

# Why Delegating Tasks is Difficult for Legal Professionals





Are you the best attorney for the job?

If you're handling a case or project that's based around your practice area, the answer is most likely yes. Here's the problem with that question. It's not the whole story.

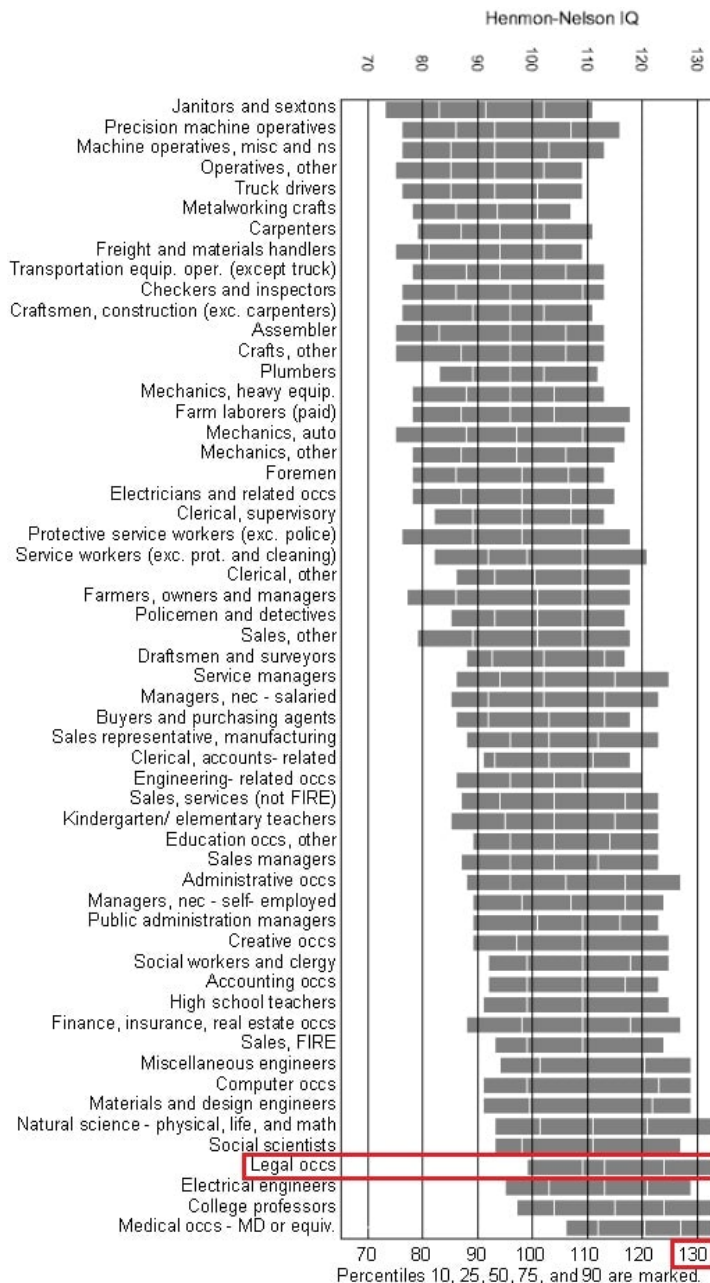
You know you're not the best attorney for **every** task.

Why is it so hard for attorneys to delegate tasks then? It seems like a fairly straightforward problem. You delegate tasks, your firm grows and you bring in more revenue.

It's not rocket science.

## **Delegating tasks is a trust problem**

It's not a performance or intelligence problem. But even if it was, it wouldn't matter. You're a legal professional which means you're part of the most intelligent segment of the population.



The problem is trust.

Many attorneys don't *want* to delegate important cases and projects to their subordinates. They feel it's a terrible idea which makes sense when you realize they struggle with these specific problems.

- **Delegate and nothing is done right.** It's a horrible situation to find yourself in. You trust your subordinates to get work done on your behalf, only to find it isn't done. What's worse, your workload has now doubled. You have to undo your subordinate's mess, then complete the tasks you would have done yourself.
- **Delegating takes more time than doing the work yourself.** This still takes more work, even if your subordinates and support staff get things right

on the first try. You have to **(a.)** explain what *needs* to be done then **(b.)** discuss how things *should* be done then **(c.)** outline what shouldn't be done and then finally **(d.)** confirm that things have been done properly and that you've received the results you're looking for.

- **Delegating means a loss of control.** As an attorney, this is a frightening ordeal to go through. A loss of control comes with all sorts of unpleasant surprises. Unhappy clients, incomplete work, poor quality work, or no work. A loss of control could mean that your quality of work is inconsistent and irregular. The worst part about all of this is...
- **You're still accountable for failure when you delegate.** If subordinates make mistakes the results could mean fines, disciplinary action, lawsuits or disbarment for you. Sure, subordinates will experience the consequences of their actions, but so will you. When you delegate, you're still responsible, good or bad, for the outcome.
- **Delegate and subordinates may show me up.** Maybe subordinates use bragging to improve their career prospects. Or they decide to share data inappropriately with the wrong person, at the wrong time. Maybe they portray you as incompetent and foolish. Whatever the case, this creates a whole new set of headaches you're now forced to deal with.
- **I'll delegate myself right out of a job.** There's an irrational fear some attorneys have. If they delegate too much, they'll encourage their subordinates to strike out on their own. If they're associates or partners at a firm, the fear is that they'll encourage competition and poaching from others in their firm. As you'll see later, there's a simple and straightforward way to eliminate this problem.
- **Delegating means I lose the tasks I enjoy.** This problem seems like it's entirely outside of your control. But the opposite is true here. If you'd like to continue doing the tasks you enjoy, you'll need focus. This sounds like trite, generic advice until you realize that most people don't know what focus actually is. Focus is saying No to the things you *don't want* so you're ready to receive what you *do* want.

