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Effective delegation: Let go to lift up

Leadership Week 2025

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Tuesday 15 July 2025

Acknowledgement of Country


Emily Kam Kngwarray, *Ntang Dreaming*

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- Bachelor of Arts, Master of Laws (Juris Doctor), Dip Gov
- Trained mediator and private investigator
- Experience working with community organisations as a solicitor, consultant and PI

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What we'll cover today:

- Why delegate?

- Why not delegate?

- Developing the right mindset

- The mechanics of delegation - what, who and how

- Building a delegation-friendly culture

How do you feel about delegation?
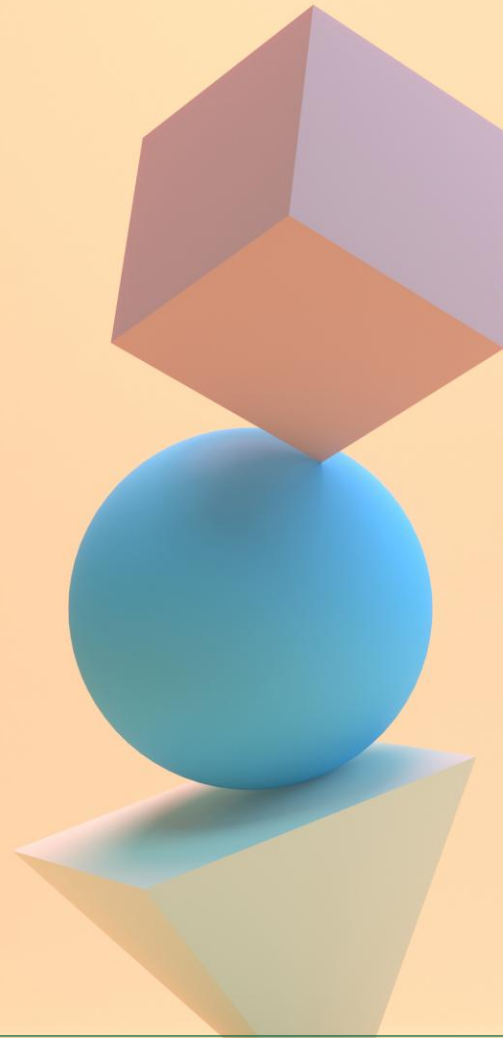
delegate
/ˈdɛlɪɡeɪt/

verb

entrust (a task or responsibility) to another person;

Effective delegation will:

- Build your leadership skills

- Support team-wide professional development

- Manage workload and priorities

- Encourage ownership and engagement

- Help you focus on big picture goals

- Encourage problem-solving and autonomy

- Maximise productivity, efficiency and scaleability

- Build trust, confidence and experience

- Drive long-term success

- Support a positive culture

Why *not* delegate?

- It would be quicker and easier to do it myself
- I really enjoy doing this task myself
- I feel bad about adding to someone else's to do list
- The task requires specific knowledge and skills
- The outcome needs to meet a certain standard
- The task is urgent and/or important
- The task involves sensitive information
- The task is best kept at the leadership level
- I don't have any suitable team members
- The task is part of my core responsibilities

