Self-Management: Setting Priorities

The Urgent/Important Matrix

Urgent _and_ important

Things with clear consequences for not taking immediate action.

Important but _not_ urgent

Things without a set end point that are easy to procrastinate about.

Urgent but _not_ important

Things that need to get done but don't necessarily require much skill.

Neither urgent nor important

Distractions that are best left as rewards after progress is made.

SMART Goal Setting

Goals are easier to approach when they are specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, and timely.

Specific. In order for you to achieve a goal, you must be very clear about what exactly you want.

Measurable. All goals need some form of objective measuring system so that you can stay on track and become motivated when you enjoy the sweet taste of quantifiable progress.

Achievable. Setting big goals is great, but setting unrealistic goals will just demotivate you. A good goal is one that challenges but not so much that you have no chance of accomplishing it.

Realistic. Realistic means _do-able_, not _easy_. It means that the skills needed to do the work are already available. Devise goals that require some effort but won't set the stage for failure.

Timely. Without setting deadlines for your goals you have no real compelling reason to start working on them. Putting an end point on your goal gives you a clear target to work towards.

Eat the Frog

If the first thing you do each morning is eat a frog, you will have the satisfaction of knowing that it is the worst thing that is going to happen all day long! Your frog is the task that will have the greatest impact on achieving your goals… the task you are most likely to procrastinate starting.

If you have to eat a frog, it doesn't pay to stare at it for very long. The key to reaching high levels of productivity is for you to develop the habit of tackling your major task before anything else.

If you have to eat two frogs, eat the ugliest one first. This is another way of saying that if you have two important tasks before you, start with the biggest, hardest, and most pressing task first.

The Glass Jar

The glass jar represents the time you have each day. Each thing that goes in it represents an activity with a priority relative to its size.

Rocks. Plan each day around your most important tasks that will propel you toward achieving your goals. These represent important but not urgent tasks that move you toward your goals.

Pebbles. Next, fill in the space between the rocks with pebbles. These represent tasks that are both urgent and important, but contribute less to the big important goals.

Sand. Now add sand to your jar. In other words, schedule urgent but not important tasks after the important tasks.

Water. Finally, pour water into your jar. Water represents trivial time-wasting activities that are neither important nor urgent and take you away from working toward your goals.

The PAT Approach

Purpose. What is the purpose of the meeting? State it in one short sentence. This helps people evaluate if they need to be there. It will also help you build the agenda and determine if the meeting was successful.

Agenda. This is the backbone of the meeting. It should be created well in advance of the meeting, sent to all participants and observers, and be used during the meeting to keep things on track.

Timeframe. How long will the meeting be? Typically meetings should not exceed one hour. If the meeting needs to be longer be sure to include breaks. Otherwise divide it into multiple sessions.