



ESL Podcast 404 – Delegating Work

GLOSSARY

to delegate – to give other people part of the work that one is supposed to do; to ask or tell other people to help with one's work; to give people who work for you work that you are responsible for completing

* When Charlotte had to write a 20-page report, she delegated the research to Sayid and the editing to Carlotta.

control freak – a person who likes to be in control of everything and does not like to let other people help

* She is such a control freak that she won't even let her husband cut vegetables for dinner because she wants it done only her way.

to end up – to be in a certain situation after many other things have happened, especially if it was not what one expected

* After seven years of medical school, he ended up working as a piano teacher instead of a doctor.

to redo – to do something again, usually because it was not done the right way the first time

* Tara put the wrong price on the books we're selling, so I had to redo all of them.

timesaver – something that allows one to do something in less time than usual; something that helps one work faster than usual

* Washing machines are a timesaver because they can wash clothes much more quickly than we can wash them by hand.

worth the trouble – worthwhile; having benefits and advantages that are greater than the work needed to do something

* It took them almost five hours to make that apple pie and it wasn't worth the trouble since they could have just bought one at the store.

to assign – to tell someone to do something; to give someone something to do

* The teacher assigned math homework to her students.

explicit – clear, obvious, and easy to understand, without anything being hidden or confusing

* My mother advised us to be explicit when we explain why we are angry with our children. Otherwise they might not understand.



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measurable – something that can be measured; something that one can know how big or small it is or how much there is

* Are there any measurable results for the program, showing how it is helping children learn to read?

goal – objective; aim; something that one wants to achieve or accomplish; the reason that one is doing something

* Their goal is to finish building the bridge within 18 months.

to let (someone) down – to disappoint someone; to not meet someone's expectations; to not do what someone was hoping that one would do

* Ethan let his business partner down when he failed to appear for their big sales presentation.

to report back to (someone) – to give someone an update on what one has done; to tell someone how well or poorly one is doing on a project

* They're supposed to report back to their supervisor every week to let her know what they're working on.

periodically – happening occasionally, evenly spaced out over time, such as every week or every month

* The store raises its prices periodically.

to get results – to be able to do what one wants to do; to meet one's goals

* When planting a garden, you have to start early to get results.

progress report – written or spoken information about how well one is doing on something, or how quickly one is finishing a project

* We were very pleased to read in the three-month progress report that the project was almost finished.

on the right track – doing something the right way; making progress on something and doing it right, even though one is not finished with it yet

* Phinneus studies all the time and is on the right track to succeed in college.



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COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

1. Why did Anya have to redo all the work herself?
 - a) Because she didn't delegate.
 - b) Because it was a timesaver.
 - c) Because the employees didn't do it correctly.
2. According to Estevan, what should Anya do to get her work done?
 - a) She should ask other people to help her with it.
 - b) She should be more controlling.
 - c) She should report back periodically.

WHAT ELSE DOES IT MEAN?

to end up

The phrase “to end up,” in this podcast, means to be in a certain situation after many other things have happened, especially if it was not what one expected: “They looked at houses for months and then ended up buying an apartment instead.” The phrase “to end in (something)” means to end or be completed in a certain way: “Her birthday party ended in tears when the little boy broke her new toy.” The phrase “the (something) to end all (something)” is used to talk about the best, worst, or most important of something: “It was the party to end all parties, with more than 3,000 guests.” Finally, the phrase “to end it all” means to commit suicide or to kill oneself: “The man decided to end it all by jumping off a high bridge.”

to assign

In this podcast, the phrase “to assign (someone) to (something)” means to tell someone to do something or to give someone something to do: “Who has been assigned to the Brookings account?” The verb “to assign” can also mean to be told to work in a particular area: “Three policemen were assigned to that neighborhood.” The verb “to assign” is often used to attach a value or an amount of time or money to something: “We assigned a value of \$1,600 to the car.” Finally, the phrase “to assign (something) to (someone)” can mean to give someone something to use, like tools or equipment: “The new vice-president of marketing and sales was assigned the large office on the top floor.”



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CULTURE NOTE

When there is too much work to do, delegating is a great way to get other people to help. But delegation has many “pitfalls” (things that often go wrong). Fortunately, you can “avoid” (not have problems with) these pitfalls if you know what to “look out for” (be careful about).

First, it is important to provide all the right information when delegating. Telling people what you need them to do is important, but it is just as important to tell them how often they should tell you about their “progress” (how quickly or how well they are working), when the project is “due” (when it must be finished), and how their work will be “evaluated” (how you will decide whether they have done their work well).

When we delegate, it is important to give the other person enough freedom to decide how to do something. If you “micro-manage,” giving too many detailed instructions, the other person will not want to work on the project.

It is also important to delegate to people who have enough knowledge and experience to do the work well. If you delegate a project to someone who is not qualified or doesn’t have enough time to do it well, then you are “setting that person up for failure,” or making it almost impossible for that person to succeed.

As other people are doing the work, it is important in American businesses to “praise” employees for their good work, letting them know that they are doing things right and that you “appreciate” (are thankful for) them and their work. When people don’t feel appreciated, they might become “resentful” (feeling angry), thinking that they’re doing your work for you. It is also expected in American companies that employers “give credit” to people for their work, making sure that everyone knows who worked on the project.

Comprehension Questions Correct Answers: 1 – c; 2 – a



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COMPLETE TRANSCRIPT

Welcome to English as a Second Language Podcast number 404: Delegating Work.

This is English as a Second Language Podcast episode 404. I'm your host, Dr. Jeff McQuillan, coming to you from the Center for Educational Development in beautiful Los Angeles, California.

Visit our website at eslpod.com and download a Learning Guide for this episode to help you improve your English even faster.

