

The success or failure of an organization's programs can depend on how responsibilities are assigned. This Data Sheet deals with assigning responsibilities for risk control programs and how this can be accomplished effectively.

Assigning Is Not Transferring

Top management has ultimate responsibility for the organization and the overall effectiveness of risk control-related programs. It initiates them, sets their goals, specifies procedures, allocates resources, and provides competent managers. Top management must create a culture that is supportive of risk control, and encourage all personnel to actively participate and contribute to the program's success. It must also oversee program effectiveness and enforce discipline for non-conformance to agreed-upon standards and objectives. When top management cannot achieve these ends on its own, it must provide for those who can. Top management's responsibility in these cases is not **transferred** to those it designates. It is **shared**.

Assigning versus Delegating

"Delegating" is a perfectly good word, but in many management circles, it has acquired some negative baggage. It implies a handing down or passing off of something; that the something delegated is **beneath** or **not important enough** for the individual doing the delegating. **"Assigning responsibility"**, on the other hand, implies an active, positive process; one where care is taken to **select** and **groom** the right person, and insure that he or she has the proper resources, support, and authority to do the job properly.

Basic Guidelines for Assigning Responsibility

- **Focus on Performance.** - Assign responsibility so that managers, supervisors and employees clearly understand what performance is expected of each of them – what they must DO - to succeed in that task. It is performance objectives that determine:
 1. What the individual must **know** to do the job,
 2. What **skills** he or she must have,
 3. What **resources** are needed, and
 4. What **level of authority** is required.
- **Make all assignments in writing.** - Whenever possible, assignments should be in writing. The rule of thumb in assigning responsibilities is that the need for written assignment increases with complexity of the required tasks and /or the organization. Verbal messages can be vague, misheard, misunderstood, ignored, even forgotten. Committing something to paper requires greater precision of thought and expression for the person making the assignment, and reduces confusion and uncertainty for all parties involved. The written document can also be reproduced and distributed efficiently, and constitutes a record for purposes of accountability.
- **Communicate the assignment of responsibilities and authority to all applicable levels of the organization.** - This is especially true when the assigned responsibility requires interdepartmental action. Departmental "turf wars" can be minimized, the program will be better understood, and managers and employees can be held accountable more readily when everyone involved understands the rules.
- **Provide adequate authority and resources to meet responsibilities.** - It is unreasonable to assign responsibility without providing adequate authority and resources to accomplish the task. Essential resources may include:
 1. **Competent Staffing** – an adequate number, properly trained and equipped.
 2. **Training** – appropriate for responsibilities, both for supervisors and employees.
 3. **Equipment** – the right tool, and enough of them to do the job.

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4. **Budget** - adequate funds for operational expenditures.

- Hold managers, supervisors and employees accountable. - Accountability is at the heart of every effective risk control program. If top management is not serious enough to track performance – to reward it when it is competent and correct it when it is not – the program will fail. The secret to accountability is being able to measure performance. All parties involved must understand **what** is being measured and **how**. The system of accountability must be fair and applied to everyone – from top management to hourly employee. If some are held firmly to expected performance while others are not, the system will lose credibility, and the program will fail.
- The results of non-conformance to agreed-upon performance standards should be predictable and clearly understood. - If RC performance objectives are not met, the process should be similar to what would happen if a manager, department or project is over-budget or produces inferior quality product:
 1. **Problems** or obstacles should be **identified**.
 2. Appropriate **corrective measures developed** and **implemented**.
 3. **Timely reports** should be made to upper management on possible need for a reevaluation or modification of the objectives, processes and procedures, and/or personnel.
- Help the person assigned responsibilities to see “the forest” and “the trees”.
Relate the objectives of specific RC assignments to the goals of the organization. Show how the program objectives fit into the “big picture”. Understanding the intent and **context** of specific objectives allows the manager to apply the guidelines undefined situations.
- Never Assign and Forget. Always Follow-up & Follow through! - If management’s commitment and support to risk control are perceived as “lip service”, the program will fail. Following-up and following-through are equated to commitment. - “What gets measured, rewarded, or punished; gets done.” Review the program operations, at least annually, to evaluate performance.
- Identify both successes AND deficiencies in the program. - Most commonly only the negatives are noticed when reviewing program and individual performance. **“Catch people doing things right.”** Provide performance feedback so that recognition can be given and/or adjustments made either to the objectives or the program activities as needed and appropriate. Remember - Challenges can occur in unexpected quarters:
 1. **Objectives** might be flawed and require adjustment.
 2. **Procedures** may not provide adequate guidance.
 3. **Inter-departmental relationships** may need refinement.

Related Information:

1. **OSHA website** – <http://www.osha.gov> .
- J.J. Keller & Associates** – <http://www.jjkeller.com> .

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