

SIGMA

Leadership Series



Great Leaders Organize Work



GREAT LEADERS ORGANIZE WORK

“ Time management is an oxymoron. Time is beyond our control, and the clock keeps ticking regardless of how we lead our lives. Priority management is the answer to maximizing the time we have.

—John C. Maxwell

Organizing the work of others is one of the essential managerial duties that leaders engage in. The number of people who report to each leader can vary widely, but leaders need to be effective at delegating, managing, and evaluating the work of their employees. Research has shown that clarity in roles and responsibilities is related to employee job satisfaction, commitment, performance, and intentions to remain within the organization¹. Role clarity can also buffer employees from the negative effects of emotional exhaustion² and psychological strain³.

To effectively organize the work of others, a leader needs to clearly define the roles and responsibilities for their direct reports. Leaders also need to make employees aware of what tasks should be done, and how these tasks are to be carried out. Individuals should be familiar with the expectations around their work, including what their final outputs should look like. Essentially, leaders must be upfront and honest about what is needed and desired from each employee, giving these employees confidence in their understanding of the work they are to perform.

In assessing your ability to organize the work of others, ask yourself the following questions:

- Have I told employees which tasks I want them to work on?
- Do I make it clear where the role of one employee ends and another begins?
- Do I help employees prioritize their work such that pressing tasks are addressed first?
- Have I told my employees what a finished task or product should look like?
- Have I told newcomers what is and is not expected of them?
- Am I providing employees with enough feedback?

Improve Your Skill in Organizing the Work of Others

Develop a shared understanding between employees: When individuals work together, whether in a team or simply within a department, it is often helpful to know what kinds of skills or experience are present, and where someone could turn for help with their tasks. Groups with a shared understanding of the strengths, weaknesses, and preferences of other group

members often find it easier to understand the roles and responsibilities of everyone in the department, including themselves. Therefore, it becomes less challenging for leaders to organize the work of multiple employees if everyone understands exact where they fit in and what content their role covers.

Provide a supportive relationship: An important element of organizing the work of employees involves a leader's relationship with these employees. Individuals who feel comfortable with and trust their leader are the ones asking questions about their work and gaining greater understanding of their role. Research has supported this notion, showing that direct reports who have a good relationship with their leader are more likely to seek feedback and clarity on their leader's expectations and their current performance⁴. In addition to the trust, positive affect, and mutual liking that comes from positive working relationships, leaders who are on good terms with their followers have an easier time communicating what they need done. Finally, these leaders feel confident that the right employees are listening and can see expected results come from these conversations.

Use your other leadership skills: Many of the other skills a leader needs to be successful can come in handy when trying to improve your ability to organize your employees. In this case, the most transferable skill is communication. To ensure you've reached a shared understanding with employees about their roles, you need to communicate calmly and clearly; you need to accurately convey the information; and you need to be prepared to listen to your employee in return to ensure they understand. In addition, your skills in motivating employees could be of assistance in framing the tasks and responsibilities of an employee in a way that speaks to their interests and aspirations. For employees taking on burdensome or unpleasant tasks, your persuasiveness could be vital. See some of the other guides in this leadership series for more information on improving these skills, which will help you in improve your ability to organize others.

Start Doing These 3 Things Now to Become Better at Organizing the Work of Others

The following steps can help you become better at organizing others' work:

1. **Have a conversation.** One of the best ways to ensure your employees understand their role is to have a conversation about it. For example, lay out your expectations for them, including task quality, prioritization, and expected results. Don't expect that employees will be able to read your mind – ensure you are clearly laying out what you need from them. Additionally, it is important to cover their field of responsibility, from what they are expected to do, to what they are not expected to do. Allow employees to ask questions, both during the conversation and as they progress through their tasks. Clear expectations are heavily based on clear communication, so do your best to be honest, open, and upfront.
2. **Provide ample feedback.** Organizing the work of employees takes more than a one-time conversation with each employee. A great way to touch base regarding expectations

and performance is feedback. Employees who receive ample feedback experience a great sense of clarity in their role. In fact, when employees are managed by leaders who provide no performance feedback, good or bad, they perceive this lack of feedback in a negative way, and experience a reduced sense of clarity surrounding their roles and responsibilities⁵. The conversation around expectations of employees should be ongoing, correcting behavior when an employee oversteps or underperforms in their role, and encouraging or validating when an employee is performing well in their required set of tasks.

- 3. Check in often.** In addition to providing frequent performance feedback, leaders should keep in mind that there are pivotal times when roles and responsibilities need to be discussed. The most obvious example is with newcomers to an organization: they have little context on the organizational culture and no experience within their new role at your company. New employees will, therefore, need guidance and reminders around their daily priorities and recurring responsibilities. This doesn't mean you can neglect your more experienced employees. In addition to providing ongoing feedback, conversations around expectations should be planned when an employee is experiencing any change, like beginning a new project, taking on any additional responsibilities, or moving to a new role. Essentially, if change is occurring in your department, be prepared to talk over what this means for your employees. Remaining open and upfront will certainly ensure everyone can move forward on the same page.

Resources



[Five Actions Leaders Can Take to Increase Employee Certainty and Clarity](#)



[Why Role Clarity is Key in Any Organization](#)



Develop your ability to organize the work of others by taking advantage of SIGMA's coaching services.

Contact SIGMA for coaching on developing your skills as a leader.

SIGMA Assessment Systems, Inc.

Email: support@SigmaHR.com

Call: 800-265-1285

References

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