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Making the right decisions

The doorway to Darrell's office was abuzz with activity. "Here's the three different options for hammers Boss," Joe, one of his supervisors, explained. "This one's 16 bucks, this one's 18, and this one's 24. I've personally got this \$24 baby at home and I love it. The ergonomics are terrific. You can pound all day with it and not get tired."

"Let's go with the cheap one," Darrell responded.

"OK..." Joe shrugged his shoulders and left.

No sooner had Joe left than Tammy, an experienced process engineer appeared. "You wanted to see me?"

"I want to approve those engineering change notices before you sign off on them," he stated.

"Whatever," she mumbled under her breath as she left.

Linda, the administrative assistant quickly followed. "White cake or chocolate for Jim's anniversary next week?" she asked.

"Chocolate!" Darrell shot back, not looking up from the pile of purchase orders he was approving (most for less than \$50). "Why can't anyone make a decision around here?" he wondered aloud.

Quite simply, Darrell had trained his team well.

The ability of employees to confidently and competently make appropriate decisions is crucial for a number of reasons:

- Execution of decisions improves when employees have some "skin in the game."
- It frees up supervisors and managers to focus on higher level activities.
- It significantly contributes to the growth and satisfaction of employees, resulting in higher job performance and lower employee turnover.

In short, aligning decisions to the appropriate level in the organization is paramount to an organization's growth. Yet letting go of control can be particularly challenging for some managers and supervisors who have been successful running a tight ship.

A simple model can help identify which decisions can be delegated, collaborated with employees or made by managers.



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The first factor to be considered is the quality of the decision. In short, who can bring data, experience or information that adds to the quality of the decision?

They should be considered for involvement. If I, as the manager, don't have all the information necessary to make a good decision, I must involve others.

In the example above, Joe enthusiastically volunteered his hammer expertise, but left deflated when it didn't appear to be valued.

The second factor is urgency. Some decisions simply can't wait for extensive debate and analysis. While the need for a quick decision requires less involvement of others, it shouldn't result in a unilateral verdict unless the decision maker has all the facts. In other words, the need for speed shouldn't trump quality.

None of Darrell's decisions above appear to be emergencies justifying his edicts.

The third factor is acceptance. How important is it that employees accept the decision for its successful execution? How likely is it that being involved in the decision will enhance acceptance? As the importance and likelihood of acceptance of a decision increases, so does the need to get others involved with it. Tammy

isn't likely to personally defend to the organization any position which Darrell dictates to her.

The final factor to consider is the potential for developing an employee by delegating the decision.

Linda certainly won't be planning any major activities such as a customer appreciation day any time soon if she isn't considered capable of deciding on a flavor of cake.

An important distinction is that delegating a decision doesn't mean the manager wipes their hands of it.

They are not abdicating responsibility for its success. It does mean they are supporting the decision maker as the situation warrants.

Managers and supervisors often mistakenly feel pressure to have all the answers, to make all decisions correctly. It's more important that they are making the right (i.e., appropriate) decisions.

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