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You Can't Handle The Truth! – a Leadership Dilemma

You're sinking under a mountain of work, married to 12 hour work days. I can do this, you keep telling yourself. I know the intimate details of this issue, so I'm the best person to handle this. Anyway, what would my minders think if I delegated this to someone else.....wait, what would I think? The company depends on me. Anyway, John is flat out on other projects so no use delegating to him. Outsourcing? Great, if there was anyone who knew our business.

Sound familiar?

Early on in my career, I had a middle manager who needed to deliver a technical presentation to a potential client and he sought my assistance on our product range and ideas on the presentation. I helped, however, I went further. I also stated I'd go along and help with the presentation. He didn't say no but I failed to read the signs. My intentions were good, provide support and improve our chances of securing a major client. However, in hindsight, it was the wrong move. He was very capable, I had to let go and trust – and I had a stack of more strategic issues on my plate.

A productivity survey I was reading recently, revealed that approximately 25% of managers believe they could be more productive if they delegated/outsourced and reduced their personal workload.

So what stops us? What is it about this failure to let go? Is it lack of trust? Is it the fear of overloading your colleagues and then creating a bottleneck at another point in the business? Is it an issue of pride – do we want the glory of a job well done? Maybe it's our comfort zone – a subject we know well and get great enjoyment in. Whatever the reason, a business manager's effort must be focused on the big issues – strategic planning, team building, liaison with stakeholders and major clients, and driving the plan. Easy to say but hard to do. This is what I learnt along the way:

1. **The Plan.** Get this done. Know where you want the business to go and what it will take to get it there. Know the budget. And remember, this plan, like all good plans, must be constantly reviewed and tweaked/alterd as required. Understand your “driver” role in this plan.
2. **In-house Resources.** The plan will have this covered. Know what is required to deliver the plan. But as we all know too well, management issues and projects come and go – some planned, some unplanned. Typically, the unplanned creates the extra workload.
3. **Delegate.** Understand your team's workload, constantly look for efficiencies, prioritise and where possible make room for the unplanned projects. Delegate. You cannot be the leader/driver of the business if you're also personally immersed in a compliance issue, a WHS plan, a new training module or other project.
4. **Management Buddy.** Outsource. Rarely considered. Most managers believe that an external party will not understand the business, and in the time it takes to come to terms with the detail, the manager or other employee will have completed the project. Yes...but at what cost? The cost of taking yourself out of the leader's role. A smart, experienced external party will apply a fresh set of eyes to your business and quickly come to terms with the detail. This understanding phase, is a one-off event which will reward many times over, with the option to turn it on/off as required and avoid the non-productivity of a permanent resource. And the cost? Typically, the biggest objection of them all. What is the cost of the manager not acting on his/her responsibilities of planning and leadership? Nebulous as this may be, there is a high cost.

Plan correctly and acknowledge the truth – you can't do it all and remain productive. Plan, delegate, and have a management buddy or two on the reserve bench and importantly, trust and let go. Great managers know this.