure you hold on to the best and let go those who fall short.

- *Managing yourself.* The final part of this book explains how to apply to yourself the same rigor that you apply to your management of others, including using your time effectively, staying organized, working with your boss, and exercising authority. As a manager, what you do in this area sets the limits on or, we hope, removes the limits from, the results you can get.

We believe that the practices in this book will help you build and lead a high-performing organization that achieves outstanding results over the long haul. And for nonprofits working to change the world, and the people who run them, that's what it should be all about.

PART

1

MANAGING THE WORK

Whether you're managing a single team or an entire organization, there's going to be more work than you can handle on your own. And if you accept the fundamental premise of this book—that managing effectively is about getting results in your realm—then you're going to be feeling a lot of pressure to get things done, and to get them done well.

In Part One, we'll talk about how to manage the work—ideally, how to transfer some of the weight on your shoulders to your staff members. If you do this right, your staff members will feel energized because they will have responsibility, your team will get dramatically more done than you would have been able to on your own, and you'll be freed up to focus on areas where you'll have the biggest impact.

So how do you do it? Whether the work you're trying to get someone to do is as straightforward as handling logistics for a meeting or as complex as raising your organization's visibility in the mass media, the same basic principles apply: you have to be clear from the start about what you expect, stay engaged enough along the way to increase the likelihood of success, and hold people accountable for whether they deliver.

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In Part One, we'll look at how you can apply these principles of expectations, engagement, and accountability to manage different types of work:

- The most common thing most managers do is *hand off specific tasks or projects*. In Chapter Two, we look at how you can do this through strong delegation. Once you've mastered basic delegation, all the other ways in which you'll manage work follow easily, because the same principles apply.
- Ultimately, you'll *maximize your impact when you can hand over not just specific tasks, but broader responsibilities*. In Chapter Three, we look at how you do this by creating meaningful roles on your team and setting and reinforcing clear, measurable goals for what your team members should accomplish. Doing these pieces in tandem will enable you to fully share the pressure (and joys!) not just of day-to-day tasks but also of driving your organization forward.
- Whether in pursuit of specific projects or broad responsibilities, your staff members are going to perform thousands of tiny activities that you never discuss explicitly, but which will be key to the quality of the results you attain. In Chapter Four, we look at how you can create a powerful culture that will guide how your staff members approach and execute every aspect of their work.
- Finally, in Chapter Five, we'll look at two systems that will help you bring all of this together—how in the real world with multiple staff members each handling a range of projects and responsibilities, you can stay on top of it all to ensure great results.

As you'll see, the details vary depending on the context, but the basic principles of making sure people know what you expect of them, engaging with them to maximize their chances of success, and holding them accountable are the same.

CHAPTER

2

MANAGING SPECIFIC TASKS

Basic Delegation

Does either of these scenarios sound familiar to you?

- You ask your staff member to write a fundraising appeal for your new campaign. When you review the draft, the emphasis is on the wrong points and key pieces are missing, so you start editing it—and soon find that you’ve rewritten the entire piece. Your staffer is frustrated because it’s not her letter anymore; it’s yours. “Why didn’t you just do it yourself to begin with?” she wants to know.
- The next time you assign your staff member a piece of writing, you try to give her more leeway so she doesn’t feel micromanaged. But when you look at what she’s written on the day it’s scheduled to be mailed out, the tone is off, the pitch for funding isn’t strong enough, and it doesn’t feel compelling to you. You’re frustrated and unhappy with it, and when you tell her, you can tell she’s frustrated too.

If you’re like most managers we work with, one, if not both, of these will ring true. In fact, many managers we know go back and forth between being too hands-on and too hands-off. Frequently a manager will start off at one extreme, discover that it doesn’t get the desired results, and react by moving to the opposite extreme, only to find that doesn’t work either. For instance, after giving staffers a great deal of leeway to run with a project and not having it go according to plan, a manager may vow to be

involved in every step of the next project. And managers who get feedback that they've been too intensively involved will often start suppressing their natural desire to sit in on crucial project meetings and get interim project reports, inevitably to find out at the end of the project that they should have listened to their gut. At that point, it can be tempting to throw up your hands in exasperation and feel that you're damned if you do and damned if you don't.

It's no wonder managers get exasperated, because neither extreme works. In this chapter, we discuss how to get the balance right and will walk you through each step of good delegation.

EXACTLY HOW HANDS-ON SHOULD YOU BE?

Wouldn't it be nice if there were an easy answer to the question of how hands-on to be? ("Finally! Now I know that I should be 58 percent hands-on!") Although there's no one-size-fits-all formula, we've come to a paradoxical-sounding belief from our work with managers that most managers need to be more hands-on than they are—but also more hands-off.

Huh?

