

effective environments

*designing innovative solutions for success*



## Priorities: Your Tool for Authoring Life

In an era characterized by busy schedules and frequent complaints of “not enough time,” it’s useful to remember that each of us has but one job: to author our lives.

In performing this job, we are always on the lookout for tools that make a difference. One customized tool you have at your disposal — a practice which costs you nothing and will give you a powerful edge — is **creating and working from priorities**.

Priorities are your plan for accomplishment. They focus your actions and direct your resources.

Truly effective priorities grow out of your inspiration and vision. Most plans fail because they are dry, boring and (even when implemented) unfulfilling. Often, they are derived from lists of things we think we “should” do, rather than from a choice or a sense of purpose.

How, then, do you go about creating the kind of priorities that energize and empower you?

**What is really important?** Inspiring priorities begin with identifying what is really important to you. Consider your next year, five years, or more, and ask yourself, “What are the key accomplishments I see? What results are so worthwhile that every action taken toward fulfilling them brings its own sense of satisfaction?”

Include all aspects of life in this inquiry. Your year would be wasted, for example, if your business flourished but your family withered. Similarly, if you published your book but neglected your health, the year would not be one of fulfillment.

Identifying what is really important gives you a place to stand in making choices about what actions you will take each month, each week and each day.

**Are you playing a winning game?** Even if you are certain that you are working on what is really important to you, you may lose heart if you don’t have a sense that your goals are reachable. The time-honored axiom “Don’t bite off more than you can chew” is sensible but often forgotten. To ensure that you are set up to win, we recommend that you create — and work from — monthly and weekly priorities.

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***Only you can author life, and it’s your only job.***

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**Defining priorities.** Remember, a “priority” is *your* plan for accomplishment — not an emergency or the latest squeaky wheel. Keep the definition in mind! A priority is consciously chosen by you as

the next accomplishment or set of actions in the fulfillment of a long-term objective.

**Creating priorities — a matter of choice.** Three simple steps allow you to choose priorities that will lead to a real sense of accomplishment in your life:

1. Pick your time frame (for example, this week, this month, this quarter).
2. Pick the areas of life where you'd like to have a sense of satisfaction (for example, your business, your relationships, your well-being).
3. Answer the question, "What do-able accomplishment in each area would give me a sense of satisfaction?" In some cases, simply making a decision or creating a plan will be enough. Other times, you may take on organizing a team for action, completing a project, or achieving some other interim measurable result. The choice is yours.

**What to expect.** You'll have immediate benefits from this process of creating priorities! Among the most significant:

- You generate peace of mind — indeed, peace of heart — when you choose what you **WILL** do and, by inference, what you **WILL NOT** do in a particular time period.
- You provide a focus for your energies, your commitment, your attention and intention, and this focus will have you be even more effective at all you do.
- As you turn large objectives into manageable pieces, you give yourself the experience of accomplishment **RIGHT NOW**, rather than waiting until the entire result is achieved. You also rid yourself of the "all or nothing" mentality — that this accomplishment "should" have been completed yesterday or that you cannot make progress until you do the whole thing at once.
- You experience yourself as the author of your life. Rather than being buffeted by thoughts of what you "should" be doing, you are assured that you are designing your life consistent with your dreams, forwarding the very commitments you have called out as the most important.

**What next?** Work smarter, not harder. Be strategic in choosing priorities to focus yourself and achieve what you want. As you make this practice a regular part of your life, you gain mastery in being effective, meeting challenges and living with grace and ease.

### **Working from Priorities: A Practice for Personal Growth**

#### **What can you learn?**

The practice of designing and working from priorities provides a different kind of learning experience on two distinct levels: First, a routine of identifying priorities and planning your time with an eye toward their accomplishment is powerful in its own right — it becomes a practice for making life "do-able" and for producing results reliably and consistently.

Second, the process gains power through regular evaluation, observing what worked and what didn't work. Take stock of successes and misses, and adjust both your focus and your actions on the basis of what you learn. In this respect, working from priorities becomes a *dynamic* process for designing a life that works in *every* aspect.

## How do you learn?

Each week and each month, compare your actual results (how life goes) with the stated accomplishments you wrote (how you said it would go.) Ask yourself what lessons are available from this review. Would a different plan or choice of actions have produced a more effective result? Could you have made a request of someone that would have made life easier? Might a new practice or system make a difference for you? View this as a learning process, rather than as a reason for negative self-assessment, and use the lessons learned to continue to design your life for satisfaction and accomplishment.

**Dealing with obstacles.** By observing the relationship between what you said you would accomplish and what actually happened, it is possible to:

- gain insight into the kinds of support YOU need to be most effective,
- identify obstacles you encounter regularly and develop ways to deal with them, and
- learn to manage yourself in situations where you tend to go off track.

**Ongoing inspiration.** Practice writing priorities that are calculated to hold your interest. How you phrase your priorities affects your enthusiasm about achieving them. In turn, you'll become masterful at designing priorities that more nearly match your vision and that give you a profound sense of accomplishment and being on track. The key is in creating priorities that are truly achievable and that inspire you to go beyond your preconceived limits of your own abilities.

Priorities have more power when they are stated as outcomes you intend to produce, rather than as a list of actions "to do." Indeed, there may be many ways you can fulfill a particular priority. When it is stated as an *outcome*, it may be accomplished in more than one fashion.

**Providing what's missing.** Most importantly, train yourself to engage with this process as an opportunity to learn — to identify what is missing in your environment and to provide it for yourself — so that your ability to fulfill your dreams grows ever stronger. You may discover, for example, that additional support (a new team member, a coach, a sounding board, partner or set of consistent reminders) is needed to launch or implement a key project. As you practice "chunking down" sizable projects into manageable pieces, you can increase your ability to get into action and to move those projects forward. Moreover, every time you SAY at the outset what you will accomplish this week or this month — and THEN make it happen — you gain a sense of confidence and mastery. You enhance your quality of life moment by moment.

## Priorities and Practices

The relationship between your priorities and your environment is a dynamic one — as your environment changes, your priorities will alter as well. By the same token, new priorities may demand new support from your environment.

After creating your priorities, consider what practices or habits will make you more reliably effective in delivering on them. For **any** accomplishment you undertake, you may find that the following steps increase the likelihood of your success:

1. Before writing priorities for the week or the month, take a few minutes to complete any old priorities. Review them, acknowledge what was done and what was not, savor all accomplishments, identify any lessons learned. Then, deliberately put them behind you.
2. Resist any temptation to write priorities for more than one week or one month at a time. The

purpose of writing priorities is to identify the NEXT areas of focus, given what is so in your life RIGHT NOW. As life moves forward, you stand in a new place each week and each month to do this design work.

3. For every priority you write, identify the key actions to take to ensure that you accomplish what you set out to do. Put those actions on your master action manager and schedule them.
4. When appropriate, schedule a specific time to work on a particular priority. Make an appointment with yourself and keep it!
5. Keep your priorities in mind as you plan each day. Include in your daily plan at least one action that will move you forward in completing a particular priority.
6. Take time to clearly envision yourself being successful in completing your priorities. What you can imagine, you can achieve!

### **Conclusion**

Remember that this process is intended to empower you. Your outcomes are feedback and grist for your next invention — they are NOT a reason to invalidate yourself or the process.

And, finally, stay flexible. Life is a journey rather than a destination. Your object is to travel with grace, ease and fun — and to learn along the way.

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