Decision Delegation Lab

Reflection guide · grow your team's judgement by handing down the decisions you're still holding

What this is for: this is a quiet piece of thinking about your own habits, not a workshop and not delegation training. You'll list the decisions that still come to you, see honestly where each one sits, and move two or three of them to someone else — with limits that keep the outcome safe. Nobody else needs to be in the room. The point is not to free up your time; it's to grow the judgement of the people around you.

The one line: your team stops growing at the ceiling of the decisions you keep.

BEFORE YOU START — READ THIS ONCE

Nothing here says you're controlling, or that you've done something wrong. Leaders hold decisions for a sound reason: **you stay accountable for how they turn out**, so keeping them feels like protecting the work. The only thing this guide asks you to notice is that the protecting has a cost you didn't choose — **the team's judgement stops developing exactly where your grip begins**. And it isn't about one decision. Every decision you keep is one the team never practises — so the gap widens over the next hundred, not just this one.

· WHEN DO I USE THIS?

Use this when

GOOD FIT

- You're the bottleneck — **the team is waiting on your decisions**
- You keep thinking "they're not ready" about the same decisions
- Someone has stopped growing and you can't quite say why
- You want to develop the team deliberately, not just when there's spare time

USE ANOTHER TOOL

- You're trying to **free up your own time** → that's a workload question; this tool grows the team, and a lighter load is only a side effect
- You need to strengthen your ownership of decisions **you already hold** → **Decision Ownership Drill**
- You need one meeting to produce decisions → **Decision-Driven Meetings**

The test question: "Am I doing this to grow someone, or to get something off my plate?" Both are valid aims — but only the first is this tool. If it's the second, the transfer usually goes to whoever is free rather than whoever would learn most.

© Witmer

PART 1 SURFACE THE GRIP

see what you're holding

1 · WHAT IS THIS REALLY DOING?

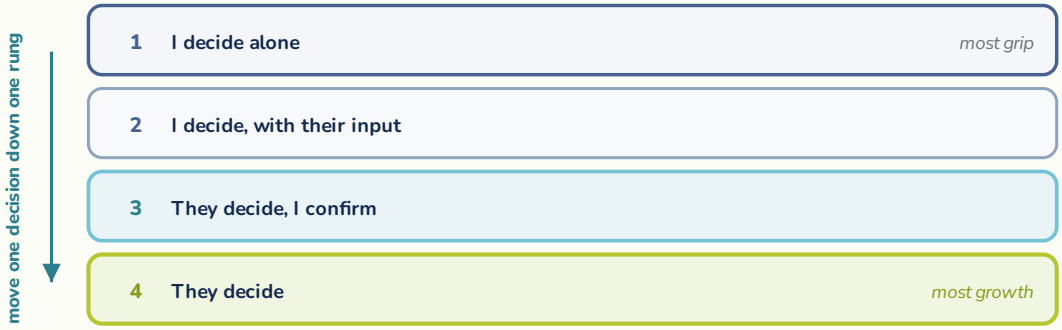
The one idea

THE ONE IDEA

People learn judgement by making decisions, not by watching someone else make them. When you hold a decision — for the sound reason that you're accountable for it — the team never gets the practice, and its judgement stops developing at that line. The team usually isn't under-capable; it's **under-practised, because it hasn't been trusted with the decision**.

THE GRIP-LADDER

where does each decision honestly sit today?



You're not aiming for rung 4 on everything — just one honest rung down, on a decision that matters.

2 · WHAT DO I NEED?

What you'll need

Item	What it is, and when it's used
Your real decision load (core)	The decisions that actually come to you in a normal month — not a job description. Be specific: "which bugs ship", not "quality decisions". Vague categories can't be transferred.
A named person (governing rule)	A decision handed to "the team" goes to no one. Every transfer needs one person's name on it — and ideally the person who would learn most, not the one who is free.
The ladder sheet (core)	Where you place each decision on the rungs, choose which to move, and record the owner, the guardrails and the review date.
Willingness to be surprised	They may decide differently from you. If only your answer is acceptable, you haven't transferred the decision.

© Witmer

3 · HOW DO I SURFACE THE GRIP?

List, then place

Be honest rather than generous with yourself here — the value of the ladder comes entirely from placing decisions where they *actually* sit today.

1 · List the decisions you hold	**5 min**	Write the decisions that come to you in a normal month. *Specific ones: "which bugs ship in the release", "when we escalate to the client", "how the tooling budget is spent".*
2 · Place each on the ladder	**5 min**	From *I decide alone* to *they decide*. *Where it honestly sits today — not where you'd like it to sit, and not where you told someone it sits.* Seeing them clustered near the top is the uncomfortable, useful part.

PART 2 MOVE A RUNG, SAFELY

the transfer, and what protects it

4 · HOW DO I HAND ONE DOWN?

