

Is Your Job Giving You Gray Hair?

“Delegate” isn’t a dirty word. By passing off tasks to parents or other eager volunteers, you can save yourself time and aggravation and revitalize your enthusiasm for teaching. Don’t wait—delegate!

by Mary Anne Duggan

As a rule, teachers try to do it all and feel guilty when they can’t. Every year seems to bring more to do, and less time to do it—planning better lessons, creating interesting bulletin boards, calling parents regularly, developing exciting enrichment activities, spending time one-on-one with the kids—the list goes on and on. All of this on top of the many roles (besides teacher) inherent to our jobs, like doctor, police officer, judge, secretary, file clerk, accountant, chef, nutritionist, carpenter, comedian, and more. What’s a teacher to do?

Give delegation a try

Like many teachers, I wrestled with these problems. I knew the solution was to delegate some of my duties, but I didn’t like the idea of letting go. Nor was I sure whom to delegate to. I developed this strategy.

I examined each activity I did in a typical day and asked myself, “Is my education and expertise required to complete this task?” If not, “Can I give this up?” Based on that, I listed 10 “delegatable” tasks and estimated the time and aggravation (measured with my self-developed Gray Hairs Index) delegating the task would save during one school year. You can use my list as a springboard to decide what you can delegate:

1. **Conference Coordinator**—schedules meetings with parents, then calls to remind them
Time saved—4 hours minimum
Gray hairs saved—200
2. **Special-Events Baker**—makes treats for open house and other events
Time saved—4 hours
Gray hairs saved—50
3. **Homemade Play Dough Preparer**—makes a fresh batch of homemade play dough as needed
Time saved—4½ hours
Gray hairs saved—30
4. **Fund-Raising Coordinator**—counts returned candy bars, tallies funds, and so forth
Time saved—6 hours
Gray hairs saved—75
5. **Book Club Order Processor**—compiles and checks orders
Time saved—7 hours
Gray hairs saved—100
6. **Library Runner**—checks out the books on your book list or picks out related books on her own
Time saved—9 hours
Gray hairs saved—50
7. **Poster Parent**—makes posters, bulletin boards, and other classroom decorations
Time saved—9 hours
Gray hairs saved—100
8. **Royal Reader**—give this volunteer a crown, a cape, and a good book, and let him take over reading to your students
Time saved—9 hours minimum
Gray hairs saved—50
9. **Writers’ Workshop Helper**—leads writers’ workshop conferences, listens to students read their stories, gives them feedback, and helps them edit
Time saved—immeasurable
Gray hairs saved—300
10. **Individualized Spelling Volunteer**—gives individual pretests and keeps track of students’ word lists
Time saved—immeasurable
Gray hairs saved—450

The grand total? At least 52½ hours, plus an incalculable amount of aggravation saved. What could you do with 52½ extra hours? Remember, there's more to life than designing bulletin boards! How about taking a weekend trip to the mountains? Losing yourself in a great new book? Reserving time for your personal interests will revitalize you and make you a better teacher.

Who will help?

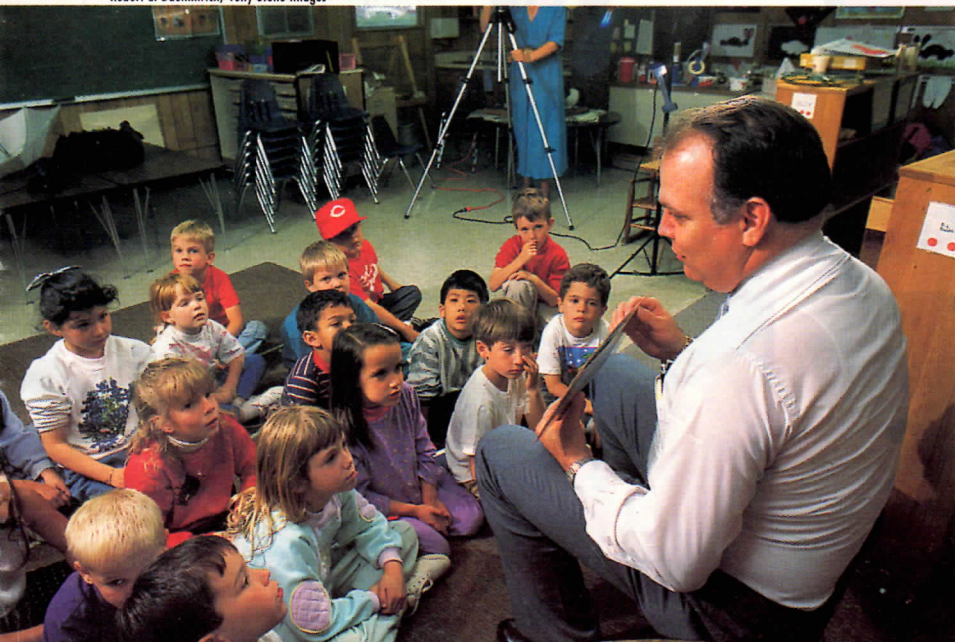
Once I knew what to delegate, I had to decide whom to delegate these tasks to. I knew that my students' parents were the most likely volunteers. But I was hesitant to involve them too much. In the past, involving parents had often resulted in more work for me. I had to figure out how to involve them *effectively*.

Part of my success would depend on learning which jobs were best suited for which parents. You could ask potential volunteers questions like these:

- *Would you like to help in the classroom or at home?*
- *Do you prefer working with kids, doing tasks like cutting and copying, or doing both?*
- *How often would you like to help?*
- *What are your strengths? For example, are you artistic? A great baker? An ace carpenter?*
- *Do you have any special hobbies, interests, or talents you could share with the class?*

Each month I sent home a volunteer calendar that parents could use to sign up. I circled the days that involved working directly with the students so each parent could choose which activity suited him best. When

Robert E. Daemrich/Tony Stone Images



Your students will enjoy the change of pace when guest readers visit.

A Peek into Another Classroom



My colleague, master delegator and K-1 teacher Susan

Kirkwood, takes delegating one step further. She recruits a room parent at the beginning of the year, explaining from the start that the position requires much more than just baking cookies. Her room parent arranges field trips, plans all class parties, and even recruits more volunteers and delegates certain duties to them when needed. "The learning process is a triangle," Susan says. "You have the student, the teacher, and the parent, and all are equal."

Susan says two things keep her volunteers motivated. "First, I try to make them feel comfortable, to eliminate any fear they may have about coming in," she says. "Then, I put them to work. Volunteers need to feel needed."

—Mary Anne Duggan

the calendars were returned, I made one master calendar so I would know when I'd have helpers.

I found that like moms, dads are great volunteers. One dad helped make vegetable soup with my 20 K-1 students. He was harried at the end but promised to come again whenever I needed him.

Keep 'em coming back for more

A simple thank-you was all I needed to give my volunteers to keep them eager and interested. Periodically, I had my students write thank-you letters to our volunteers. I also included these names in my class newsletter and had my students host a thank-you luncheon. I always made a special effort to thank volunteers personally after each visit. For example, "Mrs. Brook, I really appreciated your filing those papers for me. It allowed me to spend extra time with the children in small groups today. Thank you."

Setting a powerful example

Involving parents has benefits other than just saving time. By opening my classroom, I provide my students with a wonderful model of how adults cooperate to reach a goal. Students see that people have individual strengths and that sharing these strengths makes a better result. ✨

Mary Anne Duggan—who has no gray hair—teaches at Aztec Elementary School in Scottsdale, Ariz. You can share your delegating ideas and experiences with her by writing to 13636 N. 100 St., Scottsdale, AZ 85260.