

Planning and Prioritizing

*Your To-Do List Should Help You Do More Than Just Get Things Done.
It Should Reflect Your Values and Priorities.*

Do you frequently get to the end of your day and feel unsatisfied because you feel like you didn't accomplish anything?

Now, unless you truly spent the day staring at the wall, you probably accomplished more than you think you did. But maybe you didn't get as much billable work done as you had hoped, or your house still looks like a tornado hit it, or the project that's been hanging over your head is *still* hanging over your head. Long story short, you've got as much to do tomorrow as you did today.

The key to both getting more done and *feeling* like you're getting more done is planning. And to plan your day—or better, your week—nothing beats putting pen to paper and writing it down.

Daily to-do lists and, for bigger projects, Action Plans, can make your days—and your accomplishments at the end of them—feel more concrete and can help you maximize your efficiency. A great time to plan your day is the night before, once you've wound down. Spending ten minutes planning at the end of a busy day can help you start tomorrow focused and energized.

Whether you keep your day planner in a spiral notebook or electronically is up to you. Just make sure it's handy, portable, and easy-to-use.

Before you plot out tomorrow's to-do list, however, examine your priorities. Sure, there are client meetings and reports that need to be written. And laundry and grocery shopping. And teacher conferences and soccer practices.

These are facts of life and must be attended to. But, if your days are filled with nothing but "have to dos," you will quickly become resentful and unfulfilled—if you aren't already.

Take a tip from management guru Stephen Covey, author of "The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People," and don't just prioritize what's on your schedule. *Schedule your priorities.*

To see what we mean, take a minute and write down what you need to do tomorrow. It's probably a lot of tasks and action items for work, home, or family. But did you include goal-setting? Or lunch with a friend? A long walk in your neighborhood? Or brainstorming with colleagues?

If you didn't, it's time to re-examine how you plan your time—making time not just for the tasks you *must* get done, but also those things you *want* to get done.

To do that, it's helpful to examine Covey's Time Management Matrix:

	Urgent	Not Urgent
Important	Quadrant I Activities: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Crises• Pressing problems• Deadline-driven projects	Quadrant II Activities: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Prevention, maintenance• Relationship building• Recognizing new opportunities• Planning, recreation

Not Important	Quadrant III Activities: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interruptions, some calls • Some mail, some reports • Some meetings • Proximate pressing matters • Popular activities 	Quadrant IV Activities: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trivia, busy work • Some mail • Some phone calls • Time wasters • Pleasant activities
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Take a look at the matrix and see where most of your day is spent. If you're like most people, you probably spend quite a bit of time in Quadrants I, III, and IV—sitting in meetings, answering e-mail, filing, responding to crises—and very little time in Quadrant II. However, it's those activities from Quadrant II, the Important/Not Urgent activities, that most enrich our business and personal lives.

Take a moment to consider these two questions:

- 1) What one thing could you do (that you aren't doing now) that if you did on a regular basis, would make a tremendous positive difference in your personal life?
- 2) What one thing in your business or professional life would bring similar results?

Now, think back about the last week. Did you spend *any* time doing those things, whether it was “strategic planning” or “date with spouse”? If not, why not? Chances are you could have found the time for those things if you had scheduled them.

In order to make time for these priorities, Covey suggests a *weekly* planning session, one that includes the “have-to-dos” as well as the Important/Not Urgent items. Your schedule should reflect what you value, whether it's a daily workout, time visiting with friends and family, or brainstorming for new business opportunities.

So, go ahead, schedule coffee with your co-worker. Make time for gardening. Create the space, and the opportunity, to explore your creativity, deepen your relationships, and expand your horizons.

Now is the time to make your to-do lists work for you, not the other way around.