

# Dear Jeremy

Problems at work? Need advice? Our agony uncle has the answers. This week, an amateur shares trader seeks a way into hedge fund management, and a fledgling manager wonders how to deal with a pushy underling



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Jeremy Bullmore The Guardian, Saturday 11 September 2010

## **Good managers must delegate – even to pushy underlings**

I am an arts graduate and have been head manager for a small company for about a year following an internal promotion from admin. I enjoy my job as it is challenging and offers variety, but find it very stressful at times as, with no previous management experience, I have had to make myself get better at tasks I am not as good at. My boss leaves me alone for the most part, remaining undecided about what delegation I could do that they would be comfortable with. The job threatens to become overwhelming at times.

Despite this, I have been successful in achieving some of my larger objectives. My problem now is that I have a member of admin staff that I don't completely trust who is very keen to help me, and would probably be stronger and quicker in some of the tasks. I do give him project tasks in his area, but he is starting to nip at my heels for more.

He is young, ambitious and constantly on at me about problems that need attention, staff that have been up to no good and argues his ideas to the death, including ones to boost profit and impress the bosses, one of whom seems to favour him and is openly disparaging towards me.

My fear is that everything I have half-killed myself for will gradually erode if I let this person in more than I have. For the sake of the business, should I just be open to delegating work to people like this, if I think they are stronger, rather than risking embarrassment trying to deal with things I know I will always be weaker in. This way I can check their work to see if it fits the purpose and get more time to concentrate on the parts of my job that I am good at that would benefit the business, or should I fight to keep what I've built up and not run the risk of chipping away at it all?

It's extraordinary how often people with no experience of management are pitched into it without a day's training. It's deeply unfair – both to the new manager and to the managed. Management seems to be a skill that's somehow meant to be instinctive.

If you'd had a bit of training you'd be a great deal more confident. And one of the signs of your greater confidence would have been a much more relaxed attitude towards delegation. As it is, you're so conscious of your inexperience in certain areas that you've become defensive. Instead of welcoming this young and ambitious member of your admin staff (he sounds pushy, but able people often are), you'll soon be seen by your boss to be standing in his way. And sooner or later that will have far more serious consequences for you than gracefully conceding some parts of your workload so that you can concentrate on those parts of your job you know you're good at. (And, I bet, a lot better at than your pushy underling.)

As you'd undoubtedly have been told if you'd had any initial guidance, confident managers are relaxed enough to let lots of other people do a lot of the work. If you come to think about it, that's exactly what managers are paid to do: to oversee work and ensure that it remains of the highest quality. The more good work managers can oversee, the more valuable they become. To relinquish certain specific tasks is not to relinquish responsibility for them – but it does mean loosening up a bit. Don't see it as "letting this person in": see it as an intelligent use of the resources available to you. As long as the quality of the output is preserved, your boss should note your change of attitude with complete approval.