Your workload is getting heavier and heavier. You’re at the point where you know you can’t do it all. Now’s the time to decide which tasks to delegate and to whom.

When done randomly and without thinking it through, however, delegation can be a disaster. So, first, you want to determine when delegation is your best course of action. To do that, start by asking yourself five key questions:

1. “Is there someone else who I believe has what it takes – background, expertise, information, etc. – to do the job?”

Absent that, is there someone I can get up to speed quickly to take over the job? Realize that you may not always have the perfect person with perfect skills to step in.

It’s not always about picking the perfect person; it’s more often about picking the best person.

2. “Does the task provide an opportunity to grow and develop another person’s skills, or am I just foisting off an unpleasant task on someone else?”

You’ll want the person you pick to feel good about taking on the job, not feel as if it’s just a burden. Yes, the job may be tough and at times unpleasant and difficult – many jobs are – but it should provide the person with a genuine opportunity to grow and learn.

3. “Is this a task that that’s likely to come up again, so that if I invest time in someone, I’ll get multiple payoffs?”

Once in a while, you’re going to have to delegate someone to put out a fire – that is, take on a one-time, emergency task. That’s OK, and that’s all part of day-to-day business.

In addition to that, you should strive to delegate tasks that are ongoing and repeating, so as to get the best long-term benefit, for you and the employee you choose to do the task.

4. “Do I have enough time to delegate the job effectively?”

If there’s no time for training, feedback and, yes, an occasional redo, you may be asking for trouble.

In almost all instances, taking on a new task is also about learning, and making occasional mistakes that have to be fixed. You’ll need to build in time to account for those parts of the delegation process.

5. “Is this a task that I should delegate?”

Let your instincts decide which responsibilities must stay under your control and which you can let go.

Some of the factors to take into consideration:

- How crucial are deadlines? What are the consequences of not completing the job on time?
- Is “good” good enough? In other words, could you and your organization live with slightly lower quality for the sake of delegation? If not, you’ll have to have full confidence in the person to deliver at the highest level.
- What are the consequences of failure? Handing over the job could increase that possibility. No one accepts failure, but you have to accept the possibility and be prepared to deal with it.