Elicit people's true voices. When individuals speak with their true voice, they say what is true for them regardless of external pressures. While people often speak based on their title or role within an organization, speaking with a true voice requires them to step outside their role, suspend self-censorship, and speak what they really think about an issue. Leaders need to be skilled both in doing this and in facilitating it in others. Encouraging others to do the same enriches a conversation by bringing all voices to the table. This is a critical skill for leaders and one that is also essential when responding to adaptive challenges. To facilitate this, leaders must be able to create an environment that encourages authentic discussion. This includes encouraging dissent and a certain degree of conflict within a group. Forcing true voices within an unaccepting culture can do significant damage, so the PF must carefully observe and nourish a culture of safety and respect.

Respect their positions as legitimate. Respect is the ability to see people as "legitimate others." It enables everyone to remain open and look for the sense of what others are saying during dialogue, even if there are disagreements. To facilitate meaningful dialogue, a practice leader needs to be skilled in modeling respect for others ideas within a dialogue and facilitating this same ability among other participants in the dialogue.

Listen deeply. Listening deeply shows respect for others' ideas and thoughts. According to Isaacs, listening deeply requires being aware of our internal thoughts about what is being said and developing the ability to observe them but not act on them. To listen deeply, you must be skilled in "sticking to the facts" of what is being said and must avoid making inferences and assumptions (Isaacs, 1999a).

Suspend judgment and certitudes. This allows you to consider others' ideas. Suspending requires internal awareness that you are forming judgments about the others, plus the ability to delay or suspend these judgments for a period, thereby giving others the opportunity to have their ideas heard nonjudgmentally (Isaacs, 1999a).

Helping Leaders Engage Staff in Change

An essential skill of leadership is the ability to make effective delegations and then hold staff accountable for outcomes. A central principle of delegation is that, while authority may be delegated, ultimate responsibility is not. As a result, leaders at the beginning of their career are likely to hold decisionmaking close and may have never received formalized training in delegation or staff accountability. However, advanced skills in leadership provide a level of comfort that allows for empowerment of staff, within clear parameters, to determine and implement solutions at the appropriate level within the organization. An effective leader focuses not on simply making the decision, but instead on providing the support and knowledge required for individuals at the appropriate level to make the best decision. By doing so, leaders expand their influence and capacity to lead. As a PF, helping practice leaders develop these skills is a powerful driver of sustainability for quality improvement in the practice.

As you work with practice leaders, you may find opportunities to help them build these essential skills. Effective empowerment occurs in three stages:

1. Investment of time at the start by setting goals, identifying resources needed, and determining the acceptability and goodness of fit of the staff person making the decision.
2. Regular check-ins with the staff person and comparison of outcomes with the goals carefully defined in stage 1.
3. Handling unsuccessful delegations. This stage involves reflection on poor outcomes of the delegation, the system-level contributors to these outcomes, and a withdrawal of the delegation.

A curriculum for training practice leaders on making effective delegations is included in this module as part of the Appendix.

Summary and Conclusions

As a PF, you need to be aware that practice leadership is an essential part of your practice improvement work and will play a huge role in its ultimate success. To be effective, you need to know how to engage leaders in improvement work and how to keep them engaged in these processes long term. In addition, you can also be a direct resource to practice leadership. You can provide an introduction to new ideas about leading organizational change, serve as a sounding board to leaders by using powerful questioning, and provide training that can help them enhance leadership skills needed to guide change. Finally, you can serve as a bridge to additional resources, such as experienced executive coaching, if needed.