Contrary to the popular belief that managers just need to empower their people and let them go, we believe managers need to be significantly more hands-on in key respects. They need to be more hands-on in clearly communicating their expectations for the outcomes of the work, making sure they and their staff are on the same page about how the work will proceed, checking in on ongoing work, and creating accountability and learning at the end.

*Guide more so
your staff is more
likely to succeed,
and you'll be able
to do less yourself.*

At the same time, managers need to be more hands-off in actually doing the work. For every manager we see who's too hands-off in making expectations clear on the front end and in monitoring ongoing work, we see another (or often the same) who's too hands-on in pushing the day-to-day of the work forward and often doing much of it herself. The point of managing other people is to get more done than you would on your own, but too often we see managers fail to gain the benefit of having other people make the work happen.

We can sum up our advice in this way: guide more, do less.

You might be wondering whether following our advice won't actually take more of your time. In the long run, definitely not. *Guiding more* means that you may spend more time than you otherwise would in explaining a project at the start. You also might spend five minutes more than you did in the past reviewing data on progress along the way. But you'll radically increase the chances that whatever you're delegating will be a success. Everyone will be happier, and you'll ultimately get to *do less* because you won't end up redoing the work (and dealing with an unhappy staff member). Over time you'll be able to delegate bigger and bigger pieces of work and know that they'll come out successfully. When that happens, you can focus your energies on the work that only you can do.

THE COMPONENTS OF GOOD DELEGATION

What does guiding more and doing less look like in practice? As we mentioned in the introduction to this part of the book, there are three key steps to managing work generally and in the delegation process more specifically:

1. *Agree on expectations.* Ensure that your staff member understands what you want achieved.
2. *Stay engaged.* Make sure the work is on track to succeed before it's too late.
3. *Create accountability and learning.* Reinforce responsibility for good or bad results, and draw lessons for the future.

How exactly these principles apply depends on the context, so we'll discuss a fourth principle, which most people do intuitively: adapt your approach to fit the person and project. Figure 2.1 summarizes the basic process.

Ultimately this process is about setting your staff members up for success in their work. We've seen a lot of managers who think of delegation as consisting only of the first part of this cycle, that is, asking someone to complete a piece of work. But if you skip the next steps in the cycle, you're likely to find yourself in the situations we described in the opening of this chapter: frustrated that the work doesn't look like you'd envisioned it or doing too much of it yourself.

When you're assigning work, look for opportunities to make the assignment truly a conversation, as opposed to simply dictating every element. For instance, if there's flexibility in what the finished project should look like, ask the staff member what she thinks the outcome should be. You can also ask questions around the other pieces of delegation, such as, "So who else do you think needs to be involved?" and "Do we have samples that might be useful here?" and "What timeline makes sense?"

Now we'll walk through each of the four steps of the cycle.

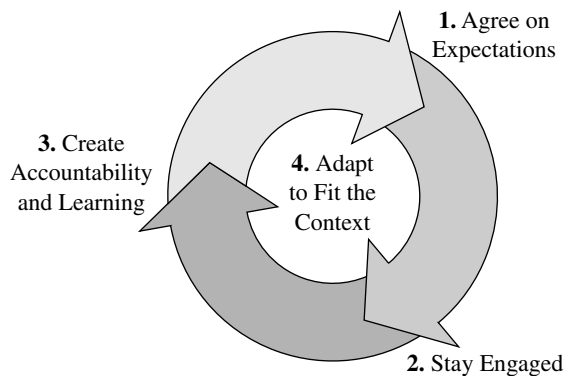


FIGURE 2.1. *The Delegation Cycle*

THE FIVE W'S AND AN H

Teach your staff to ask about the five W's if you haven't already communicated them:

Who: Who should be involved?

What: What does success look like on this?

When: When is the project due?

Where: Where might the staff member go for resources?

Why: Why does this work matter?

And a little bit of . . . **How** you should approach the work.

Step 1: Agree on Expectations

The first step in launching the work is for you and your staffer to come to a clear, shared understanding about what results you expect. It may sound straightforward, but it can be harder than you might think to get to the point where you and your staff would give the same answers to questions like, “What are you trying to accomplish?” and “What does success look like?” Just giving a quick rundown of the project usually won't get you there.

One way to do a better job of communicating your expectations is to remember the five W's from your high school English teacher, who probably taught you that every good news story begins by laying out the who, what, when, where, and why. When you're delegating, think about each of those W's, as well as a little bit of the How. We'll look closely at each piece, although we're taking a bit of creative license and covering the what before the who. And Tool 2.1 at the end of the chapter provides a worksheet to use when you are delegating work to your staff.

What Does Success Look Like for This Assignment?

