Give It to Someone Busy

Idea In Short

Give important work to the busiest effective person you know. They qualify the request, push back on assumptions and deliver in a fraction of the expected time.

Some People Get Stuff Done

You know these people. Doers. Winners. People who are not just efficient but also effective. When they say they will get it done, you might as well consider it finished. Margaret Mead observed that a small group of thoughtful, committed individuals can change the world, and in fact it is the only thing that ever has. That captures the spirit of the effective doer. These people operate with a reliability that borders on certainty, and their reputation compounds with every delivered promise.

Winners are often super busy, and that is no accident. They are in high demand because everyone wants their time and their judgment. The plea sounds familiar: be on my team, please. Yet not all busy people are the same, and the distinction matters enormously. Activity without achievement is the trap that catches the merely frazzled.

Not All Busy Is the Same

This point has been made a dozen different ways by people smarter than most of us. Isocrates warned us not to mistake activity for achievement. Henry Ford noted that most people get ahead during the time that others waste. Peter Drucker separated management from leadership, stating that management is doing things right while leadership is doing the right things. Drucker also observed that there is nothing so useless as doing efficiently that which should not be done at all. 1

The ways to look busy are endless. Mindless meetings, email jockeying, formatting and reformatting reports, research on vague topics and administering something all consume

hours without producing results. Everyone says they are busy, but the Pareto principle remains alive and well in corporate America. Roughly 20 percent of the people drive 80 percent of the results, and the gap between the two groups widens under pressure.

Give It to Someone Busy

People who are busy and effective can cut through the clutter and get the most important things done. They do not try to do everything. They do what is critical to quality, which means what needs to get done gets done. The Pareto principle explains their leverage, because 80 percent of outputs come from 20 percent of inputs. 2 shows that a small percentage of inputs creates the majority of results. Give the ball to the running back who will reliably reach the end zone.

Qualify the Request

These folks are not suckers. They do not naively say yes to everything. They scope out the problem and put boundaries on it before committing. Before saying yes, they ask whether this is something they should be doing and whether someone is dumping it on them. They want to know what success looks like, what progress exists so far and what is blocking completion. They identify the decision maker and who else counts in the equation. They confirm the deadline, the immediate next steps and where their part ends and the handoff begins.

This qualifying instinct protects them from scope creep. They manage expectations before accepting the work, which is why their commitments carry weight. A yes from an effective doer means something precisely because they say no often and loudly.

Push Back on Assumptions

Too often, we accept the status quo as inevitable. Not true. Just because someone says a task needs to be done a certain way does not make it so. Effective doers challenge assumptions openly. They ask whether a different approach would save time. They question why a step was not already completed. They point out when a key stakeholder's buy-in is missing and the effort will fail without it. They suggest a quick meeting to align and decide.

They are willing to control scope creep because they understand that managing

expectations is the real job. A request that arrives with vague boundaries will expand to fill all available time, and the busy achiever refuses that trap. Pushing back is not rudeness but professionalism.

Solve Problems Through People

Effective doers have contacts and know who to call for help. Often the most intractable problems do not require more work. They require smarter, high-emotional-intelligence work that spans silos. The achiever identifies who has access to the right data and who can offer a favor. They find subject matter experts who can provide the inside story. They reach outside the organization for an outside-in perspective when internal voices echo each other.

Cross-functional issues reward connectors, not lone wolves. The busy achiever builds a network before they need it, so when a problem lands on their desk they can assemble a solution quickly. Their reputation for delivery makes others willing to help, which creates a virtuous cycle.

Like to Win, Like to Be Appreciated

The more you tell them it is difficult and that no one else could do it, the more they want to be the hero. Dare them. Double dare them. They eat this stuff up. The head of McKinsey once said the best consultants were super smart people who were a little insecure. That slight insecurity fuels a drive to prove doubters wrong. Firefighters earn their reputation for a reason: they put out fires.

Recognition amplifies the effect. Effective doers respond to appreciation because it confirms their judgment and effort. A manager who acknowledges delivery publicly reinforces the behavior and deepens the loyalty. The combination of challenge and recognition is the fuel that keeps these performers engaged.

Get Permission to Deliver Less

The time you hand it to this fixer, you are a little desperate. You are willing to accept a painless B-minus result rather than an A with gold lining. Get it done. This plays into the busy person's position. They are allowed to be a little bossy. They are allowed to step on toes and get things done. They question whether a particular assumption is truly a bottleneck and

whether the problem resembles one solved last year.

They do not spend 300 hours finishing the job for you. They spend five hours sketching the answer and giving pointed suggestions. You buy into that, and they invest another 15 hours putting the plan together. You approve, and they spend 25 more hours and declare completion. You accept. They invested 45 hours where you expected 450. Often a semi-answer arrives in one-tenth of the time, because the achiever asks whether a result with 20 percent variability is acceptable and proceeds accordingly.

Prioritize and Iterate

Busy people prioritize. Ask anyone raising three children under six. No Gantt chart captures the reality of a parent on the run. It is all about sorting activities into now, later and never, with a lot landing in the third bucket. Everyone knows the 80/20 rule, and 20 percent of superstars drive 80 percent of revenue and results. It is a non-linear world.

The achiever also iterates using the OODA loop, which stands for observe, orient, decide and act. 3 originated in military aviation and describes a continuous cycle of assessment and action. The classic scenario appears in Top Gun, where a pilot in a dogfight constantly observes, orients, decides and acts faster than the opponent. Busy achievers run the same loop in their work. They know what is important, they prioritize and they act without paralysis. Give them the task and let them cycle.

- 1Peter Drucker's Distinction Between Management And Leadership
- 2The Pareto Principle And How Teams Apply The 80/20 Rule
- 3The OODA Loop Developed By Military Strategist John Boyd

Summary

Busy achievers succeed because they qualify requests, challenge assumptions, solve through people and prioritize relentlessly. They iterate using the OODA loop and accept permission to deliver less. Give them the ball and get out of the way.