Makes sense, doesn't it?

The rationale behind these concerns isn't unreasonable. It's clear and based in reality for the most part. Here's the part that isn't so clear.

Why.

Why do you, as an attorney, need to delegate?

# Delegating tasks is a catalyst for success

*or failure.*

It's entirely up to you.

Small law firms rely on a certain kind of do-it-yourself mentality. Which works well... at first. You're able to rely on a few select employees and you're able to grind out a respectable living.

A living that's entirely dependent on *you*.

If you're the main driver of your firm's success you own a (potentially lucrative) job, not a business. Walk away from that business for three months and you won't have a business to come back to. What does this mean for you?

## **Endless work.**

Delegating tasks is the only way to free yourself from the hamster wheel of forced productivity.

But why?

Here's the answer: **What got you here won't get you there.**

[Marshall Goldsmith](#), renowned leadership coach and management expert, makes a compelling case for growth in [his book](#). He outlines some deceptively simple details that produce growth.

It's so simple it's easy to ignore.

Behavioral problems, not head knowledge or technical skills, are what separates the greats from the not-greats. You can achieve incredible results from incredibly basic behaviors. Saying please and thank you. Thinking before you speak. Active listening. Owning and apologizing for your mistakes.

Common decency, right?

His book is filled with not-so-obvious truisms that produce the kind of results your firm needs to grow.

- We resist change due to delusional self-confidence
- Getting praise is dangerous. Praise makes it easy to delude yourself when all you hear are positives

- The higher your status in an organization the more your suggestions are viewed as orders
- The four fundamental drivers of self-interest are money, power, status and popularity
- Give away all the credit
- Simply accept compliments and say “thank you” more often
- We tend to focus on shortsighted goals and aimless to-dos.
- “*How do you feel about me?*” isn’t as important as “*how can I get better?*”
- We can’t make long-term change if we don’t follow up. Following up shows our co-workers that we care
- When making a hurtful or critical comment the question you should ask isn’t “*is it true?*” it needs to be “*is it worth it?*”
- When you apologize say “*I’m sorry I’ll try to do better.*” Then be quiet.
- Feedback is vital. When you receive positive or negative feedback accept it from a neutral place. Say thank you without judgment, argument or complaint.
- and more...

Blech!

This sounds like *soft skills*!

Gross.

Only it *isn’t* gross. Delegation is a trust problem, remember? If you’re going to delegate successfully you’ll need to *trust your subordinates*. Your subordinates will need to *trust you*. What do you need to make that happen?

## **Relationship.**

You’ll need a good/great relationship with your peers and subordinates. These interpersonal niceties may *seem* like a waste of time but it’s actually the opposite. They’re the grease that lubricates the relationship and daily interactions in your firm.

Does this matter?

Absolutely. It’s a consistent way to attract the right of results when you delegate. Which you’ll have to do to grow. Firms that grow to the million+ mark *must* delegate.

## **Can you delegate successfully?**

Delegating isn't as simple as handing out orders to subordinates.

It's about the goal.

Sure, you *may* be the best attorney to handle a particular task. But that's not really why clients reach out to you for help. No, [your job is to win](#) for your client.

So how do you do that?

1. **Prepare to delegate.** Take the time to determine **(a.)** the tasks you'll need to complete **(b.)** the professionals you'll need to complete said tasks and **(c.)** what needs to be done and how to do it.
2. **Delegate the right tasks.** There are several tasks that can and should be delegated regularly. Repetitive and non-essential tasks. Delegate tasks that don't have an immediate deadline. Tasks that are favored by specific subordinates. Delegate tasks to subordinates who need growth in a particular area.
3. **Make sure subordinates understand.** Confirm that the professionals on your team understand items A and C. Ask them to summarize or repeat the items back to you. Make sure they're fully aware of the outcomes you expect including to-dos, milestones and deliverables.
4. **Prepare to fail.** Your subordinates will make mistakes. If you're truly the best, the work won't be done as well. Work to minimize mistakes and maximize outcomes. *Focus* on outcomes. Avoid getting bogged down by minutiae or the process.
5. **Set an agenda.** Create an agenda outlining: the tasks to be completed, the deadlines for each task and the budget required. Provide your team with the necessary authority and permissions required to complete each task. Then set a date to meet the following week to go over the previous week's results.
6. **Get criticized, seek out feedback.** Give your teammates the forum they need to ask questions. Make it safe for them share feedback, problems and concerns. Assess the wins and defeats of the previous week, then work to improve.

Your job is to **win**.

Delegating tasks is an essential component for success. Delegating requires preparation. There's more to it than simply handing out orders. Delegation needs relationship and a system.

## **Delegating tasks is a trust problem**

It's not rocket science.

Want your firm to grow? Delegating tasks isn't optional. While it may be difficult for attorneys in general it doesn't have to be difficult for you. Many attorneys don't *want* to delegate important cases and projects to their subordinates. They feel it's a terrible idea.

But delegation is a catalyst for success.

Small law firms are scrappy. They pride themselves on a certain kind of do-it-yourself mentality. This works well if you're looking to own a job. It's the fast track to *endless work*.

You have the recipe for freedom.

*What got you here won't get you there.* Delegating tasks is the only way to free yourself from the hamster wheel of forced productivity.

Can you delegate successfully?

You can and you will, if you follow the steps I've laid out. You're the best attorney for the job. But you know what your clients are looking for. They're looking for a win. Continue to win and you'll quickly become the best attorney in their book.

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