EFFECTIVE DELEGATION AND LEVELS OF INITIATIVE



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Introduction:

David looks at his watch. It is almost 6 P.M. The last member of his sales support department has turned off her PC and headed out the door, leaving him alone in his cube with a pile of unfinished work and a visceral sense that he is ineffective in his work. Glancing at his calendar, David sees that the next day is packed with meetings and "to-do" items. With so much of today's business unfinished, he wonders what sort of dent he'll be able to make in tomorrow's workload. "It's true what they say about a manager's work," he tells himself. "There is too much to do and too little time to do it."

"If you want to do a few small things right, do them yourself. If you want to do great things and make a big impact, learn to delegate."

– John C. Maxwell

It is usually said that management is about achieving result through other people, that is, by delegating work to them. However, today's world changes fast and a company or organization that only looks to today's problems will be out of business tomorrow, so management is now about more than simply achieving results. Managers today cannot just delegate today's problems; they must also ensure that their staff are ready for tomorrow's challenges. They must develop their staff in a variety of ways and one of the best and least expensive methods of doing that is to coach them in new skills and delegate tasks to them so that they can then use those new skills.

Traditionally, a manager's role has been to plan, organize, motivate and control. Goals have been issued, rules and procedures written and a bureaucracy established to maintain control. Opposing views have been held about workers' attitudes to work. At one extreme is the idea that people dislike work and that they have to be coerced and will avoid responsibility.

In today's climate, with more liberal management and a better educated workforce, things can be different even if it is not always so in practice. When people have studied hard and trained hard to achieve their qualifications and positions, they must continue to learn if they want to retain their professionalism. They will not take kindly to being denied opportunities to generate new ideas and learn as they work. Either they learn or they leave.

Furthermore, modern managers are expected to be leaders, not just managers. John Adair (1979) has wisely expressed the modern role of a manager as having three overlapping core responsibilities: achieving the task, building and maintaining the team, and motivating and developing the individual. This task-team-individual view of the role of management is well known and used in management training. These three responsibilities intertwine and all draw on the various roles taken by people who call themselves managers.

Adair and others also recognize that many managers have a professional role to fulfil as well, perhaps as an accountant, or as an engineer, or as a teacher or whatever. We are drawn into seeing management as a complex process that involves:

- Managing others so that tasks are achieved through delegation.

- Leading teams and individuals so that changes can be faced and challenges met.
- Performing a professional role, which includes using and developing one's own professional skills.
- Developing individuals (including coaching and delegating tasks to them) so that they and the company can face the challenges of today and meet those of tomorrow with confidence.

All this is set in a turbulent and sometimes chaotic world where there is either not enough information or there is too much of it, where things change too fast, where best actions are not always clear and best intentions do not always work.

You may be able to think of many reasons for embracing the skills of delegation but basically they fall into three categories:

1. To achieve more for the organization.
2. To save time for you.
3. To motivate and develop your people.

These three motives are not just valid at work. They are as valid in the home, at church, Mosques, organizations or at any other place where people come together. The child who helps with the washing at home is being developed for later life. Probably the most important delegation you will ever do will not be at work. It will be at home where by coaching your children and by delegating to them you will help them to grow into tomorrow's useful and responsible citizens.

Definition

Delegation is rooted in the essential purpose of management, which is to produce results through people. Every level of management, from the CEO down to the frontline supervisor, must delegate in order to accomplish his or her goals.

The Concise Oxford Dictionary defines the verb 'to delegate' as to 'commit (authority, power, etc) to an agent or deputy, entrust (a task) to another person, send or authorize (a person) as

a representative'. That gives us the broad outline of delegation but more is needed if we are to use the definition to help us to improve our delegation skills.

Delegation also involves a responsibility to others, usually to your own manager or customer, plus a responsibility to the subordinate to whom you delegate the task. You retain your overall responsibility to your superior, supervisor or customer, as the case may be, not for actually doing the task but for ensuring that it is done to the standard required or agreed upon. This is sometimes called accountability instead of responsibility. To your delegate you have a responsibility to ensure that there is a clear understanding between the two of you, that you let him or her get on with the job and that by monitoring performance you will prevent any disasters. This leads us to the following definition of delegation:

Delegation is entrusting authority and responsibility to another to carryout out or complete a clearly defined and agreed task under your supervision, while retaining your overall responsibility for the success of the work.

