

THEME: MANAGEMENT SKILLS: DELEGATION

DEEP DELEGATION

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THE STORY

In 1961 Rick, presided over a disastrous meeting where members of a committee wanted to help a Bible translator in Papua, New Guinea set more appropriate work priorities.

The translator rejected this input in an embarrassing show of anger during the meeting and continued doing what he had been doing. Those involved ended up beginning from scratch in building a relationship with him.

In a prior meeting, this committee raised the question whether this worker was putting the cart before the horse in focusing on literacy work before making more progress on his linguistic analysis and translation goals. The committee decided invited him in to see if they could learn more about what he was doing and perhaps straighten him out. Bad idea!

This committee experienced constant tension between helping and evaluating. Their mandate from leadership was to do both. To evaluate, they would look at what the workers were doing by checking what they had produced (on paper). A focus on helping would suggest ways of coming along side to provide needed expertise at crucial times.

Doing a language project is huge, yet there were some on the committee who just wanted to evaluate rather than give the best help. Their approach tended toward criticism, which would often leave the workers feeling isolated and discouraged about their massive analysis and translation task. A focus on helping the workers would have included evaluation with a goal of finding ways to help.

Most of the time consultants from the committee met with workers individually to review their language work. This called for good interpersonal skills on the part of the consultants. When a person's work is being examined, that person usually feels put on the spot – tested – with the real possibility of having weaknesses exposed. Having this happen while in training is one thing, but this was real life so the potential embarrassment was greater.

In 1963 Rick got a taste of the work of this committee from the other side of the table. He had worked in a Kunimaipa Village on grammar from story materials he had gathered. He knew these stories would be a great resource for analyzing the grammatical structure of the language.

Rick took what he had learned in the form of a finished analysis back to the main center and gave a copy to the committee (of which Rick had been the leader until about that time). So in the last few weeks before Rick and family left Papua New

Guinea for a study program and a year of sabbatical, he was approached by a grammar consultant who had looked over his work. The consultant had little to say about the noun analysis and didn't like the way Rick had presented the verbs.

Rick found himself justifying his analysis of the verb structure to someone who didn't speak the language or have any familiarity with it other than the information Rick had given him. Instead of trying to find out why Rick had done it the way he had, he began criticizing the analysis and presenting his own way of doing it. The criticism hit at the most basic level of analysis: how the prefixes and suffixes attach to the verb stems.

Rick shared examples that showed the weakness of the criticism, but the consultant remained committed to his analysis, expecting Rick to **submit** and adopt his view. They couldn't agree, and the consultant never got back with him to try to resolve the matter.

Rick knew intuitively that he shouldn't do what this person wanted but also felt the conflict could have been avoided altogether had the consultant taken a helping stance. Had he been willing to listen to why Rick did the work as he did, a foundation for future collaboration would have been set. Rick knew that what he had done was not only an acceptable way of analyzing the language but also the best way. Also, he felt that his analysis was groundbreaking work – though not a word of commendation was given.

LEADERSHIP ISSUES

1. What were the mistakes of the committee when they tried to get the worker to change his priorities? Can you suggest an approach that might have worked?
2. The episode of the committee calling the translator to give account raises the question of how to change the priorities of someone to whom full responsibility for a program has been delegated.
3. If you had been in Rick's shoes, would you have been encouraged or discouraged by the way the consultant handled this matter? Compare and contrast the work of a mission leader or district supervisor of churches with that of the consultant in this story. Are there more similarities than differences? What lessons do you see here?
4. Is it your impression that by delegating so deeply, the organization that Rick was part of had lost control of the work? What is it in the story that prompts your reaction to this? What could the organization do to maintain control?

RELEVANT SCRIPTURES

1. Exodus 20:12: Parents have a huge job given to them by God. Why did God command us to honor our parents?

2. I Corinthians 7:17-24: Paul seems to be saying in v. 21 that being a slave is irrelevant. Why would he do that?
3. II Corinthians 8:23: Paul honors Titus as a partner and a fellow worker. Later Titus was working on his own and received Paul's instructions. It's obvious that Titus was a trusted worker to whom Paul delegated a lot of responsibility. What would suggest to you that they not only trusted each other but also that Titus had a good idea of what Paul expected?
4. I Peter 2:16-18: We are to live as free people but at the same time to show respect, honor, submissiveness, and servanthood to those over us. What is the balance between these two sides? What is the reason for this push toward humility?

ALTERNATE PLANS OF ACTION

1. The role of a consultant is to make suggestions based on his/her broader experience and to be a sounding board in relation to what the consultee is seeking to do. This consultant needs to be guided to work in that mode. This consultant was too much in love with his own abilities for language analysis and so was pushing when he should have been presenting options and making suggestions. Usually, a consultant who has established a poor mode of working has to have some strong motivating force to get him to change to a less aggressive manner. Sometimes just working alongside an effective consultant for a while is enough, but it might take ending his consulting role for an extended time and then bringing him back in as a trainee consultant.
2. We have no way of knowing whether the analysis done by the consultant might have been based on newer ideas from his own training that would have been more useful and more publishable. Perhaps Rick's work was incomplete and not able to account for all the data. Rick's analysis looked more elegant than that proposed by the consultant, but there are also other criteria by which such analyses are evaluated. In that same New Guinea program there were people who refused help even from people with international stature and so the analysis done by them lacked depth and acceptance by a broader audience. In such cases it is perhaps helpful to have a way of bringing in consulting that would coordinate between neighboring and related language programs.
3. Another way of dealing with this situation would be to set up basic formats for grammar and phonology data that would be easier to use by the language team. Instead of writing a potentially publishable paper on these aspects of the language, each team would simply provide data from the language and give optional suggestions on how the data might be analyzed. The actual analysis would be done by a consultant primarily and then finalized in consultation with the language team. This way of handling things might result in higher quality analysis of languages and might also give the language work teams more time to deal with

matters like getting the translation program moving and tending to the physical and spiritual needs of the people.

CHOSEN PLAN OF ACTION

Action Option 3 was developed by the Branch consultant corps and used about 5 years after the above stories took place until the present. Language workers who had an interest in doing linguistic analysis had the option of actually writing papers for publication on their language work if they wished.

LEADERSHIP PRINCIPLES

- Teach consultants what their role is and how to stay in that role.
- Understand that the consultee may be feeling happy with his work, including how it fits the language.
- Positive commendation is usually the best motivator for those doing original work. Use small bits of criticism carefully, phrase as suggestions about alternatives for how to do things.
- Learn the difference between resistance to any and all suggestions and selective openness at key points. Follow through with a consultee to complete anything left hanging in an initial visit.