

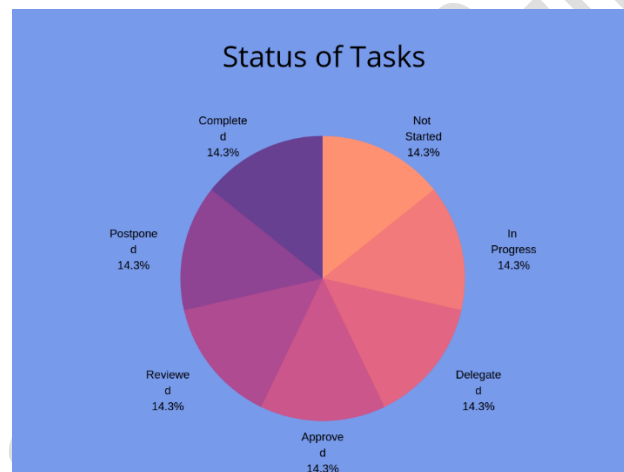
Prioritization of Tasks – LinkedIn Article Discussion

A few days ago, I shared my most recent blog post regarding the evolution of time management and how its connection to philosophy and psychology has a daily impact in our business lives. I then shared information on several current methods used to assist us in our quest to effectively manage our time and complete goals.

Today's discussion will delve deeper into how to successfully determine the priority of your daily to-do's and current projects in business. We will look at what a task truly is, the levels of activity associated with tasks, and their life cycle. We will then discuss how to organize and prioritize your tasks using a variety of common methods. And finally, I will share some helpful tips and tricks found throughout the industry to help you with the unending quest of finding more time in your day.

What is Task Management?

A task is any duty required to assist in the completion of a goal. As such, this means that a task therefore has a life-cycle – including a beginning, middle, and end. This also indicates that there is a necessary element of management that must be included within each task.

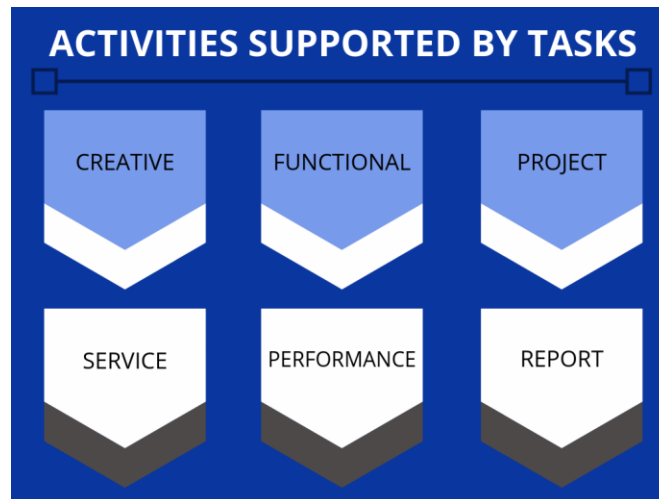


In the above pie chart, I've included several of the more common statuses one can apply during the life-cycle of a task. These are the ones I typically use myself, although depending on the complexity of a task, there are several others I can add as well.

One thing to remember is that what works best for one person might not work best for another. The best advice I can give is to use these (or others more suitable to your business) as you see fit. If a more complicated variety of statuses works for you, use it. If a simpler one is your style, use that too. It all comes down to personal preference (although when applied to a group project, using these is very helpful to everyone involved).

The other side of task management pertains to the various activities associated with a task. Not all are used at once and sometimes, certain activities might occur simultaneously. But in the graph below, I will give an overall summary of the types of activities one may come across, depending on the project.

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Prioritization of Tasks

The hardest part we face when trying to organize anything is determining what is most important. How do you decide what takes priority over something else? What happens when you decide to work on one thing, only to realize that the other item you chose to skip over was needed before this task was started?

Prioritization of each task before starting your work is paramount. Looking at each item individually and assessing them one-by-one is what is required before you can truly begin working on your goals. But first, you need to know what your tasks are.