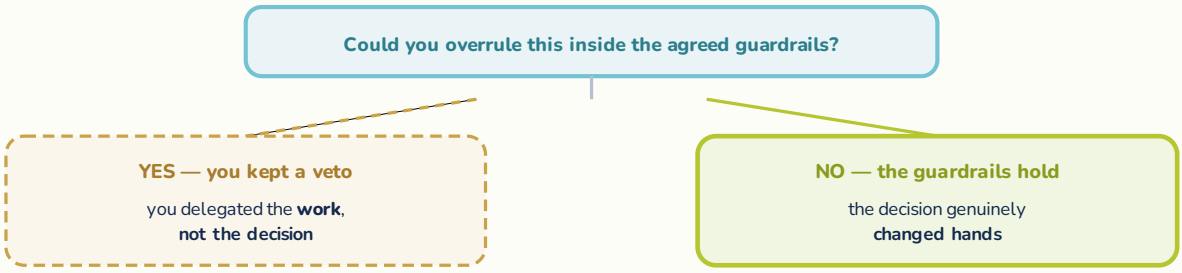
The safe transfer

This is the whole mechanism, and it only works as a pair: **the ladder exposes the grip; the guardrails make letting go possible**. The ladder on its own is just self-awareness. Guardrails on their own are ordinary delegation. Together, the decision genuinely changes hands without the outcome being left unprotected.

3 · Choose two or three to move	**4 min**	Choose decisions that matter. *If the decision has no real consequence, it won't grow judgement.* Name the person who now owns each one.
4 · Set the guardrails	**4 min**	For each: the limits inside which they decide freely (budget, scope), and the triggers that must come to you. *Write them down and say them out loud — unwritten guardrails become silent vetoes.*
5 · Book the review	**2 min**	A date to discuss how the decision went and grow their judgement. *Say plainly that it's to coach, not to take the decision back* — then hold to that, especially if the decision goes badly. **If only your answer is acceptable, you haven't transferred the decision.**

© Witmer

THE TEST THAT SEPARATES A REAL TRANSFER FROM A FAKE ONE



Guardrails make it safe. A silent veto makes it pointless.

5 · WHAT IF IT GOES WRONG?

Common mistakes

What you'll see	The fix
You keep a quiet veto	The main failure. If you can still overrule the decision without breaking the agreed guardrails, you haven't transferred the decision — only the work. Either widen the guardrails or accept the outcome you didn't choose.
You hand down something trivial	A decision nobody minds losing teaches nobody anything. Pick one with real consequences — that's where judgement grows.
The decision goes to "the team"	Then it goes to no one. Name a person — ideally the one who would learn most from it.
The review becomes a takeback	The moment the review is where you re-decide, nothing transferred. Ask how they reached the decision, not whether you'd have made it.
They decide differently and you step in	Different isn't wrong. If it's inside the guardrails, let it stand — the learning is in living with the decision, and yours was never the only workable answer.

Before you close the sheet, check:

- ✓ Every decision on the ladder is where it *actually* sits, not where you'd like it
- ✓ The decisions you moved have real consequences
- ✓ Each has one named person — not a role, not "the team"
- ✓ The guardrails are written down and will be said out loud
- ✓ You could *not* overrule inside those guardrails — so it's a real transfer
- ✓ The review is booked, and it's to coach

© Witmer

6 · HOW DO I MAKE THIS STICK?

Take it back to work

THE HABIT

When a decision lands on you, ask one question before you make it: "is this mine because it has to be, or because it always has been?" If it's the second, you've just found the next rung to move.

Come back to the ladder every month or two. The decisions you moved should have settled with their new owners — and the list of what you still hold should be visibly shorter. That shrinking list is the team's judgement growing.

Appendix a worked example · where this sits

7 · A WORKED EXAMPLE

One decision, moved safely

The situation: a delivery lead is the bottleneck on releases. The team waits on them for the final call on which bugs ship. The lead has said "they're not ready to make that call" for about a year.

Stage	What the lead did
The list	Which bugs ship · when to escalate to the client · how the tooling budget is spent. All three landed on rung 1: *I decide alone*.
The honest look	"They're not ready" had never been tested — nobody had ever been given the decision to be ready *for*.
The move	The bug call moved to rung 3 — a named engineer decides. Real consequences: it affects what customers get.
The guardrails	Decide freely on anything internal or under a day's work. Anything customer-facing, or a fix over a day, comes to the lead. Written down, said out loud.
The review	Two weeks later: "talk me through how you decided." The engineer had shipped one bug the lead would have held. Inside the guardrails — so it stood.

The lesson, not stated but felt: the hard part wasn't the guardrails or the review — it was letting the one decision stand that the lead would have made differently. That is the moment the transfer became real, and the moment the engineer's judgement started growing.

© Witmer

8 · WHERE DOES THIS FIT?

Where this sits in the Gym

Three tools sit near this one and are easy to confuse. The boundary is what each is trying to grow:

Tool	What it's for
Decision Delegation Lab	**Grow another person's judgement** by transferring decisions you hold. (This tool.)
Decision Ownership Drill	**Strengthen your ownership** of decisions that are already yours. One grows capability; this one grows accountability.
Decision-Driven Meetings	**Make a meeting produce decisions.** About one meeting's output, not who owns a decision from now on.

The line worth holding: this is a Learn-and-Improve tool, not a workload tool. If your aim is a lighter in-tray, you'll transfer the easy decisions and the team will learn nothing. The output here is **a more capable team** — the lighter in-tray arrives later, as a consequence.

© Witmer