

DELEGATION AND MANAGING USING THE TIGHT – LOOSE – TIGHT MODEL

A common challenge entrepreneurs experience is successfully delegating work to employees and contractors. No matter how earnestly they try, delegation never seems to work as well as they would like it to. Entrepreneurs often believe that employees are not up to the challenge of doing the job as well as they can do it.

Talking with employees provides a very different view. Employees feel that they are not given a chance to perform and succeed because they are micromanaged at almost every turn. If they try to do the job their way they are “corrected” and instructed to “do it my way”. A key challenge is that the *process* becomes the focus rather than the desired *outcomes*.

When entrepreneurs consistently manage employees too tightly, two outcomes typically occur. First, employees become frustrated and, second, they either stop attempting to use initiative and their own thinking because it will only be “corrected” or they leave to find a more suitable environment for their talents. Which employees are most likely to leave? The best ones who have the initiative and talent to succeed and they know it.

There are a number of conceptual models that attempt to address delegation and, more broadly, how to build successful, entrepreneurial companies that consistently achieve stellar results. One model is the **Tight – Loose – Tight** method. Here are the foundational parts.

TIGHT: Make sure with 100% certainty that each person in your organization (including outside contractors that support your business) is clear about what your company is about (mission, focus, approach to customers and the market, etc.), what *results and outcomes* are required to be successful (how they and you can win), and how each person fits into the bigger picture.

LOOSE: Let everyone go about doing his or her job without micromanaging them or focusing on how they go about getting things done. This is the difficult part for most entrepreneurs who have typically done each job in the company prior to hiring someone else to do the same role. Resist the temptation to instruct someone to do it the way you would do it. Let people learn through trial and error – as long as it won’t sink the company. Setbacks are how entrepreneurs learn and employees need to have the same opportunity to stumble and learn in order to acquire experience and confidence.

TIGHT: After a project or after a specific time period take the time to evaluate outcomes. Note successes and, where results were not satisfactory, coach and educate so that outcomes are better the next time. This expands capabilities, increases confidence as employees do better with the next challenge, and dramatically increases satisfaction and retention.

And while it is likely that 80% or more of delegation success with an employee or contractor will depend on selection (if you have the wrong person there will be little you can do to lessen their dependence on you), an efficient and effective way to determine if you have the right person in the right position is to let them succeed or fail using the Tight – Loose – Tight approach. Unfortunately, many entrepreneurs use the Loose – Tight – Loose approach. Because they micromanage their employee’s or contractor’s method of getting the job done rather than focusing on the required results and outcomes, they have difficulty accurately assessing whether the person can do the job.