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Appendix 21. Relational Delegation: Introduction to Making Effective Delegations and Holding Team Members Accountable

Developed by Anthony Suchman and Penelope R. Williamson

Effective delegation and accountability are core tasks of successful leadership and management. When done well, those with newly delegated responsibilities build their capacity, unleash their creativity, and enhance their self-efficacy. Effective delegation also gives leaders more time to mentor those in their charge and focus on larger system issues. Too often, however, leaders do not effectively delegate tasks or assure accountability for their implementation. The delegation may be too vague or there might be micromanaging instead of true delegation. Feedback may be impromptu and impressionistic—if it is given at all. It may be focused more on the person than on the behavior, and it does not lead to performance improvement. Ultimately, if performance levels are unacceptable, delegations are often withdrawn in a manner that is unnecessarily hurtful to the individual and harmful to the organizational culture. Worse yet, the unfulfilled delegation may not be withdrawn and the poor performance would be allowed to continue, to the detriment of customers, coworkers, and the whole organization.

Fortunately, there are some straightforward principles and practices that can help you make effective delegations and maintain accountability, thus maximizing the performance of your team or organization. We offer these below, along with illustrative conversations showing what these principles might look like in action. We divide this information into three sections that correspond to three obligations you have to those to whom you make delegations:

- A well-conceived delegation (made to the right person, with clear expectations and adequate support)
- An honest assessment of progress, with feedback and coaching as needed
- Withdrawal of a delegation, role, or position that is not working

Making a well-conceived delegation. In making an effective delegation, your first and most important task is to choose the right person—to seek the best alignment between the task and the individual. While the selected individual must have sufficient skills and experience to take on the new role, he or she does not necessarily have to be the most skilled or experienced person. Other factors are equally important in assessing best fit. People are most creative, committed, and effective when their work holds personal interest and meaning. Perhaps the delegation represents a step up in responsibility, a chance to gain new knowledge and skills, or a chance to develop important new working relationships. Perhaps the work is in a domain for which an individual has a longstanding interest or passion. Or maybe the work will enhance the individual's visibility within the organization. It is helpful to exchange perspectives about fit with the person you have chosen. It reinforces a pattern of partnership from the outset, and it can reveal important considerations of which you might not have been aware. Avoiding an unwise delegation is far more efficient than having to clean up afterwards.

Once you have chosen the right person, it is important that you **establish clear expectations for**

the work you are delegating. This means not only naming the overall task or role to be delegated but also providing enough details to ensure that you and your employee share an accurate understanding of what is being asked: What is the desired outcome? What is the deadline? What resources are available (or must not be used)? Who else should or should not be involved? Are there any other parameters within which the delegation must be carried out? The amount of detail provided will depend on the nature of the work and the experience of the appointee.

The simplest way to ascertain the level of detailed information an employee needs is to ask. It is often helpful for the boss to start this inquiry, as it may be difficult for an employee to do so.

Negotiating clear, mutually understood expectations strengthens partnership by letting the employee know he or she is not in this alone and has a supportive, thinking partner. It also is the basis for reviewing performance and providing feedback along the way. Unambiguous expectations are the starting point for maintaining accountability.

It is also essential to **ensure adequate preparation and resources for the person to do the job**. As above, an open, transparent conversation can help you learn what an employee needs to perform the task well. Does he or she have (or can acquire) the resources, knowledge, and skills needed? These might include financial, educational, or other resources; emotional support; and a constructive environment. Taking on a new role or task might necessitate prioritizing or giving up some current responsibilities. What help will you provide at the start and over time? Clear negotiation of these important variables will help pave the way for a successful delegation.

Finally, it is crucial to **arrange for a feedback session at the time of the initial delegation**. Delegation requires supervision; it is not a hand-off but rather a reapportioning of responsibilities. It is far more efficient and beneficial to all involved to have timely assessments of successes and needs along the way, making course corrections as appropriate, than to discover at some end point that expectations have not been met. It is helpful to arrive at an understanding ahead of time about when performance will be assessed and what criteria will be used. Here again, expectations can be established mutually. Involving the employee in each step of the delegation reinforces and models partnership and sets the stage for trust and mutual accountability.

