

Time Management On-line Training - Part 2

ESTABLISHING PRIORITIES

What are your job priorities? How do we decipher between the vital few and the trivial many? We will look at setting short and long term priorities; how to decide between multiple urgent and important tasks ensuring promises are kept and objectives met.

What is a priority? We all have priorities whether or not we carry them out and complete them. A priority is a task that **MUST** be carried out within a given time period. This chapter will show you how to identify your long-term goals, identify & rank your priorities etc.

LONG TERM PRIORITIES

Let's look at some of your priorities, starting with a long term view.

In addition to knowing what is important to you at the moment, you may also have specific goals and objectives in mind, for your personal as well as work life. 'Goals' are where you want to be at some point in the future - two years, five years, ten years and 'objectives' are what you need to do to get yourself further towards your goal(s). If you like, goals and objectives are the specifics or building blocks which ultimately satisfy your life values.

Do you have a goal? Maybe not at the moment - but you might have one in the future and decisions you make about what to do next should be influenced by the goal you have.

Action Point Annual Strategies

Use the form below and write down what you would like to achieve over the next 12 months. Don't confine yourself at the moment with what you **HAVE** to achieve - write down what you'd **LIKE** to achieve. Make your items realistic - we would all like to win the national lottery but it's probably more realistic that you'll enrol in Spanish classes and go to South America for a holiday.

Targeting your Long Term Priorities

The key to achieving a priority is to have a **TARGET** for completion. What we mean by this is a date by which the task must be completed. Targets are important because you have the opportunity to measure your productivity whilst attempting your priority. Targets will motivate you to succeed and you will adjust your behaviour if you have a target. For example if your favourite sporting team were playing a friendly match you might go along to support. If they were playing in a league match you may be more inclined to go. If they were playing to win the league or avoid relegation from the league you'd be even more motivated to go. If they were in the final of the major cup for the sport you'd do anything to obtain a ticket. The point is; each situation has its own target and with each target comes a different level of motivation to attend. By giving yourself a time target for tasks you are more motivated to achieve your priorities.

PLANNING YOUR PRIORITIES

What must you do in the next month? What are your key priorities? Our priorities may be daily, weekly or monthly or a combination of all three. You will have key tasks that you must carry out every month; these will be regular tasks that you must complete for your job, e.g. expenses, reports etc. Or they may be one off projects, new tasks, new clients etc. Because there will be a problem if these are not completed you can now classify them as your monthly priorities.

Action point: Write down all of the priorities you have to complete in the next 4 weeks. Break them down into Regular Priorities and Irregular Priorities.

This month's priorities are:

Regular Priorities

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Irregular Priorities

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Once you have completed the list ask yourself the following questions.

From my Regular Priorities	Your answer
1. How many of these priorities have you a written schedule for? Either by wall chart, diary, Outlook calendar etc	
2. How many of these priorities have you a standard operating procedure?	
3. How many of these priorities actually get completed every month?	
4. How many of these priorities get completed at the last moment every month?	
5. How many of these priorities do you have to chase up other people to ensure they get completed?	
6. How many of these priorities get missed because of other work issues?	
7. How many of these priorities do you struggle to complete each month?	

If you answered All or Most to questions 1, 2 and 3 you should give yourself a pat on the back for managing your mid-term priorities well. If you answered All or Most to questions 4-8 it looks like you need to refocus on your mid-term priorities.

CREATE YOUR ACTION PLAN/SETTING GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Once you have clarified ‘what’s important’ and ‘what stops you’, it is important to establish an action plan that will enable you to become ‘truly effective’.

Below is an example of an action plan to increase a manager’s ability to delegate more effectively. The major development area is broken down into manageable ‘Action steps’ and, once the key people have been identified, a time frame established for completion of each one.

Example:

Development area	Breakdown of Action steps needed for each development area	Key people	Time frame for completion start/finish
Delegate more. My lack of delegation prevents me from planning team strategies.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Identify which tasks I can delegate 2. Assess which member of staff could complete tasks 3. Hold meeting emphasising timings and checkpoints 4. Resist the temptation to take over 	Staff	1 st Nov 5 th Nov 8 th Nov Ongoing

Action point: Looking at your time stealers, write down an action plan for each of the development areas identified.

PRIORITISING DAILY

However great your long or mid-term plans are you will only be effective if you manage to complete them on time. Every long term priority will eventually become a daily priority and this is the key to effective time management ‘What shall I do today that will enable me to achieve my overall goals and objectives?’

This next section is packed with tips and ideas on how to manage your daily planning so that you are able to complete your Important and Urgent tasks on time and on schedule.