For most managers, delegation is about sharing tasks with individuals, usually subordinates, but it can be broader than that. For example, it is possible to delegate to groups of people or teams, or even to another organization. That is how major projects are achieved. It is often the case that one organization manages the project while others do the work and that is a form of delegation, usually agreed through a contract.

WHAT TO DELEGATE

"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

What you delegate is pretty much up to you but some things lend themselves to delegation and others do not. It is most likely that you will delegate tasks but you can also delegate roles (on-going functions) from within your own post. For example, a manager will often have a

budget and will be held responsible for it but it would be quite feasible to delegate the accountancy side of managing the budget to someone else. That person could start by running a system to track how much of the annual budget has been spent, providing the manager with weekly or monthly statements, something like a bank statement. Later your delegate could progress to making predictions and eventually to constructing the budget bid for next year.

Everything you have to deal with, whether role or task, can be pictured along scales of both importance and urgency. As a manager you should be achieving the immediate tasks through other people while you concentrate on the longer-term and more important tasks. Of course life is not always that simple and you will find yourself doing some important, urgent tasks as well. However, the principle is clear: the important and longer-term issues, such as strategic thinking, planning, and so on, are your tasks. You cannot do them if you spend all your time on urgent day-to-day issues that you should have delegated to your staff. You should concentrate on the important and non-urgent issues as much as you possibly can. So what sort of tasks are ripe for delegation? Most senior managers would expect you to delegate tasks that are:

- Routine.
- Complete in themselves.
- Time-consuming but necessary.
- Recurring frequently.
- Ones your subordinates can do better than you.
- Ones your subordinates can do more economically than you.
- Regular, such as deputizing for you at routine meetings.
- Favourites that you tend to keep for yourself, but should not.
- Pet hates that someone else might enjoy.
- Large projects or tasks that can be broken down into separate activities, especially if there are tight deadlines.
- Ones that will add variety to someone else's role.
- Moving from planning and decision-making to implementation.

WHAT NOT TO DELEGATE

There are some tasks for which there is wide agreement that you really ought not to delegate because of their very nature, things that are yours by the very fact that you are the head or leader:

- Company briefings, except if timing is important and you cannot be there.
- Genuine crises which will need your authority to sort out quickly.
- Tasks with ill-defined requirements where others could waste a lot of time, unless you have great confidence in them.
- Unpleasant tasks that you must face up to, such as staff disciplinary measures.
- Tasks clearly beyond the individuals' ability to perform, even if you coach them.

Delegation is WIN-WIN

Common sense tells us that a lot of what people learn about their job they learn while doing the job. It has been said that up to 90 per cent of an employee's development takes place on the job. No doubt the figure can be argued over but most people appear to accept that we learn most effectively by doing rather than being talked at, and that we learn a huge amount by doing our jobs.

One of our natural human traits is that it is often much easier to persuade ourselves to do something if we can see or suspect some sort of advantage to ourselves. Delegation, when done properly, has several direct and indirect advantages to both the manager, the subordinate and indeed the organizations. Among the numerous benefits/advantages, few are mentioned below:

BENEFITS FOR THE MANAGER

Saves Time and stress

Are you still at the office after your staff have gone home? Managers who delegate too little inevitably get bogged down in the minutiae of the business and can lose sight of the grand plan. Routine and repetitive work drives out the more innovative and creative work that a manager ought to be doing. When managers are overwhelmed by routine detailed work it is likely to be because they are poor at delegation. As some wit has observed, time is a non-renewable resource. It is certainly precious. In normal circumstances it is silly for managers to do tasks that more junior members of staff can do to the required standard. One of the main ways in which managers can free up time for themselves, in order to concentrate on management, is by delegating tasks. As you delegate tasks which previously you would have had to do yourself, you start to reap the benefits and you can go on reaping for as long as those staff stay with you. The pressure on you can be reduced and your level of stress with it. You will have more time, perhaps not as much as initially you might have hoped for, but ultimately you will have more time for your own achievements.

