

Prioritizing What to Do Now vs. What to Do Later



You have got so much on your plate, how do you get it all done? It's overwhelming to step into your office some days as you are faced with a list that never ends. Yet, at the end of the day if you have not worked on your 'real' work, your true priorities, it feels like you got nothing done. You leave more stressed and agitated. What you're experiencing is a result of neglecting your priorities because you spent the day addressing all the emergencies and the knock-it-out quickly action items that bombard you.

What are your priorities?

Before learning how to prioritize, you need to understand what a priority is. Simply put, they are:

- Things that move you ahead professionally
- Things that affect the business bottom-line
- Things that are within your power to accomplish.

Many times, these objectives are spelled out for you by your job roles and responsibilities. Other times, you simply 'know' what you must do.

Does urgent mean priority?

Of course, emergency issues can bombard you throughout the day. And you do have to address them. Some of these may be true priorities. But be on your guard, some may just be easy things to knock out, and may not affect your true objectives. The easy tasks that can seem so urgent can leave you feeling more stressed and frustrated. Why is this? Because you did not get the 'real' priority work done.

Follow these simple principles to prioritize your work:

1. Capture all the things that need to get done



Write them down or record them in one place. You may believe that you are smart enough to remember all that you have to do, but why waste mental energy on mundane things that can be written down elsewhere?

2. Separate To-Do Now items from To-Do Later items

If you keep all of your tasks together, then you have an unbalanced picture of what you really must do. They can't all get done today. Many people keep their list or stack in front of them and wonder why it is hard to get started in the first place. When you set the things aside to do later, you are acknowledging that they still need to get done. You're also setting aside things that are waiting for someone to get back to you about (you may also call these things – pending or 'on hold' items). They are truly on hold until you get the work or the item back from that person.

3. Keep a short list of priorities for each day

In any given day, you'll have about three things that really must get done. Be aware of the times during the day in which your energy level is at its peak. Do priority work at these times so you're fresh for difficult tasks that may require your full concentration. It's best to schedule appointments with yourself to get these done. For complex priority tasks, break them down into manageable chunks.

4. Schedule your To-Do Later items.

Put your to-do later items on your calendar for the near future in the days ahead. Long-term items should be scheduled by assigning dates to them. Put them on your calendar allowing enough time to make sure you meet your deadlines.

Having a complete list of all of your tasks gives you a realistic idea of how much work you have. Prioritizing them gives you the confidence and plan you need to get them done.

