

# Never hand off work without a checklist

More than ever, work is collaborative. It's not enough to do your work correctly and efficiently; you must also be sure that other members of the team or project-based work group can be trusted to finish what you started.

Where do things go wrong when it comes to collaborative work? At the handoff. It's not because someone is incompetent or lazy; it's due to poor communication.

In his book, *The Checklist Manifesto*, Atul Gawande describes how hospital staff who follow a checklist save more lives than most medical "miracle drugs" or procedures.

*The bottom line:* We all need checklists. They help us communicate, clarify, be more specific, and avoid inadvertently leaving something out. Being "expert" at your work means you probably need a checklist more than anyone, since you may take for granted that others know what you know.

Try using or adapting this "handoff checklist" to your work. When you hand off work, ask these questions of the person taking accountability for the completion of the work:

- ✓ What do you understand the priorities to be?
- ✓ What concerns or ideas do you have that have not been mentioned?
- ✓ What are your key next steps, and when do you plan to accomplish them?
- ✓ What do you need from me in order to be successful?
- ✓ Are there any key contingencies we should plan for now?
- ✓ When will we next check-in on progress/issues?
- ✓ Who else needs to know our plans, and how will we communicate them?

The time it takes to go through the checklist? One to five minutes. Time saved by going through the checklist? Immeasurable.

— Adapted from "The Secret to Ensuring Follow-Through," Peter Bregman, *Harvard Business Review* blog.