Are these valid reasons not to delegate?
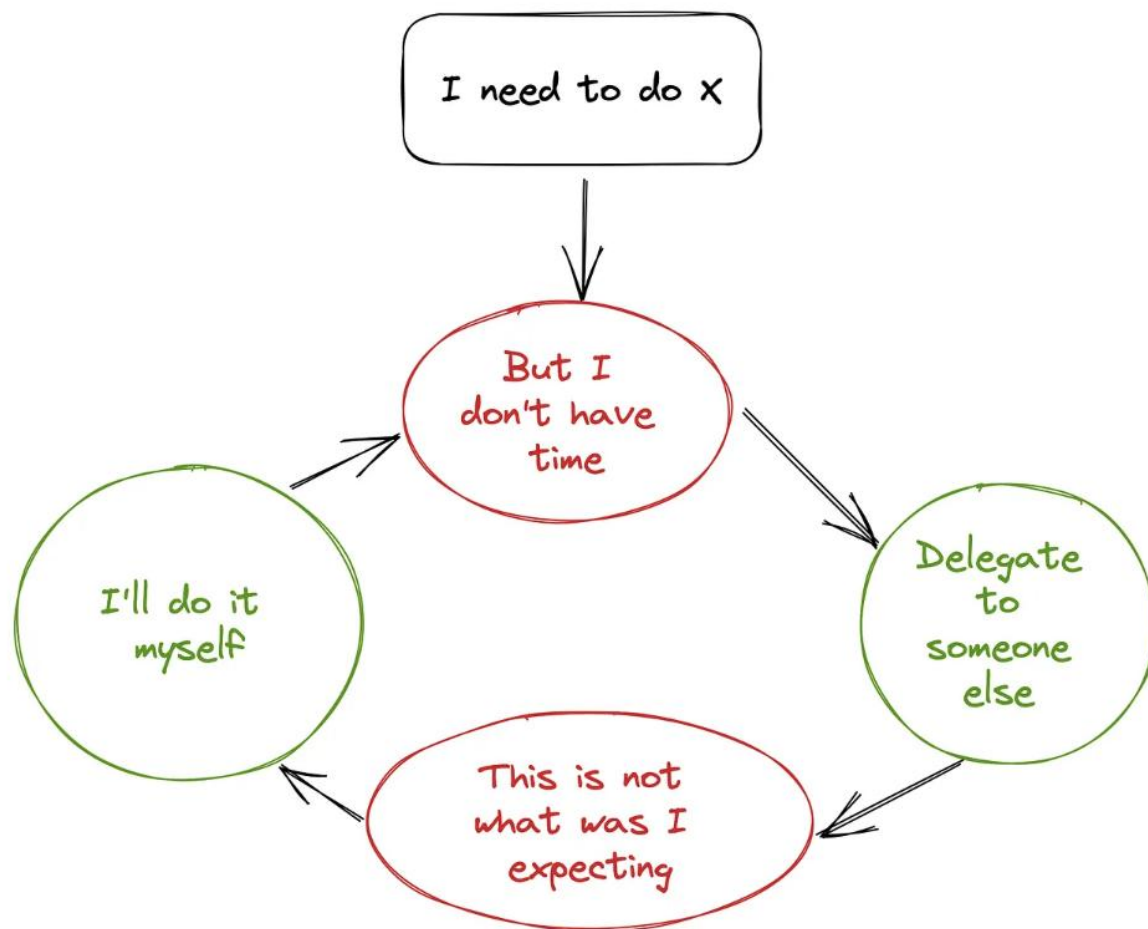
The Delegation Loop:
https://marciok.substack.com/p/the-delegation-loop
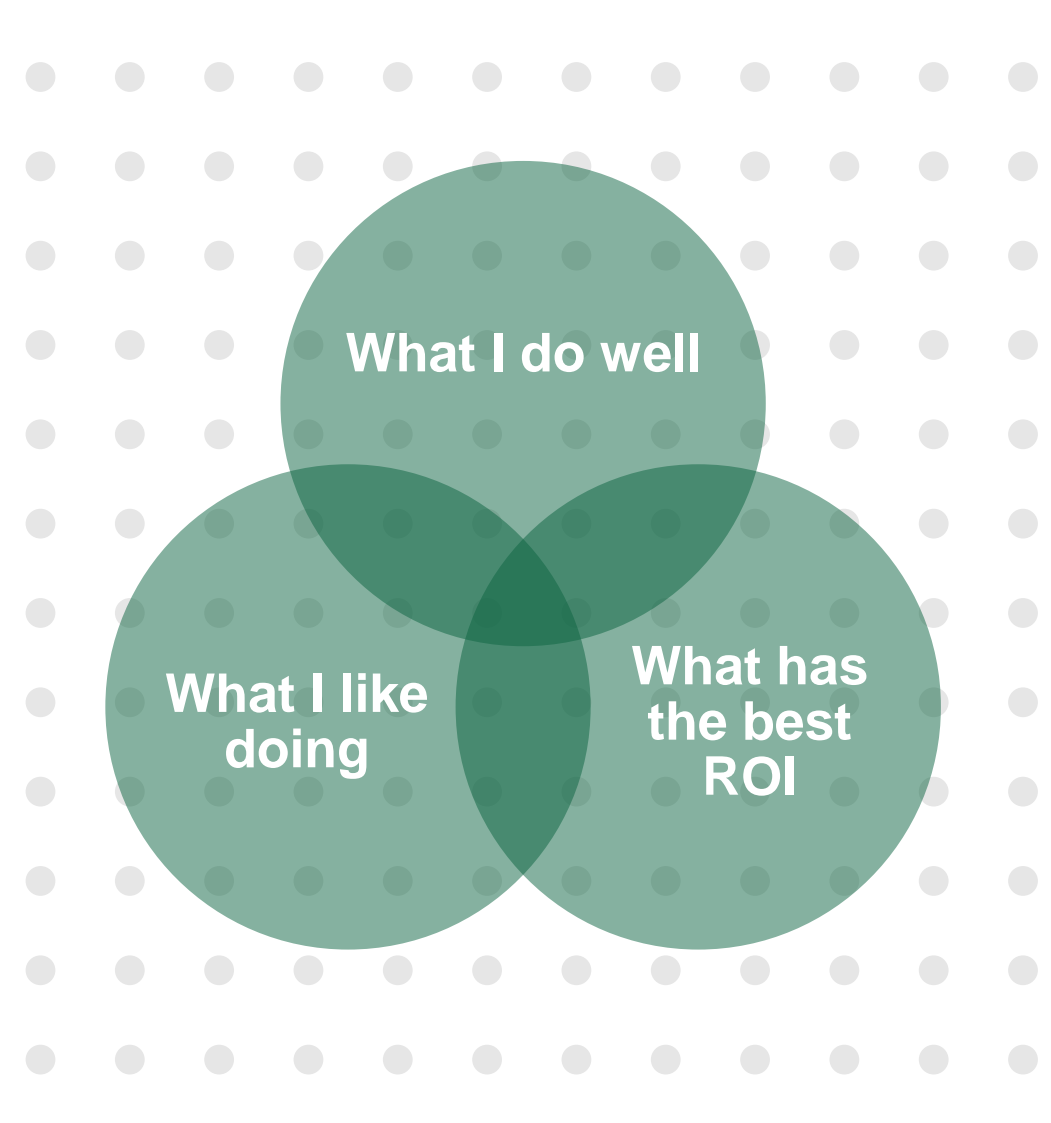
Delegation involves:

- Skill-building
- Strategic thinking
- Time management
- Patience
- Empathy
- Iterating
- Investing in your team
- Self-awareness
- Adaptability
- Accountability

What should I delegate?

- Recurring tasks

- Tasks aligned with team members' interests

- Tasks connected to team goals

- Tasks that others have the skills and time to do

- Fully specified tasks with clear expectations

- Tasks with lower stakes

Consider priority, importance, complexity and potential impacts of delegation

What I do well

What I like doing

What has the best ROI

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The prioritisation matrix

	Urgent	Not urgent
Important	**Do:** Tasks with deadlines and consequences	**Schedule:** Tasks with unclear deadlines that contribute to long-term success
Not important	**Delegate:** Tasks that must be done but don't require your specific skillset	**Delete:** Distractions and unnecessary tasks

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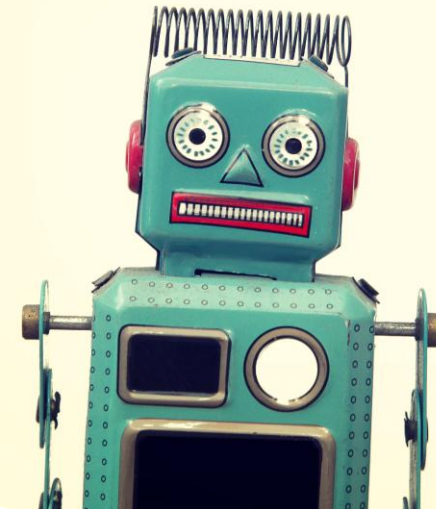
The monkey on your back

- Where did it come from?

- Who should be holding it?

- How can you pass it back?

- How do you check in on the monkey while keeping it at the right distance?

Who should I delegate to? Consider:

- Skills

- Capability

- Strengths

- Role and workstream

- Development goals

- Capacity

- Priorities

- Interests

What about AI?

