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How Leaders Can Avoid Being Overwhelmed



When did Americans start equating exhaustion with productivity? We self-advertise on how overwhelmed, overworked, and overtired we are from work.

Someone asks, “How are you?” and we respond “Busy! Crazy!” and we are somehow proud of this.

American executives not taking their paid vacation time is well documented, as [Market Watch addressed the issue](#). Their study found 34% of respondents feared getting behind on work if they take time away. Another 30% felt they could not take time off because they were the only ones who can accomplish their work.

If you have ever found yourself taking on too much and being exhausted in the process, consider how much **more** effective you could be if you were not constantly worn out.

Leaders are great at recognizing the signs of overwhelm in other people, but may not see the indicators in themselves. Improve your own leadership ability and increase your team’s performance by **delegating better**, **trusting others**, and happily **accepting work** that is not the way you might have done it.

Delegate

Learning to delegate is a study in trust, since we have to be sure that others will complete tasks. However, when delegating, we also have to understand that others may have a different approach, and the final product may be different than if we did it ourselves. Rather than become frustrated, we need to embrace that the different outcome may be better than

our initial idea. If it works, then go with it. If we need to alter it, that is fine, but don't be too quick to discount other people's ways of getting something done.

Delegating is making use of our own opportunity cost. Opportunity cost is the highest, best use of our time, talents, and resources. As leaders we constantly have to be thinking, what is the best use of our time?

Other questions to consider are:

"Am I the only person who can do this job?"

"Am I the best person to do this job?"

"Can someone else do this job better than I can?"

"Can someone else do this at a lower opportunity cost?"

Many first time supervisors struggle to delegate because:

1. It is easier to do it themselves in the short term
2. It takes too much time to explain what to do and how to do it to someone else
3. We don't want to bother other people
4. They believe they are going to have to re-do it anyway, so they might as well do it ourselves the first time

Of course, the arguments for delegating are:

1. Yes, the first few times it is easier and faster doing it ourselves, but after a while, other people learn what to do and that allows them to become more valuable
2. Yes, we do need to explain the process, but as they do more of it, those explanations will decrease
3. Yes, we hate to bother other people, but if those tasks are part of their job, then that is not delegating, it is managing, and is part of holding people accountable
4. They might be doing the job slightly differently, but that may actually be an improvement.

As leaders, we have to delegate the \$15/hour jobs so that we can focus on the \$50/hour jobs that we need to do. When delegation goes well, supervisors can quickly parse out tasks with confidence, leaving them with the higher challenges that deserve full attention

Some questions to consider when selecting team members for delegation:

- Who on the team has the right skills and abilities for this job?
- Can we rely on that person to handle the responsibility?
- Are the standards and expectations clear?
- Are we providing the right amount of authority to the person we delegate the task to?

Trust

We build trust with our teams when we give them a clearly defined purpose, and when we transfer authority. When working with others, we are most successful when we establish clear, two-way communication, and keep our message clear.

People like being trusted, and they like helping others. Giving people responsibilities at work shows that we have confidence in their abilities and that we trust them. If we hold onto every aspect of every job, not only are we burning ourselves out, but we are conveying that we do not trust others.

Recognize Warning Signs

Executive coaching conversations help us identify warning signs of burnout, stress, exhaustion, and diminished capacity to make important decisions. We can learn to recognize many of these signals. Decision fatigue has recognizable symptoms, as [outlined in a New York Times article](#) about a study about judges:

- Misplaced aggression, often directed at family, friends, and coworkers unrelated to the decisions
- Low patience levels
- Responding in short, curt sentences
- Eating junk food
- Restless sleeping patterns
- Wasting money on unnecessary expenditures

We can counter these negative impulses and build an even stronger leadership team by honing our skills, consciously developing a clear vision of success, and encouraging our team members to invest themselves in the common goal.

On a personal level, we can enjoy a great evening out with friends, exercise, and revisit healthy eating habits. At work, we can share the responsibility, share the authority, and delegate duties. We can allow everyone to feel successful and valued. The pressure we take off ourselves allows us and the whole team to be more empowered and successful.

Coaching helps

Great leaders and smoothly running teams do not spontaneously burst into being. They are honed and nurtured. Every Olympic athlete has a coach – someone who helps them be more efficient, more effective, and more competitive. Think about a swimmer diligently practicing every day. If a coach suggests a small modification, it can shave valuable seconds off of their time. Without those adjustments, the swimmer is swimming hard, but is not swimming effectively. For help with [executive coaching](#), building team leadership, and learning to delegate authority, turn to experts who can help.

I would love your thoughts on this topic [here!](#)

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