Most managers we know hate being labeled micromanagers, and with good reason: micromanagers tell staff exactly how to do a project or, worse, do (or redo) the work for them. What will let you delegate effectively while not micromanaging is setting clear expectations for success. By being extremely clear about what you want achieved, you free your staff up to figure out how to get there, so you'll start by agreeing on what success will look like.

Sometimes identifying what success will look like is easy. For instance, when you are putting a staff member in charge of organizing a gala event, you might have a predetermined aim, such as raising net revenue of \$250,000. But in other cases, the definition of success might not be as clear. In those cases, you might ask your staff to take the lead in proposing what a successful outcome would be, saying something like this: “You're in charge of logistics for this event. What do you think doing that successfully should look like?”

In either case, the outcomes that you and your staff agree to should be as specific as possible. Quantitative targets are often ideal, since they leave little room for

misunderstanding. But quantifying outcomes isn't always feasible, so you can also agree on qualitative aims. In these cases, you should be as specific as you can about the qualitative target, that is, how you will know it when you see it. For the staff member you put in charge of logistics, the qualitative aim of having an event run smoothly might more specifically be, "Everything is set up and ready to go on time; if we run out of supplies, we have extras at the ready; we anticipate basic needs and provide for them; and we have someone ready to deal with extraordinary requests."

But sometimes even qualitative outcomes are hard to pin down. In these cases, making sure that your staff member understands the full context of what you're trying to accomplish can go a long way toward defining the outcome. For instance, in delegating a funding proposal, you could explain what the funder cares about and what will turn her off (the context), and you could explain that the finished document needs to resonate emotionally with the donor and convince her that the project is in line with her interests and goals (the outcome).

Finally, don't define the task too narrowly. For instance, let's say you're preparing for an upcoming meeting and you'd like your assistant to help make it go smoothly. Many managers in this situation will give the assistant specific tasks to do, such as, "Please check that there are enough pads and pens in the conference room, and make sure people are offered water and coffee." But a broader, and often much more effective, approach is to tell the assistant that she's in charge of all logistics preparations for the meeting. The first time you do this, you'd agree on what that should look like, but from there, she'd take on the broad responsibility of ensuring smooth logistics. That way, she'd presumably take the initiative to clear the unrelated papers from the conference table that you didn't even realize were there, ensure the speakerphone is set up and ready to go, and do all kinds of other tasks that you might not have thought to assign. This broader approach will make the assistant's job more challenging and your life easier, and it will get the job done better than if you'd assigned it more narrowly.

So when you're addressing success, go broad, not narrow.

USE SAMPLES AND TEMPLATES TO CLARIFY When possible, offering samples can be an incredibly useful way to give your staff a clearer idea of what you're looking for. For example, if you and your head of communications agree that the Web site she is developing should look "clean and crisp," you might send her links to sites that you feel look that way. Similarly, you could give your new development director a successful grant proposal from a previous year to show her the tone and style she should be striving for in this year's report.

If the assignment is a new type of work, providing a template can help structure the work in the way you're envisioning. For example, rather than simply asking a staff member to give you research about other organizations working on a particular issue, you might create a chart with the specific headings you are looking for (for instance, organization name, mission, budget, and so forth) and have her fill it in.

“Make sure your staff members can answer the question,
‘What do I have to do to delight my boss?’”

PETER B. LEWIS, CHAIRMAN, PROGRESSIVE CORPORATION

Who Should Be Involved?

However broadly you define the task, be unambiguous with your staff member that she is ultimately responsible for it. Too often we hear managers say, “Can you help me with logistics for the meeting?” when what they really mean to say is, “You’re in charge of making sure logistics for the meeting go smoothly.” The key here is to make sure your staff member understands that she is the owner—a word we love—of the task. She might call on you or others for ideas or even help with the task, but she is the one making sure that all of the helpers do their jobs and that the task is done well.

One way to instill the idea of ownership is to use a simple tool we call MOCHA, an acronym for the different roles for a piece of work. We developed it because we had a lot of clients who rightly placed a high value on inclusion, and therefore had projects that ended up involving lots of people. Too often, though, those projects devolved into confusion when people were not clear on their roles and the project lacked a clear driver or decision maker.

In projects where a number of people are playing roles, then, being clear about the who is key. MOCHA helps solve the who issue by providing a standard vocabulary within the organization for describing how people might be involved. (You can remember “MOCHA” because if you get this right, your job becomes easier and you can sit at a café all day sipping mochas.) Here’s what the different pieces of MOCHA stand for:¹

Manager	Assigns responsibility and holds owner accountable. Makes suggestions, asks hard questions, reviews progress, serves as a resource, and intervenes if the work is off track.
Owner	Has overall responsibility for the success or failure of the project. Ensures that all the work gets done (directly or with helpers) and that others are involved appropriately. There should be only one owner.
Consulted	Should be asked for input or needs to be bought in to the project.
Helper	Available to help do part of the work.
Approver	Signs off on decisions before they’re final. May be the manager, though might also be the executive director, external partner, or board chair.