To summarize, the four steps in making a well-conceived delegation are:
1. Choose the right person. Find alignment between the needs of the organization and the personal goals and interests of the person receiving the delegation.
2. Establish clear expectations. Be sure expectations are shared by both the person in charge and the employee.
3. Ensure adequate preparation. Make sure people have or can acquire the resources and knowledge and skills to do the job, including training, financial or other resources, emotional support, and a constructive environment.
4. Plan the assessment prospectively. Arrive at an understanding ahead of time of how and when performance will be assessed—preferably mutually decided upon.

Example of a Delegation Meeting Conversation

Boss: Hi Rob. Is this a good time to meet? (Yes? Good.) I'm very pleased to be talking with you today. I have heard you express an interest in taking on larger scale projects and have observed your excellent way of relating with people, and we have a need that just might fit. I'd like you to coordinate our annual community outreach meeting, which is set for June 7th, four months from now. I think you would do an outstanding job with this. I hope you'll agree to take this on.

Rob: I'm delighted you thought of me, and would like to consider it. What is involved?

Boss: We already have a venue and a date, which is a good thing but also creates the need for efficient planning, as it is only four months away. I'd expect you to coordinate the work of everyone who will be involved and to keep on top of the planning and implementation along the way. Let me ask you, have you done something like this before?

Rob: I've headed up some projects of a smaller scale.

Boss: The basics are likely familiar. Let's explore how you might take your experience to a larger scale. What would be helpful?

Rob: I'd appreciate knowing how you would approach this task.

Boss: I'd suggest that you begin by creating a timeline with all the major tasks so that you can pace yourself accordingly. Also, you'll probably want to gather a planning team to help you think of all the necessary steps and carry out all that will need to happen to plan and bring about this important gathering. I'm available to meet with you weekly or at least bi-weekly over this time to be of help and to provide supervision since this is your first time with a project of this scope. How does that sound? What are your thoughts?

Rob: That all sounds good. I like the idea of a planning team and also that you'll be available for consultation and supervision. Will I have any other support (time freed up from my other roles, secretarial help)?

Boss: You bet. (Gives details of what will happen and support.) Is there any other help you need to get started?

Rob: I have to admit, I've never created a timeline before.

Boss: Thanks for being forthright. I can show you how I approach this. I'd start by drawing a line across a sheet of paper. The end point is the event. The beginning point is today. We've already agreed that you will form a planning team. If you can do that by next week, put an X there to mark the spot. Then think of all the tasks that will be involved (such as marketing, creating a schedule, lining up speakers or workshops, arranging for food and lodging, etc.) and in what order they need to be done, and list them on the line. Sometimes it's helpful to work backwards from the date of the event. You might take a first stab at this and then invite your planning team

to help fill in and refine your draft. Does that help?

Rob: That is great. I have a good sense of what I need to do now and am pleased you thought of me for this project. I'm glad to accept.

Boss: Good. I'm delighted, and I feel confident you'll do well. Time is of the essence, and everything that happens will depend on the timeline and the planning team. I'd like to meet again as soon as you have created a draft of the timeline and gathered the planning team. Is a week enough time for those two steps?

Rob: Yes; I think so.

Boss: Good. Then let's meet next Friday at 2:00 PM, and I'd like to see the timeline and know who's on the team by then.

Assessing progress and giving feedback. Having made a well-conceived delegation with clear descriptions of expected outcomes and the parameters within which they must be achieved, the next step is to follow through with planned progress assessment. This step is much simpler if you have defined the assessment criteria in advance: you both know what data to gather and there is less potential for misaligned expectations. The crucial success factors here are honest feedback, effective coaching, and a good partnership process.

