## ASSIGNING RESPONSIBILITY

### By Rick Boxx

When I have a project that requires only my expertise, I find I can easily focus on producing an excellent outcome. If a project requires an entire team, however, achieving excellence becomes more complex.

A team typically has multiple people with different perspectives, experiences and ideas about how something should be approached and completed. To make matters even more complicated, team leaders, including myself, often forget the simple step of assigning responsibilities for a desired outcome.

Two commonly used statements come to mind that apply here. One says, "The whole is greater than the sum of the parts." In other words, people with a variety of skills, gifts and abilities can accomplish more collectively than if they were to operate independently of one another. Thus it is important to delegate tasks and assignments according to the team members' respective strengths and capabilities.

The second statement is, "None of us is as smart as all of us." Sometimes it is tempting for leaders to want to control all planning and decision-making, confident they know what is best. But by trusting the team's collective intelligence, a better outcome can be achieved than the leader could have envisioned.

This principle of assigning responsibilities to different members of the team according to their abilities is one that appears repeatedly in the Bible. For instance, after their escape from Egypt, the Israelite nation's leaders were confronted with the taunting task of governing them. Moses was the leader, but he could not do all the decision-making by himself.

Moses' father-in-law, Jethro, was the one that recognized the need to share the burden of settling legal disputes. He told Moses, "What you are doing is not good. You and these people who come to you will only wear yourselves out. The work is too heavy for you; you cannot handle it alone" (Exodus 18:17). Jethro proceeded to recommend how Moses could properly delegate judicial responsibilities, reserving only the most difficult cases for himself.

Later God established procedures for caring for the Israelites' worship center, dividing duties among the men who had formally been appointed as priests.

Numbers 18:1 states, "The LORD said to Aaron, "You, your sons and your family are to bear the responsibility for offenses connected with the sanctuary." Aaron was a very capable leader, but to get the work done properly it needed to be shared by others.

It can be tempting for leaders to try and do all of the work. After all, they know exactly what they want to have done and also know exactly how they would like to have it accomplished. But one of the many advantages of a team is having a number of individuals that can contribute to the effort and share the load, preventing it from becoming overwhelming for one person.

As Ecclesiastes 4:8-12 declares, "There was a man all alone.... There was no end to his toil.... Two are better than one because they have a good return for their work.... A cord of three strands is not quickly broken." If you desire your team to excel, be certain to specifically divide responsibilities, then hold everyone accountable for completing the work.

Reflection/Discussion Questions

1.   Some leaders are directive, preferring to assign all responsibilities. Others like to delegate, assigning tasks but being insistent upon being kept informed about progress and problems. Still others would prefer to control all of the work themselves. Which one of these are you?

2.   At your workplace, do you think job responsibilities – and authority – are distributed properly? Explain your answer.

3.   What do you think are the greatest problems associated with working on a project together as a team?

4.  How do you think it would be best to deal with a leader that fails to assign responsibilities in a fair, equitable and effective manner?

NOTE: If you have a Bible and would like to read more about this subject, consider the following passages:

**Proverbs 14:1, 15:21, 19:8, 27:17; Romans 12:4-8; 1 Corinthians 3:6-9, 12:12-31**