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Delegation Decision Matrix

A Practical Framework for Finance and Accounting Managers

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If you became a manager because you were the strongest accountant on the team, chances are you are still doing too much yourself.

Your days are filled with interruptions. Your evenings are spent catching up on the work you could not get to during them. Your team brings everything to you.

That is not leadership. That is overload. This framework helps you change it.

How to Use This Framework

Delegation is not a soft skill. It is a core financial management competency — as essential as reconciliation, analysis, and reporting. In finance and accounting it is often the one most resisted. This matrix gives you a structured way to decide what to keep, what to hand off, and how much authority to extend when you do.

Use it in three ways:

- Work through Part 1 (the Decision Guide) for any specific task you are unsure about
- Use Part 2 (the Reference Table) for quick daily decisions organized by topic area
- Use Part 3 (Delegation Levels) to decide how much authority to extend — not just whether to delegate

In Practice: Running a Task Through the Decision Guide

A new Controller is currently preparing the monthly variance report herself. She ran it through the five questions:

Q1	Does this require my authority or signature?	*No. The report goes to the senior team — but preparing it does not require her authority.*
Q2	Does it require knowledge only I have?	*Not really. She designed the template. A senior analyst can run it with a proper handoff.*
Q3	Would doing it myself prevent development?	*Yes. Her senior analyst needs to develop this skill before the Controller role becomes available to her.*
Q4	Am I holding on for the right reasons?	*Honest answer: she is faster at it and trusts her own version more. Neither is a reason to keep it.*
Q5	If it came back done differently, would I accept it?	*If it met the standard and told the right story, yes. She recognizes this is where she has been hesitating.*

Decision: Delegate at Level 2 initially. Senior analyst prepares the report and recommends the key variance explanations. Controller reviews and approves before distribution. Move to Level 3 after two successful cycles.

One honest note before you start: the hardest tasks to delegate are almost always the ones you are best at. That discomfort is not a signal to hold on. It is a signal that handing off will stretch both you and your team member.

Part 1 — The Decision Guide

For any task you are currently doing yourself, work through these five questions in order. Stop when you reach a clear answer.

#	QUESTION	GUIDANCE
Q1	Does this task require my authority, my signature, or my judgment as manager? *Examples: hiring decisions, performance conversations, budget approvals, external stakeholder commitments.*	Delegate if yes
Q2	Does this task require knowledge that only I currently have? *If yes: plan to transfer that knowledge. The goal is to make yourself non-essential to the task.*	Delegate if yes
Q3	Would doing this myself prevent a team member from learning something they need to develop? *If yes: this task belongs to them, even if it takes longer the first time.*	Delegate if yes
Q4	Am I holding onto this because it is genuinely mine, or because it is faster, easier, or more comfortable to do it myself? *Honest answer required. This is the question most managers avoid.*	Delegate if yes
Q5	If I delegated this and it was done differently than I would have done it, but still met the standard — would I accept the result? *If no: examine whether you are managing to a standard or managing to a preference.*	Delegate if yes

If you answered yes to Q4 or Q5 only: this is a mindset issue, not a task issue. The work belongs to your team. Practice letting it go.

> **“** **CFO INSIGHT**
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> *For several years I owned a complex accrued revenue model I had built, presented to executives, and defended with our external auditors. Every month, a financial analyst on my team updated it. One day she came to me with a finding: the model was missing a structural element that would become increasingly material as the business grew. She was right. We revised it immediately.*
>
> *The gap had been there for years. It only surfaced because she genuinely owned the work and felt safe enough to question it. If I had been maintaining the model myself, I would never have found what she found. I was too close to what I had built.*
>
> **When you hold onto the work, you also hold onto your blind spots.** *Delegation is not a time management strategy. It is how organizations discover what they do not yet know.*
>
> — **Shelley Lewis-Mercier, CPA, MBA | Former CFO | Founder, Foundation First**

Part 2 — Finance and Accounting Delegation Reference

Organized by topic area. Related tasks sit together so you can see at a glance what to keep, what to delegate now, and what to develop toward delegation.