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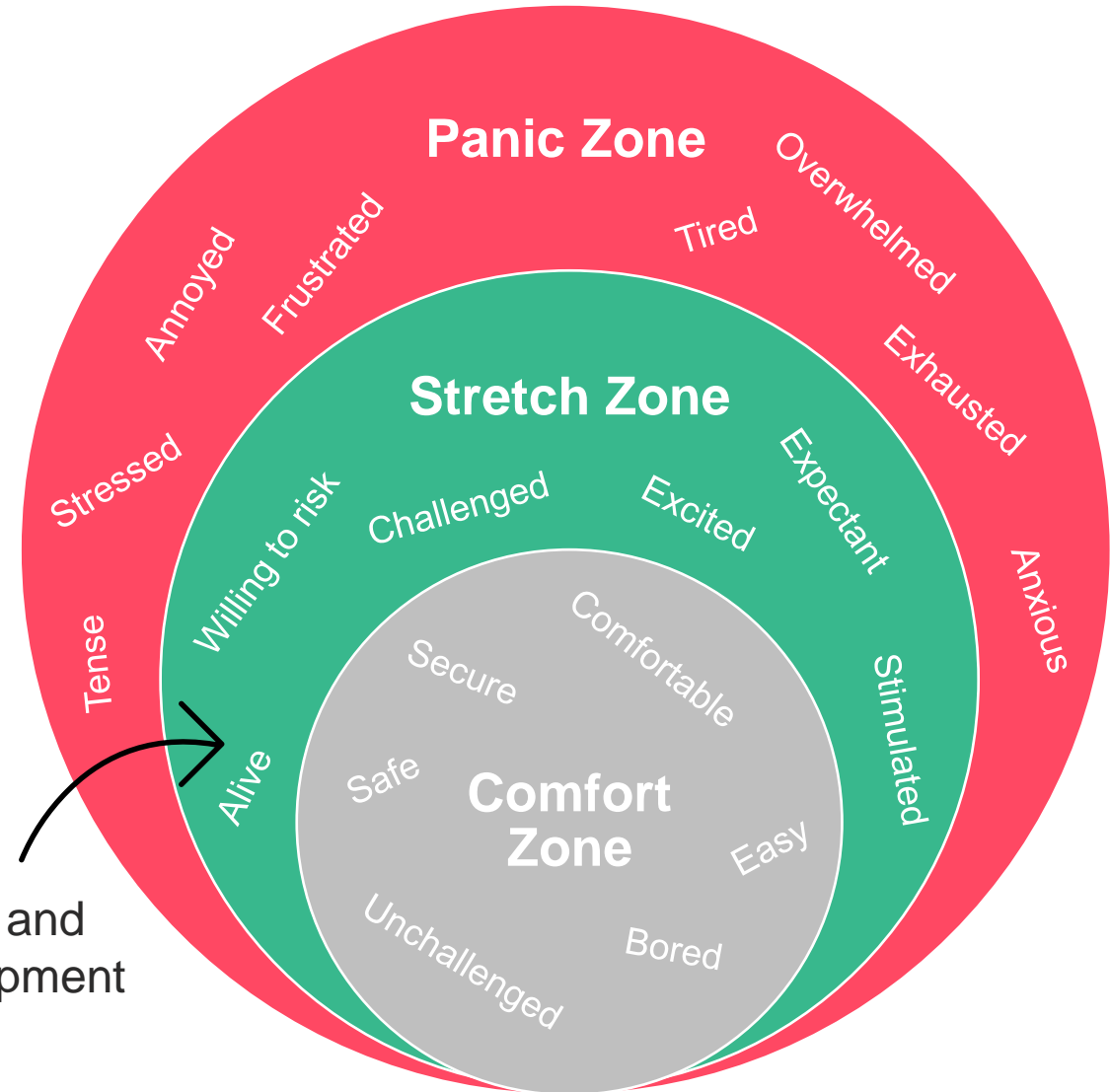**ourcommunity.com.au**
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How do I delegate?

- Provide clear, concise instructions

- Explain what needs to be done and why

- Describe the process – but don't overexplain

- Set a clear timeline including regular check-ins

- Ensure your team member has the right training, resources and authority

- Put the task in context – relate it to organisational and personal goals

- Set clear expectations and measurable outcomes

- Demonstrate what 'good' looks like

- Make space for questions

The learning zone

Panic Zone

Overwhelmed

Tired

Exhausted

Annoyed

Frustrated

Stretch Zone

Stressed

Expectant

Anxious

Willing to risk

Challenged

Excited

Tense

Comfortable

Secure

Stimulated

Safe

Comfort Zone

Alive

Easy

Unchallenged

Bored

Ideal for personal and
professional development

The GROW model

Goal: What do we want to achieve? Where do we want to end up?

Reality: What is the current situation? What resources do we have/need?

Obstacles / Options: How can we achieve our goal? How can we deal with any barriers?

Will / Way Forward: What actions will we take, who will do them, and when?

Once you've delegated…

- Step back and let the team member take ownership

- Maintain oversight and accountability

- Check in periodically

- Maintain the review/feedback cycle

- Use shared tools to increase visibility and access

- Trust but verify

- Recognise progress and celebrate small wins

- Focus on results

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"My team member took about twice as long as I would have to complete this task. I had to follow up several times."

"They finished the task, but it wasn't at the standard I was hoping for."

"Delegating this task created a lot more work for me, including constantly dealing with questions."

- Did they meet the agreed timeframe?
- Did you give them space to work things out?

- Was the team member aware of your expectations?
- Did you provide instructions, examples and resources?

- Were your initial instructions clear?
- Did you set up (and maintain) an agreed communication channel?

