

# DELEGATING IS AN ART

*The best executive is the one who has sense enough to pick good men to do what he wants done and self-restraint enough to keep from meddling with them while they do it*

—Theodore Roosevelt

**S**peaking to an audience of 150 mid-level associates at the City Bar's Professional Development Breakfast Workshop, "Attaining Excellence in Management: Supervision, Delegation and Feedback," on January 25, Dr. Saletta Boni, of Leadership Consulting Associates, said that learning how to manage effectively is essential to moving ahead in your career.

As a midlevel associate, said Boni, your responsibilities have expanded and you neither can nor should handle everything yourself. In order to be successful you need to free up time to develop client relationships. You can no longer be spending all your time behind your desk drafting memos, making delegating critical. In addition, as a mid-level associate, you need to start developing relationships with professional and support staff to develop colleagues that like to work with and for you. To accomplish this you need to provide appropriate feedback to those to whom you delegate.

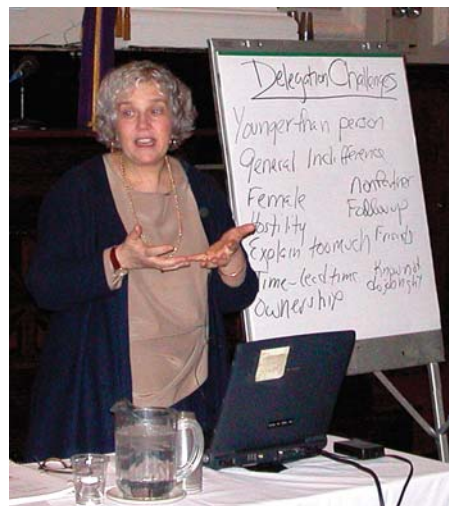
## Begin With a Plan

At the start of her remarks Boni acknowledged that the art of effective delegation and managing a team is a difficult task and can be especially challenging to lawyers new to management leadership roles. Some of the top reasons delegating can be so tough is that there is a tendency for people to feel that no one can do it faster or better than they can or they view delegation as giving up control. If that weren't enough, there are all sorts of emotional challenges of delegation, including delegating to someone older, delegating to friends, experiencing hostility, and delegating to someone of a different gender, ethnic group or religion.

According to Boni, effective delegation begins with a plan. As the supervisor you must first think through the project. The best way to do this is to make a checklist; for example, what has to get done, what resources are available, to whom are you going to delegate, and what is the time frame of the project. Thinking this through ahead of time will save you time in the long run.

As you begin to delegate, think about what was important to you when you were on the other side. For example, notes Boni, let people know about the whole matter, not just about the narrow task you are asking them to do. Giving those that work for you the context of project makes them feel connected, provides motivation, and shows them respect.

When you begin to hand out assignments, make sure that you make them specific and clear. Remember to set timeframes and establish clear deadlines. It is important, reminds Boni, when you delegate to be sure you have communicated effectively with those you supervise. Once you are done explaining assignments, invite questions and make sure to check that everyone understands their assignment.



Dr. Saletta Boni, of Leadership Consulting Associates, addressing attendees at "Attaining Excellence in Management: Supervision, Delegation and Feedback" on January 25.

Once the work has been delegated it is important to remember that you are never really out of the matter. Be available for questions. Remember to check in; as a supervisor your support is critical. A small comment or acknowledgment, says Boni, goes a long way to the success of the project. However, you must be careful not to micro-manage a project.

As you check in on the project remember to make adjustments as needed. The best way to do this, advises Boni, is to bring the entire team together now and then to discuss what has been done, what still needs to be done and

redirect the team if necessary. This keeps everyone motivated and on track and helps avoid duplication.

## Feedback is Important

Many attorneys who recognize the value of delegating see it only as the handing out of assignments. Being a supervisor, says Boni, also requires providing feedback on a regular basis. As Boni points out, saying "thank you" or "good job" is nice, but it isn't enough. You need to take the time to coach junior associates. This is the best way to develop their skills, making their work product better, which will ultimately make your task of delegating easier in the future.

In order to be effective, feedback must be accurate, honest, timely and, most important, content-rich. Content-rich feedback, notes Boni, can either be reinforcing or redirecting; either way the purpose is to teach and motivate those who work for you and get greater performance, effort, and dedication in return.

Content-rich feedback is constructive feedback. There are four steps in providing constructive feedback, says Boni. First, set the stage by establishing clear performance expectations. Second, be respectful of differences. Diversity of backgrounds and experiences must be understood in order to match your message to the receiver's style. For example, notes Boni, in some cultures eye contact is crucial while in others it is considered rude. Third, use clear and specific language to describe what should be done to improve the result. Stated simply, says Boni, tell them what they did, what they should have done and how they could have done it differently. Fourth, remember to listen. Never assume you have been clear, warns Boni.

Mastering these skills takes time. But, advises Boni, the more you use these skills and techniques the easier they become and the payoff will be improved professional development.

For more information on the Professional Development Breakfast Workshops and a complete schedule of upcoming sessions, please visit [www.nycbar.com](http://www.nycbar.com).