MODULE OVERVIEW

Delegating without burning out: Five obstacles, five fixes

Adaptive module | ~20 min

Delegating is one of the hardest parts of a manager's job, and what holds people back is rarely technical: it's the fear of losing control, the fear of overloading others, the reflex of "I'll do it faster myself." As a result, managers burn out and their teams miss the chance to grow. This module names the five inner obstacles, uses real examples (Decathlon, HCL, Haier) to show that delegating at scale is possible, and offers five practices managers can apply starting this week.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

01 Recognize the five obstacles, often psychological, that prevent people from delegating even when they want to.

02 Spot reverse delegation using the monkey metaphor, and know how to "hand the monkey back".

03 Draw on organizations that delegate at scale (Decathlon, HCL, Haier) to broaden your own practice.

04 Put five practices in place: explain the why, allow mistakes, define the result, and follow up without micromanaging.

WHO IT'S FOR

Managers who know they should delegate more but struggle to take that step without burning out.

- **Prerequisite:** none

HOW THE MODULE WORKS

Self-paced, with practice tailored to each learner.

1. **Self-assessment**: on 9 dimensions, to gauge current habits and guide the practice.
2. **Expert video**: 10 minutes, with 3 pauses for reflection.
3. **Practice scenarios**: the first 2 chosen from the self-assessment, then 16 optional ones. Every answer gets feedback: what it leads to, and one way to improve.
4. **Dated commitment**: one action to try, written by the learner or picked from the suggestions.
5. **Memo to download**: key takeaways, questions, commitment, personal notes and checklists.

ASSESSMENT AND COMPLETION

Pass mark: 80%

The score takes into account your answers to the practice scenarios, your commitment and, where relevant, any additional learning activities. Passing requires a commitment and a score of at least 80%.

METHODS & MODELS

- Questions to "hand the monkey back" ("What do you think?" / "What do you suggest?") – Afthonios method, in the spirit of Oncken & Wass
- Afthonios framework: 5 obstacles to delegation and 5 practices for smart delegation
- Delegation by results / "stewardship delegation" and management by intent (Stephen Covey)
- The right to make mistakes, inspired by psychological safety (Amy Edmondson)

SOURCES & REFERENCES

- Oncken & Wass, "Management Time: Who's Got the Monkey?" Harvard Business Review, 1974 (reprinted in 1999 with a commentary by Stephen Covey)
- Hamel & Zanini, "The End of Bureaucracy," Harvard Business Review, 2018 – Haier's RenDanHeYi model, about 4,000 microenterprises
- Decathlon: decentralization and autonomy for department managers; the company operated in about 78 countries in 2024
- Vineet Nayar, "Employees First, Customers Second," Harvard Business Press, 2010

Module created by Afthonios.com.

Content reviewed on 13 October 2026