



Letting Go

Stop fighting yourself and learn to delegate.

By Stacey Freed

John Kiernan, owner of John Kiernan Construction, Bradenton, Fla., agrees: "The job will not get done unless you get somebody to do it. You need a person more talented than you are in a specific area who makes a decision close to what you would make." Kiernan, now at the point where he's looking to replace himself altogether in the business, found that person in his son's best childhood friend, Ben DePrenger, who had a background in the corporate world. Kiernan had DePrenger shadow him for six months and plans to train, educate, and give him more responsibilities over the next 10 years.

There's no way to maintain control.

The control issue is the toughest to crack because it's something that you will continually struggle with. Keep in mind that you're in control of control: You dictate the amount of control you're willing to hand over. "Replacing yourself is replacing a critical part of the company," Downing says. "Don't rush the process. It might take a couple of years to get a person up to speed. You have to be able to trust their judgment before you let them make the decisions you're used to making." (See Ways + Means, "How Much Authority Do You Want to Give?" page 46.)

At some point, Kiernan says, DePrenger will make a decision that Kiernan wouldn't make. "There will be a curve when his decision will be better than mine. Hopefully, I'll be able to support his decision." He knows that it will be tough for him to relinquish control, but he sees it as "a necessary evil."

Employees don't want more to do.

If an employee doesn't want to take on extra work, it could be you have the wrong employee, McCadden says, but it could also mean "they may have been treated badly when they did take on responsibility. An owner can de-motivate an employee."

It's best to discuss with the employee whether he or she wants responsibility, and there must be clear goals, expectations, lines of accountability, and a certain amount of decision-making freedom for the employee to be motivated to take on a new role. "In most cases," Downing says, "employees want to be challenged and want to learn. When people have the chance to learn new things and become more important to the company, that's what builds excitement and enthusiasm."



"You get to a point where you realize it won't get done unless you get somebody else to do it," says John Kiernan of John Kiernan Construction, Bradenton, Fla.

"You get to a point where you realize it won't get done unless you get somebody else to do it," says John Kiernan of John Kiernan Construction, Bradenton, Fla.

"You also have to know why you want to hand off a particular responsibility. "Are you working too hard or do you want to concentrate on something else? Is what you're doing today keeping you on the path toward what you want to do? What's the real reason you want to replace yourself and is it the right reason?" McCadden asks. Often, remodelers manage by the moment, creating solutions that address a current situation. McCadden calls this "reactive management." The alternative, he says, is to think ahead to where you want your business to be and what role you want to play in its evolution.

Employees are working at their max.

This is the flip side of whether an employee wants to carry more responsibility: You perceive that an employee is working at capacity. One easy solution is to look at that employee's tasks and see if there's anything he or she can hand off to someone else. Knowing what each job entails will help you understand what may be passed on.

Early in his business, when St. Onge saw that growth was going to overwhelm him, he spent a long weekend with his laptop writing down everything he did: "How did I greet the client? How long did it take me to get back to the client with an estimate? When I was the carpenter, what did I do when I went up to a client's

house? How did I introduce myself? I broke things down into different categories and all of these became company procedures," he says. Even when he was basically a one-man show, he created descriptions for jobs that he would one day fill. That procedures manual is now 72 pages and RIKB is a design/build company with 21 employees. By knowing every job's details, St. Onge has been able to hand off more or less important responsibilities to the right people.

Letting Go

All this "head trash" — that little voice inside that messes with your instincts — can instill fear of both success and of failure. But how you look at your business and how you see yourself go a long way to helping quiet that voice. "I've always seen myself as a business owner who happens to be in the business of carpentry," says St. Onge, who began RIKB in 1989. "That subtle distinction makes a difference as to what you do every day."