CATEGORY	TASKS IN THIS AREA	KEEP	DELEGATE	DEVELOP TOWARD
Month-End Close	Subledger reconciliations Journal entry preparation Variance explanations — routine Management reporting package Accrual calculations — standard Intercompany reconciliations	**Review of final package** **Judgment calls on materiality** **Presentation to senior leadership**	Subledger recs Standard accruals Intercompany recs	Variance explanations Narrative preparation
Banking and Treasury	Daily bank reconciliations Payment processing — routine Cash position reporting Bank relationship — day to day Forecasting — short term	**Authorization limits over threshold** **Bank relationship — strategic** **Financing decisions**	Daily recs Routine payments Cash reporting	Short-term forecasting Bank liaison work
Accounts Payable and Receivable	Invoice processing and coding Vendor statement reconciliations AR follow-up — routine Credit holds — routine Dispute resolution — standard Aging review and reporting	**Policy exceptions** **Disputes involving legal risk** **Material credit decisions**	Invoice processing Vendor recs AR follow-up Aging reporting	Dispute resolution Credit hold decisions
Payroll	Payroll data entry and processing Timesheet verification Standard deduction calculations Payroll reconciliations Off-cycle adjustments — routine	**Compensation changes** **Termination pay calculations** **Regulatory filings and sign-off**	Data entry and processing Timesheet verification Standard reconciliations	Off-cycle adjustments Regulatory prep
Tax	HST and GST filings — preparation Instalment calculations Tax provision working papers CRA correspondence — routine Fixed asset continuity schedules	**Amended returns** **Material judgment calls on treatment** **CRA audit representation** **Tax planning decisions**	Provision prep Instalment calculations Fixed asset schedules	Filing prep Routine CRA correspondence
Budgeting and Forecasting	Template preparation and distribution Data collection from departments Input entry and consolidation Variance analysis — department level Scenario modelling — standard assumptions	**Assumptions with P&L impact** **Presentation to executives** **Guidance to department heads**	Template prep Data collection Input consolidation	Variance analysis Standard scenario modelling
Audit and Compliance	PBC list preparation and coordination Working paper preparation Audit schedule updates Standard audit queries — responses Internal audit prep work	**Auditor relationship — strategic** **Representation letters** **Material scope questions**	PBC coordination Working paper prep Standard audit responses	Audit schedule management Auditor liaison work
Financial Systems	Standard report generation Data exports and formatting User access requests — routine System entry and maintenance Report distribution	**System change requests with P&L impact** **Access rights for sensitive data**	Report generation Data exports Standard entries	Report design User access coordination

		Vendor relationships for key systems		
Customer and Revenue	Invoice generation Revenue reconciliations Collections follow-up — routine Revenue reporting — standard Contract billing calculations	**Material collections escalations** **Revenue recognition judgment calls** **Contract negotiations**	Invoice generation Revenue recs Routine collections Standard reporting	Collections escalation Revenue analysis
Interdepartmental	Responding to information requests Cross-functional meeting attendance Report distribution Finance business partner updates Process documentation	**Commitments made on behalf of finance** **Senior leadership communications** **Budget challenge conversations**	Information requests Report distribution Meeting attendance	Business partner relationships Process documentation

Keep = manager's direct responsibility. Delegate = assign now to a capable team member. Develop = plan to transfer as team capability grows.

Part 3 — Delegation Levels

Deciding whether to delegate is only half the decision. The other half is how much authority to extend. These four levels give you a practical language for that conversation.

LEVEL	INSTRUCTION	USE WHEN	EXAMPLE
1	**Do exactly this**	The task is new, the risk is high, or the standard is non-negotiable. You define the method and the output.	*"Prepare the bank rec using this template. Send it to me before it goes anywhere."*
2	**Recommend, then I decide**	You want their thinking but retain the decision. Good for developing judgment without extending full authority.	*"Review the vendor dispute and bring me your recommended resolution and your reasoning."*
3	**Decide and inform me**	They own the decision. You want to stay informed but will not override unless something is material.	*"Handle the collections follow-up. Let me know if anything gets above 90 days or above $50K."*
4	**Own it fully**	Full ownership. They handle the task, the decisions, and the relationship. You are available if needed but not in the loop.	*"The month-end bank recs are yours. Flag me only if something does not reconcile cleanly."*

Most new managers default to Level 1 or Level 2 for everything. The goal over time is to move tasks from Level 1 toward Level 4 as your team develops capability. A team where everything sits at Level 1 is a team that has not been developed.

