



Are You OK With That?

It is very important that we can successfully delegate a task or teach a task to another person. It not only helps to develop that other person but it can save us valuable time. This is another skill that requires good quality communication. For ease of reference, let's assume that the two people involved are the person explaining the task, someone who has a good understanding - "the Delegator" - and the person receiving instructions, someone who has little experience with the task - "the Learner". Let's look at the communication required from the Delegator:

At the Beginning

The first step is easily overlooked in the Delegator's enthusiasm to outline the task. It is important that the Delegator correctly positions the task - from the Learner's perspective. A great way to do this is for the Delegator to begin by explaining why it is valuable for the Learner to understand and undertake the task. In other words, what's in it for the Learner? Once that is established the Delegator should provide some context for the task and then explain the steps involved. The Delegator's primary responsibility is to ensure that the Learner understands. After completing the explanation, a poor (but popular) question the Delegator may ask is "OK, any questions?" A much more effective question for the Delegator to pose is "What aspect would you like me to go over again?"

During the Task

I hope that you will agree that when the Learner is first attempting the task the objective is for it to be completed successfully - in a manner that enhances the relationship between the Delegator and the Learner. How can the Delegator monitor and assist the Learner in a way that builds trust and mutual respect? I would recommend that the approach be discussed up front, in which case the Delegator should ask the Learner something like "How would you like me to support you in this task?" (not "Will you be OK?"). At a minimum, some agreement on when and how to seek input should be established so the Delegator might ask the Learner something like "How often would you like to check in with me?" (not "Let me know if you have a problem"). When it comes time to review progress the Delegator should monitor both time and quality. In terms of the former, one suggestion is "How much progress have you made?" (not "When will it be finished?"). In terms of the latter, one suggestion is "What steps have you taken to check your work?" (not "Is it right?").

At the End

When the initial task is completed there is a great opportunity to learn from the experience, for both the Delegator and the Learner. We'll discuss feedback next month.

Delegation is a critical communication skill. If we can get it right we can help other people to learn and grow, as well as free up some time for ourselves.