



InterVision Group, LLC

Take the Time to Prioritize

By Debby Stone, JD, CPCC

We are all frequently overwhelmed by all of the things we need to do in our daily lives. It is easy to feel confused by all of the tasks that seem to require our attention. Generally, it is impossible to complete all of the items on our personal and professional “to do” lists.

However, by spending the time to make a clear list of each of the tasks that confront you and then prioritizing each item on the list, it is possible to avoid becoming paralyzed by the seemingly overwhelming tasks of any given day. Simply putting items on a list often helps clarify each task and its true importance as well as to clear that item out of your head. In addition, while it will take a few minutes to make the list and prioritize it, these minutes are time well spent in terms of efficiency and organization.

Once your list is made, the next step is to thoughtfully categorize each item on the list into “must do’s”, “should do’s” and “want to do’s”. It is particularly important to separate the “must do’s” from the “should do’s”. For example, a must do might be the memo your boss requested you complete. On the other hand, volunteering to help your child’s teacher with a class party might be a should do or a want to do rather than a must do. Base your categorization of each task on your true needs and values. Does it serve something you hold as important or is it something that you think you should be doing?

After categorizing your list, it is time to prioritize the tasks and determine which items come first, second, third, etc. Look at the time sensitivity of each task and then assign it a priority. Be realistic about this. It may seem that the memo for your boss must be done today, but if the real deadline is several days away, then it may not need to be a number one priority today.

As you move through your lists, also note whether any of the tasks can be performed by someone else. Perhaps your son or daughter could do the laundry or your assistant could write up a draft of that memo. If you can delegate the task, do it. This will free up more of your time.

Finally, decide which tasks on the list you will actually do and when you will do them. You may think that you will do them all at some point in time, but in actuality, you will likely only do those tasks that you must do or that you are truly committed to doing. It is important to understand what you will commit to and then eliminate other things from the list. For example, you may think you should go through that box of old family photos and put them in albums, but if you do not want to do it, and it is not absolutely necessary, it may never get done.

At first glance, this process may seem to create extra work. However, if you implement it, you will find that you may actually eliminate a number of tasks from your to do list and that you will feel more committed to those that remain. In addition, analyzing your tasks and then categorizing and prioritizing them will give you the opportunity to see where you might be able to simplify your life by reducing the number of "should's." You may also be able to delegate or eliminate tasks so that your number of "musts" will shrink too. During this process, you will be able to create more time for the things you want to do and become more efficient at working through all of the things that really require your attention.

Self Quiz - Categorizing and Prioritizing Your "To Do" List:

1. Is there a deadline for this task? When is it?
2. What will happen if I do not do this today? At all?
3. How do I feel about this task? Excited? Filled with dread? Obligated?
4. Why is this item on my list?
5. Can anyone else do this?
6. Realistically, when will I do this?
7. Am I really committed to getting this done?