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Mastering Delegation: Practical Tips for Managing Complex Teams

Authors: Blair B. Evans, Linda A. Klein, Russell W. Gray
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Managing a large team in a fast-paced legal environment requires more than expertise – it demands strategy, communication, and trust. We spoke with three of our seasoned client team leaders – Blair Evans (Memphis), Linda Klein (Atlanta), and Rusty Gray (Chattanooga) – to uncover their best practices for delegating effectively, empowering team members, and keeping complex projects on track. Their perspectives offer practical advice for leaders who want to build strong teams, deliver exceptional client service, and foster a culture of ownership.

1. What is your strategy/approach for delegating and outsourcing?

- **Blair Evans**: I delegate to my team based on jurisdiction and complexity. If the assignment isn't jurisdiction specific, I rely on firmwide information on what attorneys may have availability or a specific interest in the work we are doing. For administrative tasks, I try and outsource these to our firm's internal resources like the copy center or mailroom. On a personal level, I outsource time-consuming chores – like ironing, meal planning, and addressing holiday cards – so I can focus on work. **Efficiency is key: if someone else can do it well, I delegate.**

- **Linda Klein**: My approach starts with accessibility. I keep an open door – virtually and in person – so team members can ask questions and share ideas. I make sure I know what everyone is working on and look for opportunities to give them challenging assignments that help them grow. **Delegation isn't just about moving work off my plate; it's about creating learning opportunities and improving processes through team input.**

- **Rusty Gray**: **I focus on matching the right person to the right task.** I consider expertise, experience, and client needs. Sometimes I know the best fit from prior work, but I also consult internal leaders for recommendations. Delegation is about ensuring the client gets excellent service while developing talent within the team.

2. Why is delegation important when managing a large team?

- **Blair Evans**: It's impossible to do everything myself, especially managing certain legal restrictions across states. **Delegation ensures compliance and efficiency**. It also strengthens client relationships by creating multiple points of contact and gives younger attorneys valuable first-chair experience they might not get elsewhere.

- **Linda Klein**: Delegation is essential for morale and growth. When paired with constructive feedback and recognition, it motivates the team and builds confidence. Celebrating wins and client praise reinforces a positive culture. I find that **carrots work better than sticks – encouragement drives performance.**

- **Rusty Gray**: Delegation improves client service by leveraging the strengths of multiple team members. It deepens the Firm's relationship with the client and creates stability over time. **It's also a powerful training tool – larger teams can offer diverse learning opportunities while maintaining oversight.**

3. Best practices for managing all the moving parts and team members?

- **Blair Evans**: I rely on the Firm's internal resources to track case status and recurring team calls with attorneys and paralegals to ensure progress and address challenges. Those recurring calls give me a chance to ensure (a) the cases are moving forward, (b) the team members have everything they need to serve the client, and (c) they have an opportunity to talk through challenges or strategies on specific cases for successful outcomes. I also have a monthly client call with one client, after which I spend time following up with each attorney's case we discussed, which also provides the attorney an opportunity to bring up issues on those cases with me.

- **Linda Klein**: Communication is everything. I make expectations clear, set timelines, and ensure everyone understands their role and its importance. I also try not to take myself too seriously – leading by example means working as hard as I ask others to work.

- **Rusty Gray**: Regular meetings with clear agendas are critical. I send agendas in advance and keep accessible running notes for easy reference. I also use task-tracking tools or color-coded spreadsheets to help monitor progress and accountability.

4. Philosophy on empowering team members to think "like owners"?

- **Blair Evans**: Transparency is key. I share what makes our work profitable, compliance requirements, and how effective administrative practices directly benefit the client relationship. Coaching these details helps team members understand the business side of law.

- **Linda Klein**: I encourage empathy – asking team members to see things from the client's perspective. What would excellent service look like to them? This mindset fosters accountability and client-focused thinking.

- **Rusty Gray**: I give team members leadership opportunities and show confidence in their abilities-trust builds ownership and encourages initiative.