- Use direct observations whenever possible.
- Celebrate and reinforce successes; reinforce positive expectations.
- Show genuine belief in the capacity of the other to grow and perform.
- Offer mentoring and guidance as appropriate; invite the other person to make their own thinking process explicit.
- Point out errors and omissions, using them as learning opportunities for presenting and alternative approaches.
- Use partnership and dialogue skills (Partnership, Empathy, Acknowledgment, Respect, Legitimation and Support (PEARLS – see Table A21.1), skilled inner listening, inquiry, and advocacy).
- Make a plan for the next timely cycle of performance review and evaluation—when it will take place, what specific performance expectations will be assessed, and what data and criteria will be used.

Table A21.1 Types of relationship-building statements with illustrative examples.

Partnership	We'll see this through together. I really want to work on this with you.
Empathy	It sounds like that was frightening for you. I can feel your sadness as you talk.

Acknowledgement	You put a lot of work into that project. You researched this proposal very thoroughly.
Respect	I so respect your commitment. I've always appreciated your creativity.
Legitimation	This would be hard for anyone. Who wouldn't be worried about something like this?
Support	I'd like to help you with this. I want to see you succeed.

Adapted from Clark W. Hewson M, Fry M, Shorey J. *Communication Skills Reference Card.* St. Louis, MO: American Academy on Communication in Healthcare; 1998.

Example of a Feedback Meeting Conversation

Boss: Hi Rob, it's good to see you. How have you been doing since we met last week?

Rob: Very well. I have pulled together a six-person planning team and we had our first meeting, yesterday. I think it is a very good group, representing the spectrum of activities in our organization that will be needed for bringing about this community outreach gathering. I emailed you the names yesterday.

Boss: Yes, I got them.

Rob: They are eager to be helpful and had some great ideas already; I felt good about our first meeting and about planning the event.

Boss: Terrific. I have already heard a buzz of excitement and have observed that you have gone about pulling together your planning team in a relational and inclusive manner. I'm glad you included people with a broad range of responsibility and capabilities. It looks to be a great team. Now, what about the timeline?

Rob: I have started on it, but didn't get as far as I'd hoped. (Perhaps shows sketchy timeline with only several points on it.)

Boss: I'm a little surprised that you have not done more on this, as we talked last week about how important the timeline is to all that follows, and that time is of the essence. Tell me, what has gotten in the way?

Rob: After our team met yesterday, I got slammed with two urgent deadlines from my regular "day job" and didn't want to let my colleagues down. I was up until midnight finishing that work, and just haven't had the time to sit down and put all the points on the timeline, from our conversation in the planning team and from my own thinking. I didn't want to present you with a

half-baked product. I'll do it in the next few days.

Boss: I can see how that could happen. I can also see that this is an important learning opportunity for you. The annual meeting is very important to the whole organization and to our community. Your leadership will determine its success. Taking this on presents a chance for you to prioritize and to set limits on what you can and cannot do while you are coordinating this effort. How will you approach this now?

Rob: I think I just have to say no to some other "urgent" things that keep appearing on my plate until this is done.

Boss: Yes, I agree. As you know, I arranged for you to be able to cut back on your regular work for these few months, so I have your back on this. We absolutely need this timeline in the next few days. I believe in your capacity to do both things. Let your immediate supervisor know what you can and can't do in the short run and put this timeline together by Tuesday. You've made a great start with the team. Now we need this organizational piece in order to assure we can pull off the meeting. Can I count on you for that?

Rob: Yes, I'll get it done.

Boss: Good. Let's meet on Tuesday at 3:00 PM with the timeline. Please send me a draft in advance of the meeting so I can review it. See you then.