- How long have you been doing this task?
- How quick were you when you first started?

- Did the task achieve your desired outcome - were the results acceptable, if imperfect?
- Does the task need to be completed the way you do it?

- Why do you think the team member asked so many questions?
- How much guidance did you need when you were new to this task?

What are your motivations?

1. Reflect on personal values

2. Examine your drivers

3. Assess reward response

4. Evaluate satisfaction and fulfilment

5. Consider long-term goals

As a leader, what are your intrinsic and extrinsic motivations?

The SCARF model

| Driver	Threat response activated by:	Reward response activated by:
Status	• Negative feedback • Public criticism • Lack of recognition • Feeling excluded • Unsolicited advice	• Positive feedback • Public recognition • Promotions • Invitations / opportunities • Providing input
Certainty	• The unknown • Unclear expectations • Lack of information	• Being informed and updated • Clear expectations • Timeframes and benchmarks
Autonomy	• Pressure to conform • Micromanagement • Being instructed	• Having choice and influence • Flexibility and space • Two-way communication
Relatedness	• Feeling excluded • Miscommunications • Conflict • Competitiveness	• Inclusion and involvement • Constructive communication • Collaboration • Building rapport
Fairness	• Perceived discrimination or bias • Arbitrary decisions • Evasiveness	• Clear processes and reasoning • Channels for review and redress • Transparency

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The Lippit-Knoster model

Vision	Skills	Incentives	Resources	Action Plan	=	Success
Vision	Skills	Incentives	Resources	Missing	=	False Starts
Vision	Skills	Incentives	Missing	Action Plan	=	Frustration
Vision	Skills	Missing	Resources	Action Plan	=	Resistance
Vision	Missing	Incentives	Resources	Action Plan	=	Anxiety
Missing	Skills	Incentives	Resources	Action Plan	=	Confusion

