

Setting Priorities

Time Management

Setting priorities is one of the most important time management skills. You need to learn how *urgent* and *important* tasks control your decisions about what do to with your time and ultimately how satisfied you are with your work life. Consider this: **Have you ever worked your tail off, completed every single thing on your “to do” list, but at the end of the day still felt unfulfilled?** That is because you did everything that was urgent and demanded your attention in the moment but you did not do what was important – the things that would make a difference in the long-term.

**Directions:** Read the Setting priorities guidelines below and then complete your Things to Do Today task list. After completing the exercise, ask yourself, What insights did you gain? How might you make better use of your time?

Setting Priorities:

1. A, B, C, D, E your tasks for a certain day – write them down in order of priority. You can use the “Things to do today…” sheet below to list them out for a particular day in the future. Assign one of the following codes to the left of each task that you listed to accomplish.
	1. Essential Task; must be done.
	2. Should be done; if enough time.
	3. Low-priority task
	4. Delegate
	5. Eliminate
2. Give priority to any problem that is making you ineffective as a manager.
3. Sometimes it is OK to delay a problem or task, giving it a lower priority.
4. Sometimes you can group tasks into a meaningful sequence and accomplish them together.
5. If something has been on your list for a long time, either do it or forget it.
6. Use the Chuck It Technique. Can you set aside a block of time to at least start to prioritize it by breaking it down into smaller tasks or set aside a 2-hour block of time on certain days to work on a project or priority?
7. Avoid oscillating back and forth from one priority item to another. Select your top priorities and make an action plan along with a definitive time frame to get them completed.
8. A priority list of about 7 tasks is ideal.

Things to do today……

Date: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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| --- | --- | --- |
| Priority  | Task  | Finished |
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Time Management Matrix

From *First Things First* by Stephen Covey

We live in a time pressured world where it is common to have multiple overlapping commitments that all require immediate attention now. Urgency is no longer reserved for special occasions, it is an everyday occurrences. Missing deadlines is not the path to advancement or even good job reviews. So how can one manage the ﬂood of responsibilities, do excellent work and maintain a positive frame of mind? The Covey time management grid is an effective method for organizing priorities. As you can see from the grid below, there are four quadrants organized by urgency and importance.

  ***Quadrant IV*** is for those activities that yield little is any value. These are activities that are often used for taking a break from time pressured and important activities.

Many people ﬁnd that most of their activities fall into quadrant I and III. Quadrant II is often under used. Yet, Quadrant II is exceptionally important because one must work both tactically and strategically at the same time. Finding ways to expand Quadrant II activities is a common outcome from using this grid.

Using The Grid has many applications, two are suggested here. The ﬁrst and most obvious use of the grid is take your current ‘to-do’ list and sort all the activities into the appropriate quadrant. Then, assess the amount of time you have to accomplish the lists and, if necessary, reallocate activities. The second approach is a one week assessment strategy. Make six copies of the grid (see below) and use one grid for each day of the week, listing all activities and time spent. At the end of the week, Combine the ﬁve individual day data onto one summary grid (number 6) and calculate the percent of time in each quadrant. Then evaluate how well your time is spent and whether your work load needs to be reorganized.

A fundamental question when using this time management grid is not “How can I do things faster?’ but rather “Is what I am doing important?” If what you are doing is not important, then teaching you to do it more quickly is the equivalent of teaching you to fail faster.

Therefore, start out with a focus on discovering what is truly important to you. Once you have defined what is important, the focus narrows in on how to do what is important in a more balanced and efficient manner.

The Bottom Line: **Do Important Things First!**

Covey’s Time Management Grid

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Quadrant 1: Urgent & Important** | **Quadrant II: Not Urgent & Important** |
| **Quadrant III: Urgent & Not Important** | **Quadrant IV: Not Urgent & Not Important**  |

