

# 8 Ways to Effectively Prioritize the Things on Your To-Do List by Tony Jeary

Change your habits to become proactive—instead of reactive—in your approach to priorities... and see how much time you gain.

Priorities are things that are important—I know that, you know that. But a lot of us are guilty of the habit of *reacting* to the urgent things on—and off—our to-do list, rather than *responding* to the important ones.

Think about this: Important activities should be of high priority because they are the things that contribute most significantly to our objectives. They have more long-term impact, and they should help us the most in reaching our goals. Urgent activities are usually more short-term in nature and may or may not relate to our big-picture objectives, and they do not usually make significant contributions. Instead, by pressuring us daily, they make endless demands on our time.

There is a constant tension between the urgent and the important. And because the important things seldom need to be done today—and the urgent almost always do—there is a critical need to learn how to set proper priorities so that our visions, goals and desires can be met more effectively.

Don't prioritize based on who gave you the work; fit it based on its importance and urgency for the big picture. Most people don't take this time, the time to prioritize. They are usually reactive, so make a concerted effort to be proactive.

How much time could you gain by changing your habits—by more effectively prioritizing? Here are 8 time-gaining tips that you can apply to everyday tasks:

- 1. Create lists—a lot.** Prioritized notes and lists help with focus and multitasking.
- 2. Set priorities during your daily planning.** Eliminate or minimize unproductive to-do items from your daily list to make room for the productive ones.
- 3. Learn when your high-energy time is.** Scheduling your priority work for when you have the most energy gains minutes through more effective work.
- 4. Early in the day, sort email** and quickly categorize each piece appropriately—now, future, trash. Because each piece is only addressed once, you gain time throughout the day.
- 5. Request simplified emails.** When appropriate, request that people send you prioritized emails that spell out the actions required of you with clear bullet points, not long narratives. Set the example yourself by sending only efficient, bullet-pointed emails.
- 6. Write down your objectives before you return phone calls** to gain time through quicker, more effective communication.

**7. Prioritize your reading** by learning to skim industry newsletters, articles and books. Then read only what really gives you value.

**8. Create a written agenda and follow it for every meeting.** If you're not the meeting organizer, help guide a long, rambling meeting to some actionable objectives.