What is the Knoster Chart for Managing Complex Change? - Whittaker

Leading for empowerment

- Active listening
- Open communication
- Autonomy
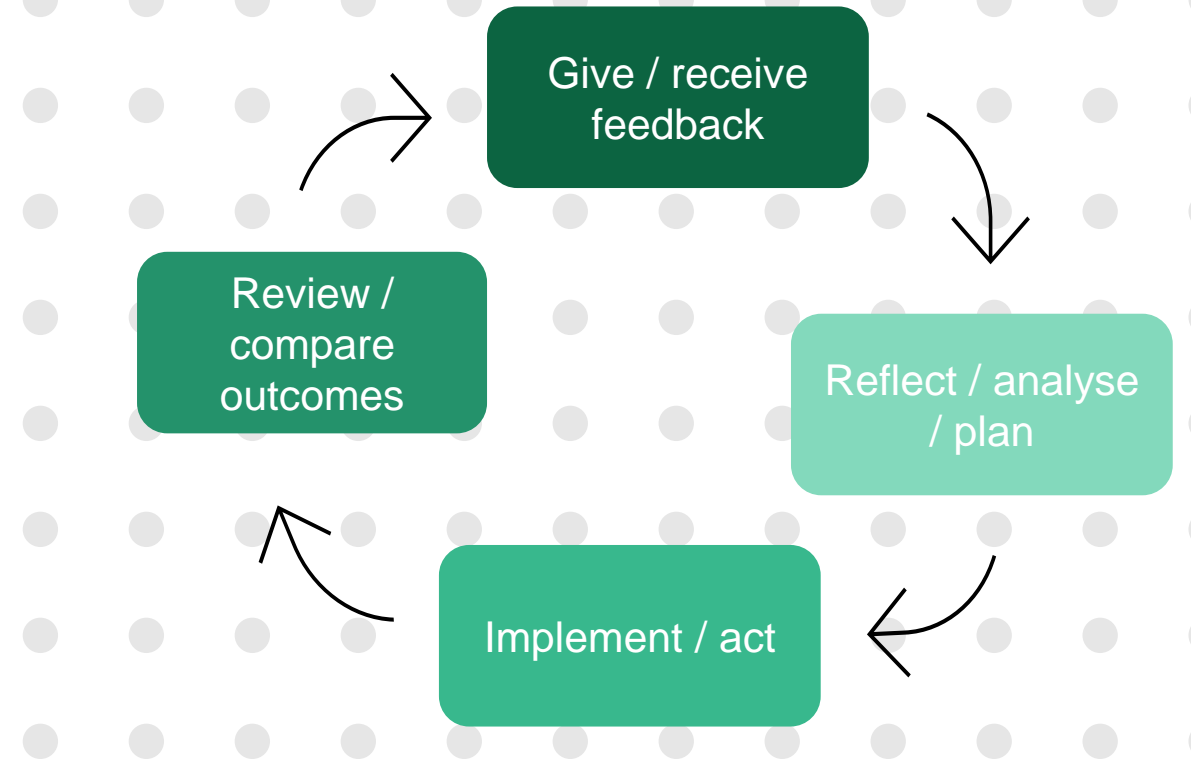- Professional development
- Recognition
- Leading by example
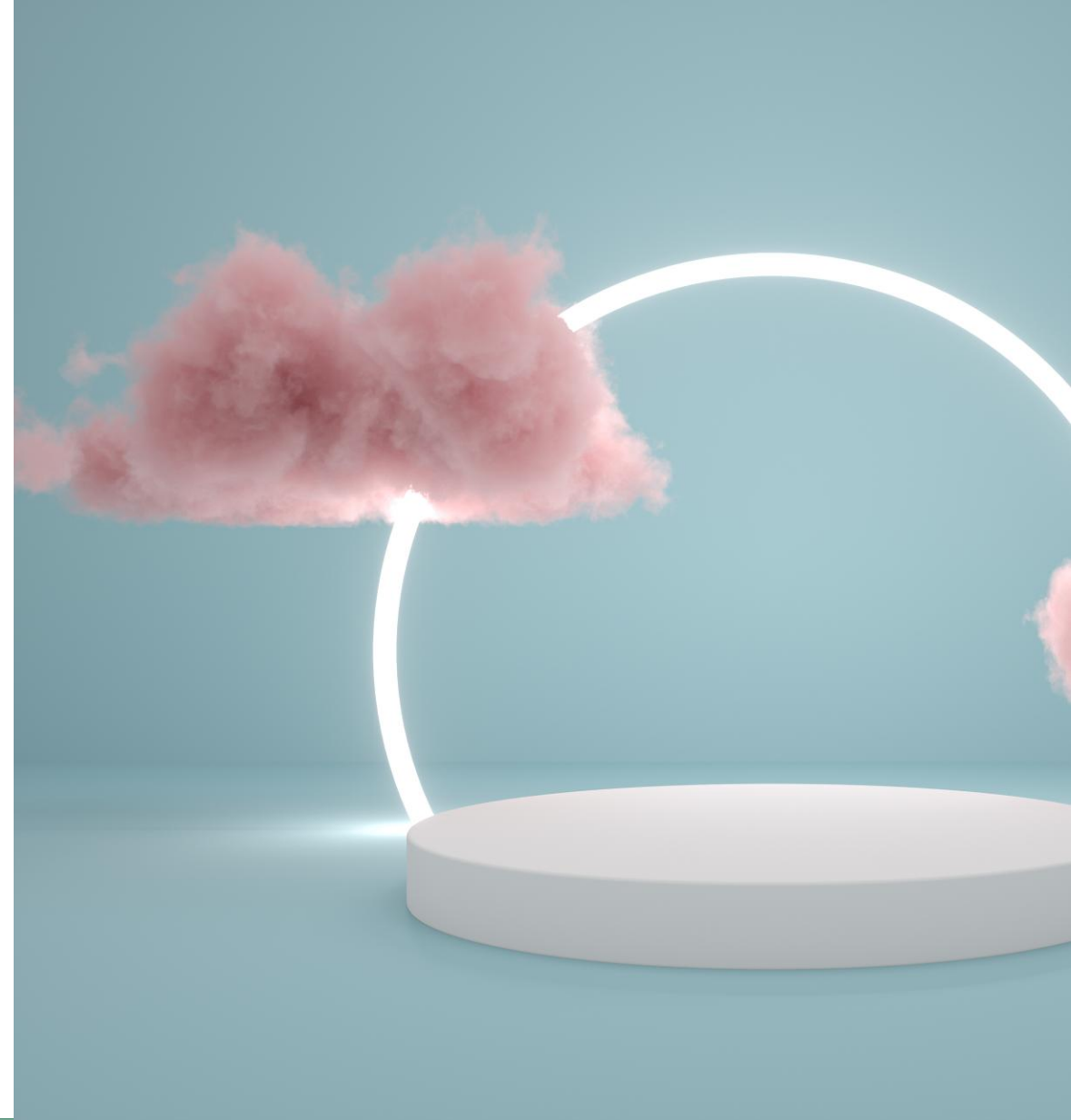
Prioritise feedback

Giving it
Receiving it

About the task
About the delegation process

Throughout the project
At completion

- Give / receive feedback
- Reflect / analyse / plan
- Implement / act
- Review / compare outcomes

