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Should You Delegate That Decision? Ask These 4 Questions

How to decide what's safe—and strategic—to hand off.

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Laura is the VP of product at a fast-growing software company. She's known for her sharp instincts and hands-on style, but is stretched thin: reviewing every product tradeoff, attending every design review, and mediating between engineering and sales. Her team is capable but stuck, reluctant to move forward without her.

Laura's experience—a full calendar, an overflowing inbox, and a mind pulled in four different directions before noon—is common among senior leaders. Everyone wants a piece of your judgment: on priorities, personnel, budgets, strategy, and the fires that flare up daily. But there's only so much time and so many decisions that you can—and should—take on.

Most leadership advice says to delegate more. But how do you know what kinds of decisions are ripe to delegate, particularly in today's high-stakes, fast-moving, and ambiguous environment?

Identifying Decisions to Delegate

In coaching clients like Laura, I've uncovered four questions to help senior leaders identify which types of decisions are safe—and strategic—to delegate.

1. Who's closest to the action, and what can they see that I can't?

This question helps you identify proximate decisions, where someone on your team is closer to the work than you are and has direct, timely insight. Whether it's the sales manager who just got off a difficult call with a client or the engineer who built the feature themselves, someone closer to the action might have a clearer understanding of the context than you do.

These decisions can also be about workflows: Think scheduling rituals, communication cadences, or handoff points between teams. The people doing the work often know best how to improve it.

Why it helps: This question shifts attention from hierarchy to insight. It reminds leaders that proximity is a form of expertise, and honoring it can yield faster, more grounded decisions.

2. Is this a decision we've made before—and could it be routinized?

Pattern decisions—like approving discount requests, prioritizing bug fixes, or evaluating vendor proposals—repeat over time. You've likely seen the same issue before and already have guardrails in place. Someone else can use historical data or follow a clearly communicated procedure to solve the problem.

Why it helps: This question reveals where you're spending time on decisions that could be systematized. Once you define the criteria, you can create a checklist—and a handoff opportunity.

3. Whose perspective would lead to a better answer than mine?

Sometimes, someone else can bring a unique lens, whether it's lived experience, technical expertise, or direct exposure to the customer's world. Other times, the right person has little to no direct contact to the customer's world, but still has the insight or know-how to find the right solution. Even if you outrank them, their view may be sharper.

Why it helps: This question surfaces underused insight and creates space for others to bring forward what only they can contribute.

4. Where is momentum stalled, and who could move it forward with a decision?

These are stuck points—places where work is delayed either because no one feels empowered to move it forward or because there is no obvious role or responsibility that oversees this work stream. The risk isn't a bad call; it's no call at all.

Why it helps: Leaders often try to step in and push the work. But asking this question gives someone else the authority to unblock the path.

Asking yourself these four questions isn't just about reclaiming hours. It's about reclaiming leadership. When you hand over decision

ownership with structure and intention, the ripple effects are substantial:

- **You free up mental space** for strategy, relationships, and innovation.
- **Your team builds judgment** by practicing real decisions, not just executing tasks.
- **Your organization moves faster** because decisions don't pile up on your desk.

When It's Still Hard to Let Go

For some leaders, asking these four questions is enough—but others hesitate. They might see decisions that technically *could* be delegated, but the personal discomfort of letting go still lingers.

When Laura mapped her work against the four questions, she saw several clear opportunities for delegation. But she still wasn't sure how to step back. I suggested she ask herself these three questions to move from insight to action:

1. Why am I the only one who can make this decision?

If your answer is “because I always do,” “because I'm faster,” or “because they might get it wrong,” it's worth pausing. This question helps identify whether you're holding the decision for strategic reasons—or just by default.

Laura realized her presence in every decision was training her team to defer, not develop. Her input—even when minor—reset alignment. She saw that her team could succeed without her if she could give them the space to try. This insight helped her loosen her grip.

2. Would a team member benefit by owning the outcome—not just the task?

Once you've acknowledged you don't need to make the call, this question helps you find the right person to step in and frames delegation as a professional development opportunity.

Laura saw this clearly. Her directors were experienced but unclear on their decision-making authority. By holding on to the calls, she had blurred the lines. Letting go wasn't a loss of control—it was a path to growth, both for them and for her.

3. Can I define what must be true for the decision to succeed without making it myself?

This question closes the loop. Can you articulate the success criteria so that someone else can take action confidently?

Laura realized she didn't need to pick product features. Clarifying the roadmap and what success would look like allowed her directors to make the final call—and explain it back.

If you're still hesitant, ask yourself: Is there anything beyond my answers to these three questions that would prevent me from delegating this decision successfully? If yes, name it. If not, let go.

When Laura began to delegate decision-making, her team was surprised at first—and then energized. With clear criteria and new authority, they stepped up and owned more decisions on their own. Laura stayed in the loop, but was no longer in the way.

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When you let go of the right decisions, you don't lose control—you extend it. You turn decision-making into a shared capability. You become not just a leader of work, but a leader of leaders.

So, the next time you're staring at your crowded calendar or inbox, don't ask: What can I get done? Ask: What decisions can I give away—on purpose—with clarity and for growth?

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