☛ **FROM EXPERIENCE**

Early in my management career I used Level 1 for almost everything. I told myself it was because the standards were too important to leave to chance. The real reason was that handing off a task I was good at felt like losing something. What I discovered later was that Level 4 delegation — where someone genuinely owns the work — is where your team's best thinking surfaces. You cannot get there by staying at Level 1.

Part 4 — Delegation vs. Abdication

Finance managers sometimes resist delegation because they have seen what happens when it goes wrong: the work comes back incomplete, incorrect, or not done at all. What they experienced was not delegation. It was abdication.

DELEGATION	ABDICATION
Clear standard set before handoff	*Unclear or unstated expectations*
Right level of authority extended	*No authority discussion*
Team member has the capability or is being developed	*Task assigned beyond current capability without support*
Manager available for questions and coaching	*Manager disappears after handoff*
Review at agreed checkpoints	*No follow-up until something goes wrong*
Accountability for outcome stays clear	*Accountability unclear on both sides*

Effective delegation is hands-off execution with hands-on development. You are not removing yourself from the work. You are changing your role within it.

Part 5 — Common Delegation Traps for Finance Managers

These are the patterns that keep finance and accounting managers overextended. Recognize yourself in any of these.

TRAP	WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE	THE FIX
Reviewing everything	You are the last step in every process. Nothing goes out without your review.	**Fix:** Set the standard clearly at the start. Review samples, not everything. Coach after the fact.
Being copied on everything	You are cc'd on emails you never act on, maintaining the appearance of oversight without the substance.	**Fix:** Define what you genuinely need to be informed about. Remove yourself from everything else.
Owning every external relationship	All banking, vendor, customer, and auditor contact runs through you.	**Fix:** Senior relationships belong to you. Day-to-day relationships belong to your team. Build both.
Solving instead of coaching	When someone brings you a problem, you solve it.	**Fix:** Ask what options they have considered and what they recommend. Coach the thinking, not the answer.

Keeping all communication	All interdepartmental communication flows through you.	**Fix:** Involve your team in cross-functional work. Let them build relationships across the organization.
Taking work back	You delegate, it comes back differently, and you redo it.	**Fix:** If the outcome meets the standard, let it stand. Different is not wrong. Redoing it sends the wrong message.

☛ **F R O M   E X P E R I E N C E**

The trap I see most often in finance managers is the last one: taking work back when it is not done their way. I have done it myself. You delegate a reconciliation, it comes back structured differently than you would have done it, and without thinking you open it up and redo it. The message your team member receives is not that you care about quality. It is that you do not actually trust them. It took me longer than I would like to admit to learn the difference between a standard that matters and a method I simply prefer.

Part 6 — This Week's Delegation Worksheet

Pick three tasks you are currently doing yourself. Run each through the decision guide. Then commit to what you will do differently.

TASK	KEEP / DELEGATE / DEVELOP	DELEGATION LEVEL (1-4)	WHO AND BY WHEN

The one question to ask every week: *What am I doing this week that belongs to my team?*

Delegation is not a one-time decision. It is a discipline. The managers who do it well are not naturally comfortable with letting go. They practice it consistently enough that it becomes their default.

Every manager has one moment when they realize they can no longer succeed by being the best individual contributor.

That moment is the beginning of leadership.

Delegation is how you get there.

If this worksheet made you realize you are still doing too much yourself, you are exactly the kind of manager Foundation First was built for.

Start with the free Manager Readiness Assessment at manager-readiness.com. It takes about eight minutes and will identify the management habits most likely limiting your effectiveness right now.

About Foundation First

Foundation First is a manager readiness program for first-time managers in finance and accounting. Core Module 2, Time, Attention and Priorities, addresses delegation directly with frameworks, application exercises, and real-world problem-solving through office hours with Shelley.

Take the free Manager Readiness Assessment at **manager-readiness.com** | Learn about the Core 4 at **manager-readiness.com/the-core-4**