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Giving feedback

Explain your intentions

Focus on the task, not the person

Be specific, timely and targeted

Make actionable suggestions

Express gratitude

Emphasise strengths

Focus on growth

Actively listen

Be empathetic and understanding

Consider time, place and delivery

Plan next steps

Follow up

Receiving feedback

Consider the intention

Focus on the message, not the messenger

Be receptive, curious and calm

Suggest actionable improvements

Express gratitude

Seek clarification

Focus on growth

Actively listen

Stay grounded

Take time to process and reflect

Plan next steps

Follow up

Constructive feedback vs disparaging opinions

"This proposal is absurd. What idiot ever thought this could possibly work?"	"I have some concerns about the feasibility of this proposal. Could we explore specific challenges or alternatives?"
"This report is pathetically written, it's not even worth reviewing."	"The report could benefit from more clarity and detail in certain areas. Let's look at ways to refine it."
"If this is your best solution, then we're absolutely stuffed."	"This solution addresses some aspects, but I think there are gaps. Could we explore some additional approaches?"
"Clearly you've never dealt with issues like this before, so your opinion doesn't hold much weight."	"This is a complex issue. Could we pair your insights with someone who has experience in this area?"

Judging personal attributes vs constructive advice

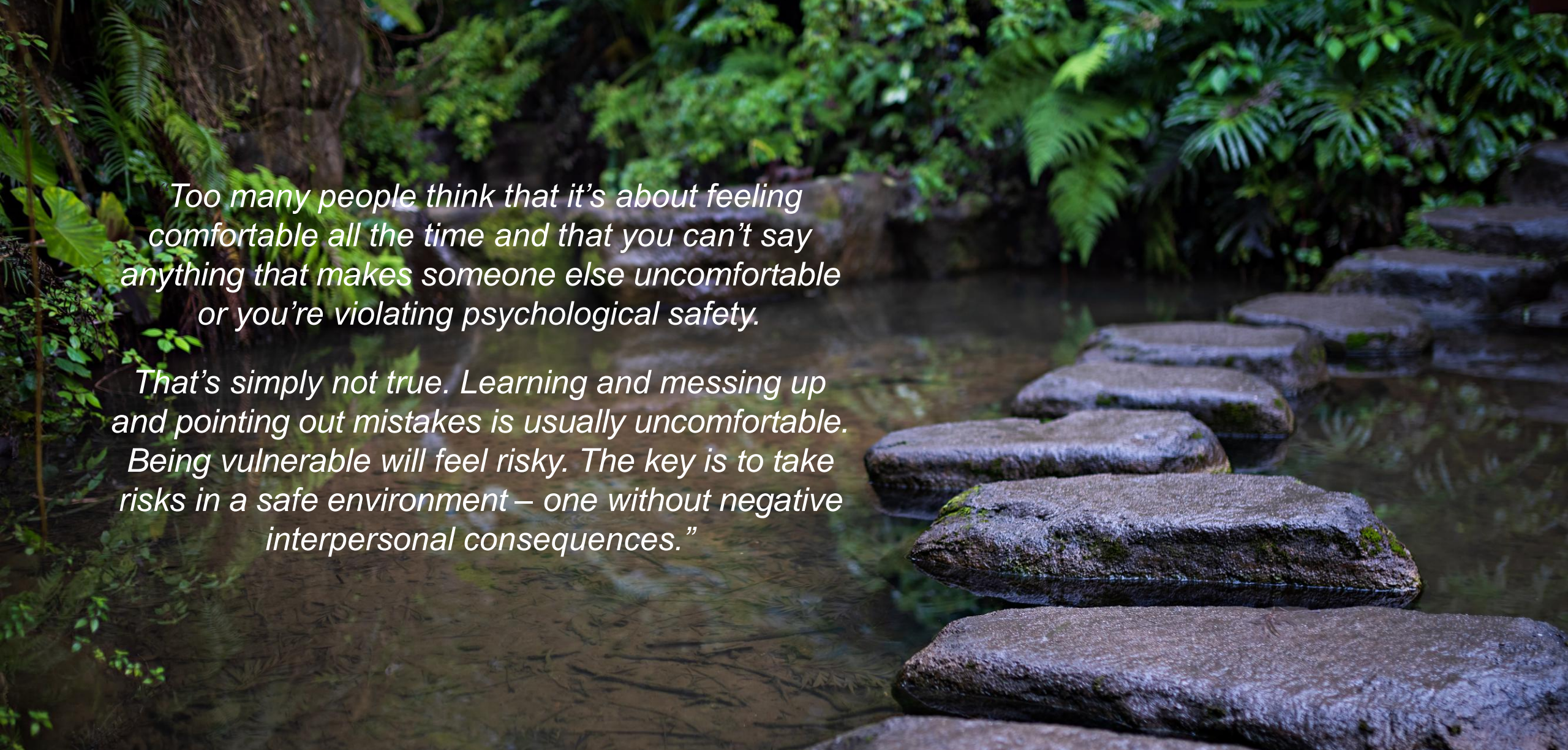|	
"You're clearly far too emotional to make logical decisions."	"I can see that this topic is really important to you. Let's make sure we focus on the key points to move the discussion forward."
"Unbelievable. I don't think you have got any real idea about how this organisation operates."	"I think we might have missed something. If you'd like, I can provide some background or context to clarify how this fits into our operations?"
"You seem clueless. What is wrong with you? Do you prepare? Did you review the papers?	"It would be really helpful if we could all review materials ahead of time to make discussions more productive."
"The blah, blah, blah, you talk in these meetings makes it hard for anyone to take you seriously."	"The clearer and more concise you can be the more it will help ensure your ideas are well received by everyone."

