



# To Do Lists

## Your first step in beating work overload

### The Tyranny of the Urgent: Improve Time Utilisation

We cannot manage time. It ticks on, incessantly and irreversibly. And it is limited - there are only 24 hours in a day. All we can manage is how we utilize this time. Since we cannot increase the supply of time, all we can do to balance our lives is manage demand. The starting point is to set priorities. Prioritization is the key to winning back the control of our time.

Prioritization seems like a simple enough exercise. Don't we know what is important to us? Won't we automatically focus on it? The answer to both questions is "non"! Urgency engulfs the leader; yet the most urgent task is not always the most important. One of the measures of a leader is the ability to distinguish the important from the urgent and to refuse to be tyrannized by short-term urgencies, missing what is really important to long-term growth and development.

+	<b>A</b> Important Urgent	<b>B</b> Important Not Urgent
IMPORANT	<b>C</b> Not Important Urgent	<b>D</b> Not Important Not Urgent
-	+	-
	URGENT	

The table above identifies tasks according to two criteria: *Important* and *Urgent*:

- "A" tasks are both important and urgent, they require priority attention.
- "B" tasks are important but not urgent. They risk to be procrastinated: they should require attention.
- "C" tasks are not important but urgent; they represent a danger because they can attract too much attention.
- "D" tasks are not important and not urgent. They can be forgotten.

## Preparing a To-Do List

Do you feel overwhelmed by the amount of work you have to do? Do you face a constant barrage of looming deadlines? And do you sometimes just forget to do something important, so that people have to chase you to get work done?

All these are symptoms of not keeping a proper "To-Do List".

To-Do Lists are prioritized lists of all tasks that you need to carry out. They list everything that you have to do, with the most important tasks at the top of the list, and the least important tasks at the bottom. Starting to keep a To-Do List effectively is often the first personal productivity time management breakthrough that people make.

By keeping a To-Do List, you make sure that you capture all the tasks you have to complete in one place.

This is essential if you're not going to forget things. And by prioritizing work, you plan the order in which you'll do things, so you can tell what needs your immediate attention, and what you can quietly forget about until much later. This is essential if you're going to beat work overload. Without To-Do List, you'll seem dizzy, unfocused and unreliable to the people around you. With To-Do Lists, you'll be much better organized and much more reliable.

Whilst To-Do Lists are very simple, they are also extremely powerful, both as a method of organizing yourself and as a way of reducing stress. Often problems may seem overwhelming or you may have a seemingly huge number of demands on your time. This may leave you feeling out of control, and overburdened with work.

*Take the worksheet "Time Management - prioritized To-Do List" and follow the guidelines to set up your To-Do list.*

You will then have a precise plan that you can use to eliminate the problems you face. You will be able to tackle these in order of importance. This allows you to separate important jobs from the many time-consuming trivial ones.

## Using To-Do Lists

Different people use To-Do lists in different ways in different situations. If you are in a sales-type role, a good way of motivating yourself is to keep your list relatively short and aim to complete it every day.

In an operational role, or if tasks are large or dependent on too many other people, then it may be better to keep one list and "chip away" at it.

It may be that you carry unimportant tasks from one To-Do List to the next. You may not be able to complete some very low priority tasks for several months. Only worry about this if you need to - if you are running up against a deadline for them, raise their priority.