Achievements

As a manager, if you embrace delegation, you will achieve more. You will achieve more yourself because you will have more time to devote to your important tasks and you will achieve more through your staff. They will accept more responsibility and become more effective through learning to make their own decisions. This gives you a double set of benefits in terms of achievements, your own and those of your staff. 'Give me a lever and I will move the world,' said Archimedes. The purpose of a lever is to amplify force. You apply force at one end of a lever and you can lift an object at the other end that is otherwise too heavy to lift.

Self-esteem

Not only will you actually achieve more, but you will also increase your sense of achievement and self-esteem through helping others to develop and perhaps go on to better things partly because of your efforts. There is, of course, a cost to you. You have to be willing and able to

stand back and see your staff receive praise and reward for things that you used to do yourself, but you should by then have received your own praise and reward as well.

"A ceramic tiling specialist was complimented on the work his young apprentice had performed and the cheerful way he had done it. One of the great reward for him, he said, was to see young people learn and develop and become skilled at the job. This was especially true when they left and started their own little business and he knew he had helped someone to find his or her own place in the world"

Receive more Interesting tasks yourself

As you free time for yourself you can start to look for more interesting tasks to be delegated to you from your superior. This can raise your image in the organization, give you the opportunity to learn new things yourself and help with your own career progression. As you demonstrate your ability to work at a higher level, so you increase your chances of eventual promotion.

BENEFITS FOR YOUR STAFF

Individuals may be fearful when asked to take on new tasks, especially if they have never done them before, but there are benefits for them also. It is essential that you reassure them that with your help they can do it and that they will have your help as long as they need it. You have confidence in them. They have taken on many new tasks in the past and been successful and they can do it again.

Development

Not everyone feels that they want to be developed, not all the time anyway. Delegation, does develop people. They learn new information and gain new skills. They may find themselves co-operating with people in the field/people they have not worked with before and they may see aspects work that have been hidden from them until now. That may develop a new warmth towards the business and new attitudes to achieving success.

It feels good

If interesting and challenging tasks are delegated, then it feels good to the delegate. Any job can become dull after a time of doing the same old things week after week so there is some excitement in being asked to do something new.

There is also the feeling of being respected and valued and trusted which raises self-esteem. One of the best rewards a manager can give to an employee is thanks and praise. Unfortunately, in our society, it is something that many managers feel embarrassed to do. A few words of thanks and praise for a job well done as an introduction to a briefing on a new task demonstrate that an employee is valued. It all adds to job satisfaction.

Jobs are enriched

As managers learn to delegate more of the interesting and challenging tasks they have previously kept to themselves so other people's jobs are enriched and become more interesting. It is not just at work where this happens. Think of teenagers who have just learned to drive and how helpful they suddenly become at running chores.

They use their Initiative

When given more responsibility and a degree of authority people start to use their own initiative and imagination more. Drawing on their personal strengths they can propose new ideas and solutions. Of course this has to be monitored, quite closely at first until you have confidence in their judgement, but isn't this what you want to happen?

BENEFITS FOR THE ORGANISATION

Cost efficient

Organizations operate most efficiently when all the important tasks not only get done, and done on time, but also are done at the least cost. If managers do tasks that could be done to the required standard by their staff, then not only is time wasted but also costs are unnecessarily high. If there is a magic answer to the question of how to increase productivity and reduce costs, then ***delegation*** is part of it.

Teams become more flexible

Organizations use delegation to move tasks around a team, so widening the skill base and increasing flexibility. Not only does this help to motivate people but it builds in a degree of contingency planning for when problems arise such as a major sickness of an employee.

Teamwork developed

As tasks are delegated people come into contact with others whom they have not worked closely with before. This helps to foster teamwork, maybe just within your own work group or on a larger scale within the company. It is not only you as the manager who can coach — use your staff to coach one another as well.

Workloads are balanced

A problem in some teams is that some people have more to do than others. Effective delegation can ensure an equitable balance of work and that all tasks get done.

EXCUSES FOR UNDER-DELEGATION OR NOT DELEGATING AT ALL:

If it is all so wonderful how can there be any disadvantages? Often the disadvantages are more perceived than real, but wrong perceptions seem real and therefore they are important. If someone wrongly believes that there is a disadvantage the effect is much the same as if they were right. Although, all the disadvantages were appropriate to allay the fear of partial delegation, under delegating or not delegating at all.

