

Chapter 16

Prioritize

The person who fails to prioritize runs an endless treadmill of mediocrity. This chapter explains various types and methods of prioritization, and how to maximize the effectiveness of your prioritization techniques.

You're unemployed, it's 9am, and you have a job interview today at 2pm. Your todo list has the following, which is too much to do by 2pm:

- Have the car's oil changed
- Take a shower
- Brush up on industry knowledge
- Write an email to Mom
- Fill out job application for today's interview
- Ask Bill for inside knowledge of the interviewer
- Write a computer program to impress the interviewer
- Walk the dog at 1pm

Obviously, this day should revolve around your 2pm job interview. That's what just might change your life. Right away, you

know that changing the car's oil and writing an email to Mom contribute nothing to the interview, and they can safely be done tomorrow, so lower their priority. The dog also doesn't effect the interview, so why not walk him when you get home. If he can't hold it, that's nothing you can't clean up.

So now you're left with five tasks that impact the interview. It's pretty obvious that you're not going to write an impressive computer program in 5 hours, but if you try to write it, the other four items won't get done, so although it's regrettable, it's best to eliminate the computer program.

You're down to four tasks, and they're all vital for today's interview. Those four tasks are doable in the remaining time, so those are what you'll do.

You've just prioritized. You've made the most of your scarce time. It's not rocket science, but it's amazing how many people fail to prioritize.

■ What If You Hadn't Prioritized?

Imagine if you hadn't prioritized. Presumably, you'd have tried to do everything, and would have failed. Worst case, you'd have spent 5 hours writing but not completing your computer program, and would arrive unshowered, unknowledgeable, and without the job application that shows you're a go-getter. You'd be disadvantaged at the interview, and recessions aren't a good time to be disadvantaged.

Perhaps you'd have emailed Mom, taken out the dog, had the car's oil changed, but at the cost of your discussion with Bill. Once again, you're at a disadvantage.

■ If Everything's Important, Nothing's Important

As the old saying goes, "If everything's important, nothing's important!" If the boss tells you that today he wants you to fix

the computer network problem that has completely shut down the business, and today he also wants you to implement a cost saving program to cut the purchase of ball point pens in half, what's the boss saying about the network problem?

The boss is telling you the network problem strangling the business is no more important than saving five bucks a day on ball point pens. If everything's important, nothing's important.

Those who don't prioritize fail. We **MUST** prioritize. The only remaining question is, how does one prioritize? Read on...

■ Covey's Combination Prioritization

In "Seven Habits of Highly Effective People", Stephen Covey discusses the four combinations of importance and urgency in prioritization:

- Important and urgent
- Important and non-urgent
- Non-important and urgent
- Non-important and non-urgent.

In this context, urgent means "must be done quickly". Important means "furthers our business goals", or in a personal context, "furthers my personal goals."

Obviously, you can ignore everything that's non-important. If it doesn't further your business or personal goals, it needn't be done. Ever. Of course, if the boss demands it be done, this becomes a personal goal in order to keep your job. But if it truly doesn't contribute to the business, you might be able to convince him that it's unnecessary.

Here's an example of **non-important and urgent**. You own a custom software business. Alice Weathersford calls, demanding a price to create a website for her. She **MUST** have this price by end of business today. She's made six similar calls in the past three years, and every time she turned you down on the price, saying she wasn't willing to pay more than four hundred dollars