Ending a delegation, role or position that is not working. Most of the time, when you have delegated a job or task thoughtfully, set clear expectations, given actionable feedback and offered timely coaching, things work out well. The delegation and feedback sessions provide opportunities for celebrations, course corrections, and learning along the way. Occasionally, however, in spite of these steps and good intentions, things do not work out. In service to patients or customers, co-workers, the organization (and its mission), and even to the underperforming employee, it falls to you to end a delegation or even a job. It is important to learn the skills of ending a delegation well. Paradoxical as it may seem, it is possible to do this in a relational manner, preserving an employee's self-worth and a relational organization culture:

> •Set the stage: "As we had planned, we're meeting to compare your actual progress with the goals and expectations we discussed previously."
> • Forecast the bad news: "I'm afraid the news isn't good."
> • Give the news, stating it clearly and unambiguously: "Your efforts haven't fulfilled our needs; I can't keep you in this role."
> • Characterize the problem as mismatch between the individual's strengths and what the role requires: "I've seen that you are good at x, y and z. This role requires a, b, and c. It's just not the right match and it's not good for you or for the organization for you to stay in this role."
> • Keep the focus on the behavior and not the person: "You're work is not sufficiently organized and it's not completed on time" rather than "You're no good."
> • Use empathy and other PEARLS (see Table A21.1): "I imagine that this is pretty hard to hear…"

It is essential to emphasize that ending a delegation represents a mismatch between the strengths of the person and the role requirements of the job. This is not a bad person; rather, their behavior didn't meet agreed upon expectations. Even if this is not the right task for this person at this time, it is important to indicate that you still have belief in the capacity of the person. And it is helpful to be empathic to how hard it is to hear bad news (as well as to give it).

We come back to our scenario with the Boss and Rob. Rob has not sent a timeline in advance of the meeting as requested, and an email prompt has led to an incomplete timeline that does not meet the needs for the project. Rob has not been able to let go of the "urgent" tasks that are always present in order to attend to what is most important.

Example of a Meeting to End a Delegation Conversation

Boss: Hello, Rob. Our meeting today is to compare your actual progress with the goals and expectations we have discussed. I'm afraid the news isn't good. In spite of your best efforts, your work on the timeline has not been sufficiently organized or timely enough to meet the needs of this project. I have decided I cannot keep you in this role.

Rob: (Hangs his head.) I'm very disappointed. I know I can do it. I've been trying so hard and I'm getting better.

Boss: I can empathize. This must be hard to hear.

Rob: It is—I feel like I've failed.

Boss: I don't see it that way. I see it as more of a mismatch between your strengths at this time and what the role requires. You have great strengths with part of this role (gathering the right people and getting them involved), but the organizational aspects and efficiency are also vital to a time-sensitive initiative like the annual community outreach meeting. You have not been able to manage your time efficiently and get the detailed timeline completed even with several extensions. I have to balance the needs of the organization with your learning needs.
I see this is my error, in part. I pushed you too fast into this role. You are on a learning curve regarding learning effective time management. I believe you can become good at this. But it will take more time than we have available right now. I'd like to help you continue to learn, but can't do it at the cost of this program's success.

Rob: You still believe I can learn this?

Boss: I do—if you're interested in making this a part of your repertoire.

Rob: I really am.

Boss: I'm glad to hear it. I'd like you to work closely with Dr. X for the remainder of this project. I have asked her to take the lead on the meeting. You'll be her second in charge. She has great strengths in time management, and you'll learn a lot from working with her. And you'll

continue to bring your gifts in working with the team. How does that sound?

Rob: [Silence] . . . It feels like a demotion, but I'm also glad I'm not off the project all together and that you believe I am not a lost cause. I want to lead projects like this in the future. I think it will be good to work with Dr. X.

Boss: I admire your graciousness in handling this shift of responsibilities. I think this will be an important turning point for you, and I look forward to our continued work together.

Unclear delegations and inadequate processes of accountability are arguably the leading cause of productivity loss in organizations—and the most easily correctible. Using the principles described above, you can improve the practice of delegation and accountability, which will improve organizational performance and at the same time foster a workplace culture of respect and partnership.

Source: Appendix 3: A Relationship-centered Approach to Delegation and Accountability. Adapted from Suchman A, Sluyter D, Williamson P. *Leading Change in Healthcare: Transforming Organizations With Complexity, Positive Psychology and Relationship-centered Care.* London: Radcliffe Publishing; 2011.