

Making Your Priorities a Priority

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As a society, we are busier now more than ever. We have household, marital, parental, auto, personal financial, church, health, hobby, community, and any other categorical duties that must be performed on a daily basis. This does not include the thing you spend 8 – 14 hours a day on; your business. There simply is not enough time to get everything done, that you want to get done. In fact, you **will not** get everything done. I have found the best approach is to make your priorities a priority. See what I did with the title there. Smart, huh? I can't help you with your non-work duties, but I can tell you that your business priorities are definable and doable. If you break your daily tasks down into items that are important versus just the urgent items, you will be able to focus on the priorities of your business, and find more time for all of the other things previously mentioned.

Importance versus urgency is definitely not a new concept, but one that we get away from very quickly. What usually happens is that from time-to-time we can rationalize that everything is important. We can create scenarios that justify spending half the afternoon shooting the breeze with our colleagues. After all, I could possibly form a relationship that gets me the “home run” that sets me up for life. You could, but the more likely is that you are wasting valuable time that should be spent growing your business.

Let's take a look at **Ava's Catering Company** to see how certain tasks in her business fall into important and urgent categories.

Important, Urgent

- There is a catering event tonight and a **key employee** has called out sick. This is important to have full personnel at this event and is urgent.
- A bid for a very desirable catering event needs to be submitted by the end of this week. This is a quality event and has a **quick deadline**. There is a tendency to ignore something like this, because the effort needed is heavy and you just say “we'll get it next time”.

Important, not Urgent

- **Tax planning** that can assist Ava in saving a lot of money. Unfortunately, many small business owners will be put this off until tax time, when it is too late, but it is urgent.
- Spending time at food service trade shows and other **networking** events that can assist in developing relationships with potential clients, other vendors, anyone else that can offer qualified referrals.

Not Important, Urgent

- An employee storming into the office to discuss the day's **drama**. Although it is important to empathize with employees, or anyone else, it is even more important to schedule a block of time to create resolutions and not let this be an everyday event.
- Ava receives certain **phone calls** and **emails** that seem to need immediate reaction. If this is a customer with a specific issue take it, but usually it is just someone else's emergency. That call or email can be addressed at the end of the day.

Not Important, Not Urgent

- Ava enjoys the **data entry** of customers into her database, because it is simple and gives a break from the decision making that is required of her. Although a break is good from time-to-time, this is something that could be easily delegated or outsourced and free up several hours a week.
- **Facebook** – Let me clarify. Facebook is a great marketing tool, it's free, and becoming increasingly popular. However, just updating the status of your business, can easily send you into a four-hour research session to see "how that guy that was in the office next to yours, at that place you used to work, seven years ago, is doing". This is fun, but IT IS NOT PRODUCTIVE. Yes, in theory he could become a customer, but be honest, he's not. You just want to see how many kids he has. Update your business information and go back to work.

Take a look at the previous tasks. Where is most of your time spent? Remember the important ones result in revenue and the others result in stress. Take the time to identify the important tasks and spend your energy on them. The others need to be minimized, delegated, or just plain ignored.

The TSBDC also offers free and confidential one-on-one counseling for existing and start up small businesses. To register for go to www.tsbdc.org.

Other contact information - Phone (615) 230-4780 www.volstate.edu/tsbdc

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