Managers lose tasks they enjoy

It is a fact of life that as we are promoted we tend to hold onto tasks that we enjoyed doing in the old job. It is a fact but it is a mistake. We have to learn to let go. We also need to let go of some things we enjoy doing in our present job so that we can delegate them to others, for now there are even more interesting and exciting things for us to do. Learn to take pleasure from seeing others succeed under your coaching. Let go of the old so that you can take hold of the new.

Staff are not capable or experienced

How do you know they are not capable? They may not yet be skilled or experienced but they may be capable of things you have not dreamed of. There are many stories of minnows at work who were giants outside. Learn to see people as potentially capable even though they are not yet skilled or experienced. That opens opportunities for you to develop their professional skills and your coaching skills. Of course you are not going to attempt the impossible. The people you coach must have the potential to achieve the delegated tasks. The question is: Do you fail to see their potential? As for experience, how else will they gain experience if they are not allowed to try? Through briefings, coaching, monitoring and feedback you use your own experience to balance their lack. As their experience and confidence builds so your monitoring might be reduced.

Risk of losing control

It is true that some managers do lose control once they delegate. It depends on what you mean by control. If you delegate well you will relinquish some control while retaining management of the overall project. You will set the goals and targets but manage their achievement through monitoring and feedback. You will no longer put in the stitches but you will still design and produce the tapestry.

It takes too much time

It does take time. You need to devote considerable time to begin with briefing, discussing, coaching, monitoring and getting feedback from the individual and from others, but this is an investment. You may indeed be able to do it quicker yourself right now, but where does that place you in a month's time, or a year's time? It puts you just where you are now, no further forward. If you do not invest time now, you will not gain the reward.

Depending on the task in question there can be an immediate gain in time, not a loss. With good coaching and delegation, a junior member of staff can almost immediately do the time-consuming jobs of running around, gathering information, sorting out facts and so on while you do other things. This gives an immediate saving of your time, not a loss.

They don't have time

It ought to be true that your staff are fully occupied right now but that does not mean that they cannot take delegated tasks. It is a question of priorities. No busy team of people can do all the tasks that come their way, inevitably some tasks do not get done. That is right and proper, provided that the abandoned tasks are the least important ones and are not essential. In most work situations there are many low-importance tasks just waiting for the chop. Get rid of them and so make time for more important delegated tasks. You may also find that you can reallocate tasks from one subordinate to another to create time for a newly delegated task.

If your organization has suffered from the head count malaise now might be the time to argue for a new junior member of staff to join you. Be sure you can cover the costs from the increased revenue that will be generated by more effective working.

Manager's Job will be diminished

Some managers may fear that their jobs will become less interesting if they delegate too many tasks to subordinates. Others fear that they will then have too little to do and so be made redundant, or that their manager may think that if their tasks can be delegated down then their job was rated at too high a level and should be downgraded. A climate of fear in any organization or company is a terrible thing and does nothing to encourage good practice, including delegation. The simple answer is that productivity will increase and this should be provable. Further, in time, you should be able to volunteer to take some more interesting tasks off your own manager so relieving his or her pressure. Achieving results through others and seeing them develop their skills and career under your care are very satisfying achievements. Remember what the ceramic tiler said in the case study on p.7. Skillful coaching and delegation open up new avenues to you as a manager and these avenues bring their own rewards. Your job will not be diminished; it will be enhanced.

"It marks a big step in a man's development when he comes to realize that other men can be called in to help him do a better job than he can do alone"

– Andrew Carnegie

Scenario One:

"Listen up," the sergeant barked. "There's some white paint down in the supply room. Get two cans of it up here on the double!" The platoon guide ran down to the supply room, grabbed two buckets of paint, and raced back to the sergeant's small office, taking two stairs at a time. "Two cans of white paint, Sergeant!" The drill sergeant assumed an expression of mocking bemusement. "Private," he began calmly. "you disappoint me. I said get that paint up here on the double, didn't I?" "Yes, Sergeant." "But I didn't tell you to get it." His face reddened as he shouted, "You were supposed to get one of those other maggots to fetch the damn paint!"

DELEGATION – STEWARDSHIP ARRANGEMENT

Delegation is not only the giving out of tasks or 'jobs to be done'. Normally, a delegated task takes more than a short time frame to complete. It does not involve telling people what to do, rather it involves explaining the outcomes and results they are expected to achieve. They are then expected to work out the 'how' and the steps involved.