SETTING PRIORITIES

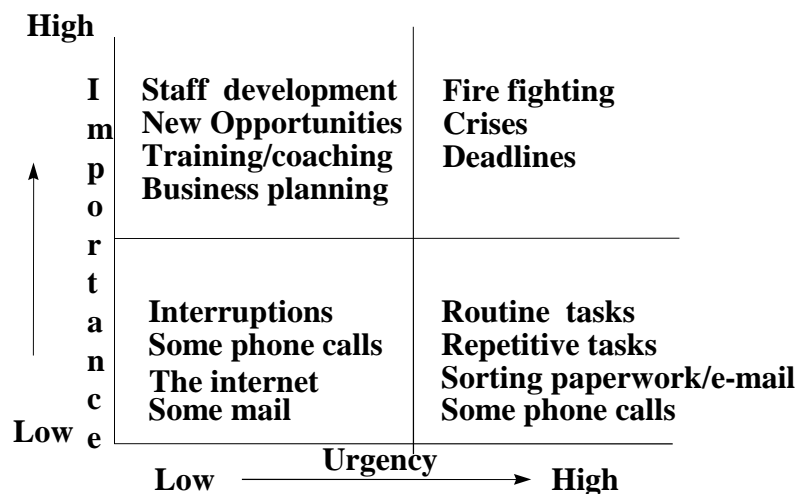
One of the most effective ways of determining priorities is to grade tasks by their **Urgency and Importance** to your goals and objectives.

Important tasks are ones that will have a substantial impact on your objectives e.g. monthly reports, training, strategy meetings, sales targets etc. Another way of looking at important tasks are those that, if not completed will have a substantial negative consequence for you, your objectives, your department, your clients, in fact anyone who is the direct recipient of the task. People can also be classified as important as most organisations have a hierarchy of position, i.e. director, manager, supervisor etc.

Urgent tasks are ones that have a definite deadline for completion be they quarterly, monthly, weekly, daily etc. These can be time critical processes, crises, promises made to clients and colleagues for deadlines etc.

Don’t fall into the trap of confusing urgent with important; your colleague who rushes over to you, panicking, asking you to drop everything and help them out of a crisis may sound urgent and you may have an urge to do just as he requests. But under questioning he may not need your help (if they need your help at all!!) until tomorrow. Similarly, just because you had all week to complete your progress report (but you hadn’t analysed the steps needed to complete it) you didn’t see it as urgent so you decided to start it on Friday. You then quickly realised how much time it would take and now panic because you’re not going to finish it on time.

If we look at the diagram on the opposite page we can see how some of the tasks we perform can be categorised if we assign each task we perform as either high or low in Urgency and Importance.



All tasks in the top right hand box are both high in Importance and Urgency - we would call these **A** priority tasks. Every day is filled with **A** priority tasks and these are the ones that make us both

efficient and effective as we are spending our time on tasks that make a significant impact on our effectiveness.

Tasks in the top left will move into the **A** priority box eventually but these would be classified as **B** priority tasks and ones we can schedule for another time if we have too many **A** priority tasks to complete.

Tasks in the bottom right box form many of the routine tasks we would perform regularly. They take up our time but we could still manage if they were not completed. These tasks could be delegated or 'processed managed'. This means finding ways to streamline the tasks so that they don't take up so much time. Ways of doing this would be to set up checklists for routine tasks; complete standard operating procedures to maximise efficiency etc. We would call these **C** priorities.

Action Point

If you need to write a Checklist or Standard Operating Procedure ask your self these questions:

- What are we trying to achieve?
- What standards will we find acceptable for the overall task?
- What aspects of the task need to be covered in the procedure?
- How will we describe the steps needed to achieve the tasks?
- Who will carry out the tasks?
- How will we ensure that it is carried out successfully and consistently?

Time Tip

An example of a Standard Operating Procedure form is included at the end of this chapter to allow you to start constructing your own procedures. Use it to start the process of streamlining and standardising your regular operations.

Tasks in the bottom left box never make it onto your task list as things to complete but are the things we do that waste our time. Let's not even classify them as tasks - the more appropriate word is activity, as they may be things that are spur of the moment or impromptu actions that prop up during the day. The problem with these items is that they are usually 'fun' or more fun than what we are doing right now or need to do. People also fall into this sector - people who constantly waste our time with idle gossip, non-essential conversation or send us useless (but fun) items via the internet. We call these **D** priorities: **D** for Dump or Delete - the best thing to do with them. Unfortunately, these are activities that are sometimes the hardest to break because they usually contain some form of distraction or diversion away from more tedious (but necessary tasks). You may have the type of personality that actively looks for distractions during your day

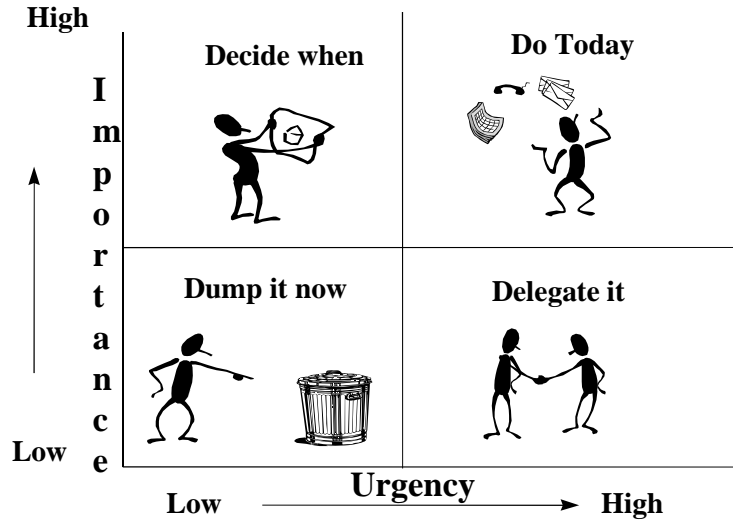
To be really effective we must:

1. Complete as many **A** priorities as we can - 'Do them now'
2. Schedule **B** tasks so that we can complete them as they become **A** priorities or before if possible - 'Decide when to do them'
3. Minimise the time taken for tasks in Low Importance - High urgency box 'Delegate and process' and finally;
4. Avoid actions, tasks and people that waste our time 'Dump them'

If we plan our tasks in this way we will be making effective decisions how we use our time effectively. This is a quick way of instantly being able to make a decision on tasks that you have to plan and tasks that come up during the day. Let's assume your boss asks you to prepare a report by the end of the week, and you already have an overflowing workload and you're going to struggle to complete what you have to do now - How would you respond? We'll cover this scenario later when we examine Assertiveness but it would be much easier to deal with your boss's request if you had a

list of tasks planned and prioritised for the day that you could show and negotiate around rather than just cave in and say ‘Yes, I’ll do it’.

In order to deal with the activities which are in each zone we need to apply some control over the workload. A simple management decision making tool has been summarised as the 4-Ds:



Action point: Using the categories explained above, make a list of each task you perform for each one. In the space below write down tasks you perform under the specific categories.

High Importance - High Urgency

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High Importance - Low Urgency

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Low Importance - High Urgency

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Low Importance - Low Urgency

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Time tips

You might find the following questions useful when determining priorities:

1. “Do I have to do this work now/today/at all?”
2. “What’s the most important item on my task list?”
3. “Is this task the most important use of my time right now?”
4. “Does this task move me closer to my overall objectives?”
5. “If I do this work what would I have to delay or abandon?”
6. “Who else could do this work?”
7. “What would happen if no one did this work?”
8. “How does this work relate to my key tasks and objectives?”
9. “Who else is involved or affected by this task and how important are they to me?”

TIME MANAGEMENT EXERCISE

HOW EFFECTIVE ARE YOU?

Try this short exercise and see how effective you are: You have been away for the last two weeks on holiday in Australia. You had a great time and this is the first day back at the office. After speaking with your p.a. about what has happened while you were away you have made a list of the things you need to do. As you look over the unscheduled items on your list, you estimate the amount of time each item will take. Prioritise the items on the list based on its urgency and importance and then note how you would approach them, e.g.

	Priority	Action
You'd like to have lunch with one of the other managers (1-2 hours).		
You have been asked to prepare your operating budget for the next financial year which starts in two months (2-3 days).		
Your "in tray" has now grown to twice its normal size (1 hour).		
One of your project team was sick last week and hadn't informed anyone that he was not able to complete his work. You are now behind on your schedule and you need to speak to him today to sort out the problem. (30 mins).		
Your team leader, who was responsible for most of the team training and planning of the work schedules, has been promoted while you were away and you need to find another one today from your team. (2 hours).		
You need to finish off the client proposal and email it to one of the other managers so they have it ready for the client meeting next Wednesday (1 hour).		
The productivity for your team reached a record level last week and you feel that they deserve some form of recognition. (30 mins).		
You have several items of correspondence which your P.A. says are urgent (1 hour).		
You'd like to catch up on the industry journals which are piled up on your desk (30 mins).		
You need to prepare a one hour team training session for next month (2 hours).		
One of your project team won the lottery last Saturday and has phoned from Jamaica saying that she isn't coming back.		
You have arranged an interview for tomorrow but the applicant has called to say that they will only be able to see you today before going away on holiday for a month. (2 hours).		

Summary of the main points of this session

- Set clear and realistic goals and objectives.
- In addition to knowing what is important to you at the moment, you may also have specific goals and objectives in mind.
- Planning is important because it gives you more control in your life
- Commit your priorities to an action plan. By writing down what we wish to achieve it gives us more motivation to succeed.
- Daily priorities are the vital factors to ensure our objectives are met regularly and consistently.
- Know the difference between important and urgent tasks so that you are able to make quick priority decisions throughout the day.
- Get into the habit of looking forward through your diary to see what is coming up; which days that are already committed, and what amount of spare time you have to complete your priority tasks. Make sure you create enough spare time to complete things you need to finish.
- What gets on your daily or weekly list should be prioritised so that you are working to full effectiveness. Grade tasks by their Importance and Urgency to decide what the best use of your time is.

Exercise

What have you learned from this session? Write down below your action points.

I will commit myself to the points of action to make significant improvements to my time management prioritising

1.
2.
3.
4.
5.