¹We adapted this model from the DARCI decision-making model taught in some programs: Decider, Accountable, Responsible, Consulted, Informed.

GIVE WORK TO THE RIGHT PERSON

We sometimes see managers fail at delegation because they assign a project to the wrong person in the first place, trying to fit a round peg into a square hole—for example, assigning the artistic director, who is a creative genius but a disaster with numbers, to prepare a detailed project budget. When delegating work, consider who has the talent and skills to get the job done rather than who should be able to do the task at hand given her background or position. Of course, if you regularly find yourself reluctant to delegate a responsibility that the staff member in that position should be able to handle, you need to assess whether that person is a good fit for the role and determine an appropriate course of action. We discuss this and other performance issues in Chapter Nine.

Let's say that you're a development director and your development associate is in charge of the upcoming gala. You might be the M (manager) on this project, and the associate would be the O (owner). The communications director and program director should be consulted (C), the development assistant is an H (helper), and the executive director might be both an H (helper by making calls to the largest donors to ask them to buy tables) and the A (approver on the final program and the table assignments).

If you do nothing else when you're delegating, make sure that there's a clear owner for making the project succeed. The owner might then figure out the rest of the MOCHA, but you need to know who is responsible for making the project successful. In fact, one way to think about your challenge as you take on more and more management responsibility is to recognize that your job is to go from being an owner to being a manager. That means that as you find yourself the owner of specific responsibilities, you might be asking yourself, "Should I really be the owner on this, or should I be handing that over to someone else?"

When Is the Project Due?

We realize it sounds obvious to be clear about the when, but we'll say it anyway: make sure your staff member knows when the project is due and where it falls relative to her other priorities. Over and over again, we see managers who delegate a project without being explicit about the due date, expecting it to be finished or at least well under way a week later, and then check back in and discover that the staffer hasn't started it yet. Again, it comes down to being clear about your expectations: state the timeline you expect and how the work fits with other priorities.

It's okay to leave the timing up to the staffer, but be specific about any qualifiers attached to that. You might say something like, "There's no rush for this, so it's fine to do it as time allows, but it should be wrapped up by August. This isn't as important as the memo for the board, so you can turn to it after that." You can also make this part very much a conversation by asking your staff member when she thinks it would be reasonable to have the work done and how she sees it fitting in with her other priorities.

Where Might the Staff Member Go for Resources?

What money, people, supplies, and other tools can your staff member use? Is there a rough budget for the project? Are there other people with expertise on this issue to whom she might turn (you might capture these people within the MOCHA as those who are consulted or helpers).

Within that list, one of the most valuable resources you can offer your staff is your own time. Make it clear that staffers can approach you to clarify expectations, answer questions, review progress, and help brainstorm solutions. In doing this, make sure that they maintain ownership of the project, so a staffer can say, “I’m wrestling with X. The best solution I can come up with is ABC, but I worry that it’s not the most cost-effective approach. Do you have any suggestions about other options I might consider?” Staffers shouldn’t say, “I’m stuck on X. What should I do?”

Why Does This Work Matter?

Finally, both of us have been guilty of giving assignments in a hurry without explaining where the project is coming from and why it matters, and even why we’ve chosen to give it to the person we’re asking to handle it. We’ve both also gotten reasonably good outcomes at times when we have skipped this step, but each time we do it well, we’ve been struck by how much more excitement and buy-in we’ve seen when we communicate the why of a project as staff members go from compliance to commitment. For instance, if you’re asking your assistant to handle the logistics for an upcoming funder visit to your office, you might remind her that the funder has shown interest in the organization but hasn’t yet committed, that the funder in the past has been skeptical of grassroots organizations like yours so you want to make sure you look extra “on the ball,” and that your assistant did such a good job organizing the community dinner that you know she can make this visit a smashing success.

... And a Little Bit of How You Should Approach the Work

The standard line in management textbooks is that if you have good people, you shouldn’t need to tell them how to do everything. This is largely true, and by being clear with your staff about what success looks like, you’re freeing them up to think about how to get there.

That said, if you have input about the project, you should give it to your staff member on the front end. There are few things more frustrating for staff members than putting the effort in figuring out something you already knew. If you know from experience that having a Web site vendor in a different city has been a nightmare in the past, don’t hesitate to tell your head of communications that.

Similarly, make sure you mention any constraints that the staff member should be aware of. These might be constraints around the process (such as who needs to sign off on an item before it goes out the door) or the substance (such as items to include in the budget). For instance, in the Web design example, you might ask your staff member to submit draft design options to the head of development before she makes a final