The manager or team leader making the delegation is still involved, however, the extent of that involvement will vary depending on the existing knowledge and skill levels of the employee receiving the delegation. If the employee is very experienced, the manager's involvement will be minimal. If the employee is inexperienced, the manager may provide more support, as the delegation is clearly being treated as a development exercise.

Good delegation saves you time, develops people, grooms a successor, and motivates. Poor delegation will cause you frustration, demotivates and confuses the other person, and fails to achieve the task or purpose itself.

Powerful delegation requires knowing your people (you'll delegate differently to a rookie than to a seasoned employee) and communicating all the relevant information to put them in the position to succeed.

One of the best and simple ways to delegate tasks or responsibilities is using the acronym **"Dr. GRAC"** as described by the famous author Stephen R. Covey in his prominent 7 Habits of highly effective people.

- **Desired Results**
  - what are we trying to accomplish?
  - clarify the "end in mind", outcomes & objectives
  - quantity, quality, target dates, etc.
- **Guidelines**
  - what are the limits and how do people proceed?
  - levels of initiative, "no, no's", known failure paths
  - guiding themes, policies, principles
- **Resources**
  - what resources are available? how do we access them?
  - types: human, financial, technical, physical, organizational
- **Accountability**
  - to whom are we accountable for our stewardship?
  - identify the standards and methods of measurement for progress and accomplishment
  - feedback and progress report expectations
- **Consequences**
  - what are the implications of achieving or not achieving desired results?
  - organizational/personal consequences – opportunity, credibility, financial, altered scope of responsibility, reassignment, training

Failure to clearly communicate the desired end result may be the biggest source of disappointment and angst in delegation situations. As a delegator, it's your responsibility to spell out what you want— what success will look like. Don't expect other people to read your mind.

ENTERTAIN QUESTIONS

Your subordinate is likely to have questions about the assignment and the results you expect:

- "Who has the information on this?"
- "Where is the file?"
- "Do you want this information presented as a spreadsheet, or as a report?"
- "Can you help me with _____?"
- "Can I share part of this task with _____?"
- "I'm not certain that I can get it done by Friday. Would next Wednesday be okay?"

Questions are useful in that they surface details you may have forgotten to communicate. They give the person an opportunity to ask for those overlooked details and to confirm his own understanding of your wishes. If he isn't asking questions, take that as a warning sign. He either is resistant to accept the job, is too reserved to ask for the information he needs, or is simply not thinking about the job or how he'll handle it. If questions aren't asked, initiate dialogue by asking a few questions of your own:

- "What problems do you foresee?"
- "Am I asking for more than you can handle right now? What do
- you need to off-load or postpone?"
- "Is Friday a reasonable deadline to expect this to be completed?"
- "Do you have ideas on how to improve this even more?"
- "What would you do if _____ happened?"
- "How do you feel about taking on this assignment?"

MONITOR WITHOUT MICROMANAGING

As a manager or supervisor, you routinely observe employee performance and provide feedback, coaching, and other support as needed. Your aim is to keep things on track to a successful conclusion. That's part of the "control" function of management.

You and the person to whom you've delegated a task should agree on a set of checkpoints over the term of the assignment. A *checkpoint* is a predetermined point at which progress will be observed and evaluated. You undoubtedly use checkpoints in the normal course of your work as a manager or supervisor to observe progress and maintain control over operations:

- "Send me the initial draft once you've completed it and I'll get back to you with my comments. I'd like that draft by Tuesday afternoon."
- "Let's meet every Friday at 4 P.M. to talk about where you are in the project and what needs to be done."
- "I want a weekly status update on each of the following activities: _____ _____."

- "Once you've organized the list of suppliers, come see me. We'll look it over and move on to the next part of the assignment."

Finding the right level of monitoring is an art. The last thing you want to do is make employees feel that you are looking over their shoulders, checking their work obsessively, and making all the decisions yourself. Gauge each situation carefully, and give the employee as much scope as possible. A casual question or two may be enough to confirm that an experienced and confident employee is on track. You may ask for more formal evidence, such as written plans or reports, in situations in which a less experienced employee is handling a task.

