



A Framework for Delegation (Bounded Autonomy) Revised January 23, 2019

As a general rule, most staff in public health are effective and performance-oriented. They have achieved in education and career because they are largely goal-focused. Therefore, barring a competency issue, if provided adequate guidance and autonomy to act, most will be moderately to highly successful with performance.

While the more common language is “delegation”, a better description would be “bounded autonomy”. By this we mean that a reasonably capable and competent staff member in public health should be able to work with a great deal of freedom as long as they are provided adequate guidance, or “bounding.”

Here is a simple framework for how to practice effective delegation, which has embedded within it the principles of goal-setting.

1. Describe and communicate effective, clear expectations, which can include objective and subjective aspects.
2. Always ask for a confirmation, which should ensure that the staff has clearly understood the expectations. If there is any lack of clarity, return to the first step. Continue until both parties feel like the expectations are clear enough to ensure success.

*Note: The book and framework, Crucial Accountability, can be a valuable resource.
<https://www.vitalsmarts.com/resource/crucial-accountability-book/>*

3. Set a clear deadline for delivery or completion.
4. Agree on appropriate process or task completion milestones by which to monitor.
5. Determine the monitoring process, for example weekly one-on-one meetings, meetings of the team, unplanned check-ins, etc.
6. The secret to monitoring is in “reporting by exception”, i.e. as long as activities are on track there is no reporting other than a reassurance. This then targets problems or anticipated deviations for discussion and resolution.

*Note: Project management skills are highly effective in such processes.
Ensure that staff are adequately trained to project manage.*

7. Use the standard of “zero missed deliverables” and “zero surprises” as the performance metric. Any deviation indicates a need to strengthen the delegation mechanism. Use this as a positive, problem-solving technique, rather than a punitive measure.

Over time, the ability to self-manage and project future challenges should steadily grow.