Too many people think that it's about feeling comfortable all the time and that you can't say anything that makes someone else uncomfortable or you're violating psychological safety.

That's simply not true. Learning and messing up and pointing out mistakes is usually uncomfortable. Being vulnerable will feel risky. The key is to take risks in a safe environment – one without negative interpersonal consequences."

Supporting psychological safety

- Create warmth and informality
- Model vulnerability
- Ask before advocating
- Reward challenges to the status quo
- Use humour and enthusiasm
- Give targeted and specific praise

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Building a delegation-friendly culture

- Provide guidance, support and empathy
- Set clear, specific expectations
- Encourage open communication
- Provide training and skill development
- Develop feedback loops
- Encourage peer support and collaboration
- Demonstrate enthusiasm and positivity
- Focus on objectives and purpose
- Model constructive behaviour
- Recognise effort and give credit
- Celebrate small wins

Summary

- Effective delegation is an essential leadership skill

- Be strategic when choosing what to delegate and who to delegate it to

- Set clear expectations and communication channels

- Consider behavioural drivers

- Prioritise two-way feedback

- Delegation takes patience and empathy – for yourself and for your team

- Think of it as an investment your team's professional development, a positive organisational culture and your own growth as a leader

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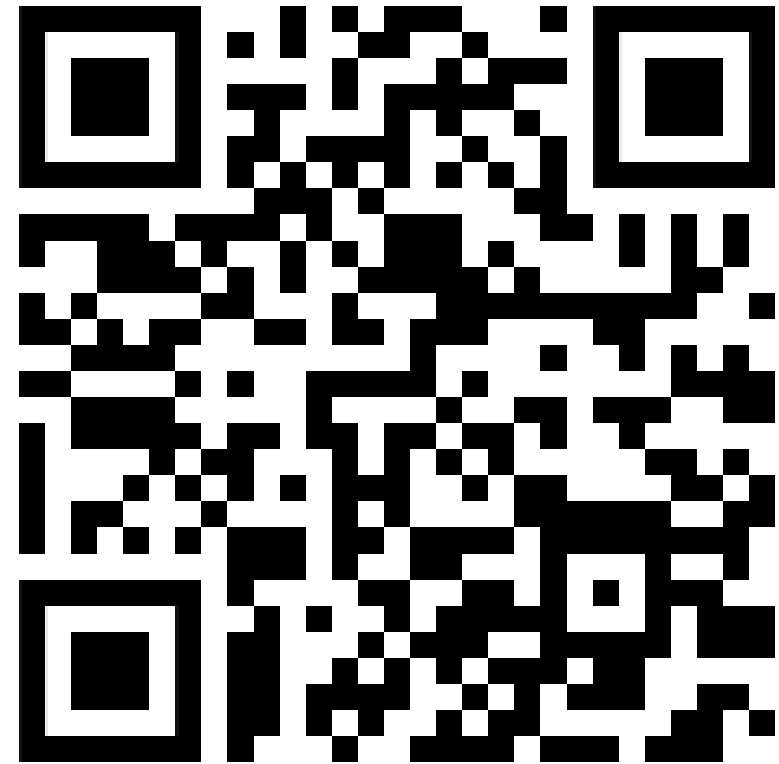
Further training and resources

Emotional intelligence: Reflections for board directors

Top 10 characteristics of good leaders

NFP Leadership Certificate

Community Directors | Tools and Resources

Project management plan for social enterprises