Scenario 2

"This job will put you in charge of ordering supplies for the entire department. It's an important responsibility. Having supplies on hand when people need them prevents wasteful slowdowns and keeps our projects on schedule, a key departmental goal. Remember when we ran out of toner cartridges for the color printer right before the board meeting? That caused a lot of anxiety and we had to pay a printing company for a rushed job. At the same time, we need to balance our supply inventory with budget and space constraints. In other

words, we have to keep enough supplies on hand to meet anticipated needs, but not so many that we have to build a new storage room. It's a balancing act that I'll expect you to master. You'll need to communicate with others to understand their upcoming needs, too."

"Alice, this job will add to your normal workload, but you're a very organized person. I'm confident that you'll find a way to handle it. I'm also confident that you'll benefit from the experience. By managing the stockroom, you'll get a better understanding of the work of the whole department. Taking on new responsibilities, figuring out how to get things done, overcoming obstacles—this is how we grow and advance in our careers. And I think you'll find this assignment an interesting change of pace from your routine."

"I've always used a checklist approach to keeping track of supply needs. Every Monday I check the inventory of twenty-eight key supplies against our official reorder point quantities. Then I ask the production manager if he'll have any special needs for the next two weeks. Then I order what we need. Once you see my file, you'll understand what I mean and you'll be able to continue that method."

"I'm perfectly happy to let you create your own approach to this task. After all, it will be your responsibility. But let's review your action plan together before you begin."

"Alice, besides having John to help you restock the supplies monthly, what other help will you need on this project?" "Well, I just saw an announcement about a negotiating course that HR is offering next week. I think better negotiating skills would help me deal with the vendors; shall I sign up for it?"

"Alice, I've increased your spending authority to $5,000, the average monthly invoice from our largest supplier. And I've alerted the staff that they should submit their requests for special items to you. You'll need to work out a system that works for all concerned."

Don't worry that employees you train will decide to leave. Worry that the ones you don't train will decide to stay!

– Unknown

LEVELS OF DELEGATION

As explained that delegation isn't just a matter of telling someone else what to do, there is a wide range of varying freedom that you can confer on the other person. The more experienced and reliable the other person is, then the more freedom you can give. The more critical the task then the more cautious you need to be about extending a lot of freedom, especially if your job or reputation depends on getting a good result.

Be creative in choosing levels of delegated responsibility, and always check with the other person that they are comfortable with your chosen level. People are generally capable of doing far more than you imagine.

These examples of different delegation levels progressively offer, encourage and enable more delegated freedom. Level 1 is the lowest level of delegated freedom (basically none). Level 5 is the highest level typically (and rarely) found in organisations.

1. ***"Wait to be told." or "Do exactly what I say." or "Follow these instructions precisely."*** **–** This is instruction. There is no delegated freedom at all.

2 "Look into this and tell me the situation. I'll decide." **–** This is asking for investigation and analysis but no recommendation. The person delegating retains responsibility for assessing options prior to making the decision.

3 "Look into this and tell me the situation. We'll decide together." **–** This has a subtle important difference to the above. This level of delegation encourages and enables the analysis and decision to be a shared process, which can be very helpful in coaching and development.

4 "Decide and take action - let me know what you did (and what happened)." **–** This delegation level, as with each increase up the scale, saves even more time. This level of delegation also enables a degree of follow-up by the manager as to the effectiveness of the delegated responsibility, which is necessary when people are being managed from a greater distance, or more 'hands-off'. The level also allows and invites positive feedback by the manager, which is helpful in coaching and development of course.

5 "Decide where action needs to be taken and manage the situation accordingly. It's your area of responsibility now." **–** The most freedom that you can give to the other person, and not generally used without formal change of a person's job role. It's the delegation of a strategic responsibility. This gives the other person responsibility for defining what changes projects, tasks, analysis and decisions are necessary for the management of a particular area of responsibility, as well as the task or project or change itself, and how the initiative or change is to be implemented and measured, etc. This amounts to delegating part of your job - not just a task or project. You'd use this utmost level of delegation (for example) when developing a successor, or as part of an intentional and agreed plan to devolve some of your job accountability in a formal sense.

	Day 1	**Day 2**	**Day3**	**Day 4**	**Day 5**
Task to be assigned					
Candidate for the job					
Point to discuss when making the assignment					
When I will check progress					
Task Deadline					