

# Completed Staff Work

The doctrine of completed staff work is a doctrine of any well-run office.

Completed staff work is the study of a problem and provision of a solution by a staff person in such form that all that remains to be done by the boss is to give approval or disapproval of the completed staff action. The concept, completed action, is emphasized because the more difficult a problem is, the more there is a tendency to present the problem to the boss in a piecemeal fashion. It is the duty of a staff person to work out the details. The individual should not consult with the boss in the determination of these details, no matter perplexing they may be. The individual may and should consult other staff people. The product, whether it involves the pronouncement of a new policy or affects an established one, should be worked out in finished form before presentation to the boss for decision.

The impulse to ask the boss what to do recurs more often to an inexperienced staff person when the problem is difficult. It is accompanied by a feeling of mental frustration. It is so easy to ask the boss what to do, and it appears so easy for the boss to answer. This impulse must be resisted. A staff person will succumb to it only if the individual does not know his/her job. It is the individual's job to advise the boss what ought to be done, not to ask what ought to be done. **The boss needs answers not questions.** The staff's job is to study, write and rewrite until a single proposed action evolves—the best one of all considered. The boss merely approves or disapproves.

The boss should not be worried with long explanations and memoranda. Writing a memorandum to the boss does not constitute completed staff work, but writing a memorandum for the boss to send to someone else does. The staff person's views should be placed before the boss in finished form so that the boss can make them his/her views simply by signing the document. In most instances completed staff work results in a single document prepared for the signature of the boss, without accompanying comment. If the proper result is achieved, the boss will usually recognize it at once. If further comment or explanation is needed, the boss will ask for it.

The doctrine of completed staff work does not preclude a rough draft, but the rough draft must not be a half-baked item. It must be complete in every respect that it lacks the requisite number of copies and need not be a clean copy. But a rough draft must not be used as an excuse for shifting to the boss the burden of formulating the action.

The completed staff work concept may result in more work for the staff person, but it results in more freedom for the boss. This is as it should be. Further, it accomplishes two things;

1. The boss is protected from half-baked ideas, voluminous memoranda and immature oral presentments.
2. The staff person who has a real idea to sell is enabled more readily to find a market.

When a staff person has finished the individual's completed staff work, the final test is this:

**If you were the boss, would you be willing to sign the paper you have prepared and stake your professional reputation on its being right?**

If the answer is in the negative, take it back and work it over, because it is not yet completed staff work.