This episode is called "Delegating Work." It's a dialogue between Anya and Estevan talking about how you give other people work when you are a boss or a manager. It uses a lot of vocabulary that you might use in talking about how you are giving other people work. Let's get started.

[start of dialogue]

Anya: I don't know how I'm going to get all of this work done before I go on vacation.

Estevan: What you need to do is to delegate. Stop being a control freak and get other people to help you with your work.

Anya: I've tried to delegate before, but I ended up having to redo the work myself. It was no timesaver at all. It definitely wasn't worth the trouble.

Estevan: That's because you have to delegate in the right way. You can't just assign a project to one of your employees. You have to give them explicit instructions and measurable goals.

Anya: I did that. I gave my employee detailed instructions and she still let me down.

Estevan: I bet you didn't ask her to report back to you periodically, did you? To get results, you have to tell your employees to give you progress reports. That way, you can make sure she's on the right track. See what I mean?

Anya: Okay, maybe you're right. I know one thing. If I don't get some help soon, I'll be spending my vacation at my desk!



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[end of dialogue]

Our dialogue begins with Anya saying, “I don’t know how I’m going to get all of this work done before I go on vacation.” Estevan says, “What you need to do is to delegate.” To “delegate” means to give other people part of the work that you are supposed to do; asking other people, in other words, to help you with your work – to give them things to do.

Estevan says, “Stop being a control freak and get other people to help you with your work.” The expression “control freak” (freak) describes a person who likes to be in control of everything, someone who doesn’t like other people helping them. A control freak is usually considered a negative description of someone, although some people say, “Well, I’m a control freak. I want everything to be done just the way I like it,” which means you have to do it all yourself, usually.

Anya says, “I’ve tried to delegate before, but I ended up having to redo the work myself.” To “end up” is a phrasal verb that means to be in a certain situation after or because of other things that have happened, usually things that you didn’t expect to happen. So for example: “After studying to be a doctor for seven years, he ended up running a website instead.” You would expect after studying to be a doctor that he would eventually then become a doctor, but instead something unexpected happened: he ended up working as a website operator. I actually read a story in the newspaper the other day about a doctor who did just that.

Anya said she had to “redo,” meaning to do something again, usually it’s something that wasn’t done right in the first place. She had to redo the work herself. She said, “It was no timesaver at all.” A “timesaver” (one word) is something that allows you to do something in less time than usual. For example, a washing machine is a timesaver; you don’t have to wash the clothes by hand. A microwave oven can be a timesaver; it takes less time to cook something in the microwave than it does in a regular oven. Of course, it usually doesn’t taste as good either, but that’s one of the “compromises,” that’s one of the things we give up for something that saves us time. Anya says, “It definitely wasn’t worth the trouble.” To be “worth the trouble” means to have benefits or advantages that are greater than the work you needed to do something. So for example, if it takes you five hours to make an apple pie, you may say, “Well, it wasn’t worth the trouble” – it wasn’t that good, it wasn’t worth my time. We might just say, simply, it wasn’t “worthwhile.”

Estevan says, “That’s because you have to delegate in the right way,” in the correct manner. “You can’t just assign a project to one of your employees,” he



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says. To “assign,” here, means to tell someone to do something; it’s what a boss will do with his or her workers. It’s what a teacher does to his or her students: she assigns homework to her students. I used to assign to my students at the university when I taught there. Of course, they never actually did the homework, but I did assign them to do it! “Assign” has a couple of different meanings; take a look at our Learning Guide for some additional explanations.

Estevan says, “You have to give (your employees) explicit instructions and measurable goals.” Something that is “explicit” (explicit) is something that is clear, obvious, and easy to understand; something that is very specific without anything being hidden or assumed. To give someone “measurable goals” means to give them an “objective,” something you want them to achieve or accomplish that can be measured – you know how they are doing on it. Anything that is “measurable” is something that you know how big or small, or how much of that thing there is. A “goal” is an objective, an “aim,” we might say.

Estevan tells Anya that she has to give her employees explicit instructions and measurable goals. Anya says, however, “I did that. I gave my employee detailed instructions and she let me down.” To “let someone down” is a phrasal verb meaning to disappoint someone, not to meet someone’s expectations. “My students let me down when they handed in their homework” – it was not as good as I was hoping it would be.

Estevan says, “I bet you didn’t ask her to report back to you periodically, did you?” To “report back” to someone means to give someone information about how you are doing – how you are progressing, how much work you are getting done. To report back means to give someone an “update,” recent, current information about how they are doing. Estevan says that Anya probably didn’t ask her employee to report back to her periodically. “Periodically” means at a certain time, evenly spaced, for example every week or every month or every two months; something happens on a regular schedule, you could say. He says, “To get results, you have to tell your employees to give you progress reports. To “get results” means to be able to do what you want to do, to “meet your goals,” we would say. A “progress report” is written or spoken information about how you are doing, how well you are doing. It’s similar to an update – a “progress report,” how much have you done. “That way,” Estevan says, if you get progress reports, “you can make sure she’s on the right track.” To “be on the right track” (track) means to do something the correct way – the right way – to make progress on something and to be doing it correctly. You’re not finished yet, but you are “making good progress,” we would say. You are getting things done when you should be getting them done, and moving closer to your goal – your objective.



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Anya says, “Okay, maybe you’re right. I know one thing. If I don’t get some help soon, I’ll be spending my vacation at my desk!” Remember, she’s going on vacation and she needs someone to help her with her work. I feel this way all the time – except, I never get a vacation!

Now let’s listen to the dialogue, this time at a normal speed.

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[end of dialogue]

The script for this episode was written by someone who always gets results – but is not a control freak! Dr. Lucy Tse.

From Los Angeles, California, I’m Jeff McQuillan. Thank you for listening. Come back and listen to us next time on ESL Podcast.

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