PRIORITIZATION MATRIX		
	Do Now	Do Later
Not Crucial	Crucial and Do Now (immediately)	Crucial but Do Later (do soon)
Crucial	Not Crucial but Do Now (delegate)	Uncategorized (delete)

The Prioritization Matrix is designed to help you determine which tasks and/or projects are most important. This is especially useful in smaller projects. However, when handling larger projects or tasks, this matrix might not be as useful. Therefore, we will now examine the variety of methods that have been designed over the years. Some may be familiar, and others might not be due to their more recent creation.

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Creating Useful To-Do Lists You Will Use

When you have your own business, you learn very quickly what works best for your working style. Each person is different with how they approach something – and that’s good news for the rest of us. It means we gain access to other ways of doing things that we hadn’t thought of before. And sometimes we find those other ways – although never all of them – work better for us than first believed.

Because I am a very analytical person, writing a list is something I’ve been doing for as long as I can remember. It gets the ideas out of my head and down onto paper. It gives me a chance to critically look at the list and determine if something is truly needed right now or can be postponed for a while.

And yet, sometimes even I can become overwhelmed at the sheer number of items on that list. So, when I came across [Brian Tracy](#) (productivity leader and author of *Getting Things Done (GTD)*) I adopted his process to creating to-do lists like a sponge with water.

Essentially, he states that utilizing to-do lists can “increase productivity and output by 25% or more from the first day that you begin working consistently from a list.” And that is the catch – creating a regular routine of using them to your benefit.

The Master List covers everything you need to do at some point in the future (including those with fixed deadlines). This is your principal catch-all list where the random thoughts and specific ideas are put into one permanent place. It is from here where you can and will build your remaining to-do lists.

Those lists could be anything – monthly, weekly, daily, quarterly, project 1 – the type of list does not matter. What matters is teaching yourself to use them regularly until it becomes second-nature. On an individual level, I use the recommended monthly, weekly, and daily to-do lists. I’ve also created others that are specific to each area of my business.

Once you fill in the Master List, you can begin the process of prioritizing each task. First, determine if each task is *Urgent* or *Important*:

		Urgent Checklist	Important Checklist
		<ul style="list-style-type: none">• It is overdue• It is due soon• It demands immediate attention• The consequences of not doing it are immediate	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• It will affect many projects or people if not completed• Other tasks depend on its completion• It contributes a lot of value• Low effort - high results (80-20 Principle)
		Important	Not Important
Urgent	Urgent	Urgent and Important (immediately)	Important but Not Urgent (do later)
	Not Urgent	Urgent but Not Important (delegate)	Not Important and Not Urgent (delete it)

I would caution you at this point: the checklists included in the graphic might look different based on your needs, but these are the typical questions or issues espoused within the industry. Looking at each

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individual task against these lists is recommended, although not required. How you choose to classify *urgent* and *important* should always reflect your business's needs.

Common Prioritizing Methods Used Today

1. Frog Analogy (Brian Tracy)
“When you have two frogs to eat, eat the ugliest one first.”
 - Things you don't want to do and don't need to do
 - Things you don't want to do but need to do
 - Things you want to do but need to do
 - Things you want to do but don't need to do
2. ABCDE Method
 - Give every task a letter from (A → E), with A being the highest priority
 - Every task given a letter A, give it a number dictating the order you'll do in
 - Repeat for B – E
 - You are not allowed to start on a new letter until the previous letter is fully complete
3. Basic Rank Method
 - Score each task 1 – 10 (1 = most important)
4. Rank Priorities Based on Level
 - High Priority = do it now
 - Medium Priority = do it soon
 - Low Priority = do at leisure
5. Grouping
 - Critical, Moderate, High Priority, Optional Priority
6. Eisenhower Method

The Eisenhower Method

- Priority Level 1 - Important and Urgent
- Priority Level 2 - Not Important but Urgent
- Priority Level 3 - Important but Not Urgent
- Priority Level 4 - Not Important and Not Urgent

Important = stepping stones to my next goal
Urgent = if not completed right away will negatively impact something (or someone) else

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7. Bubble Sort Technique

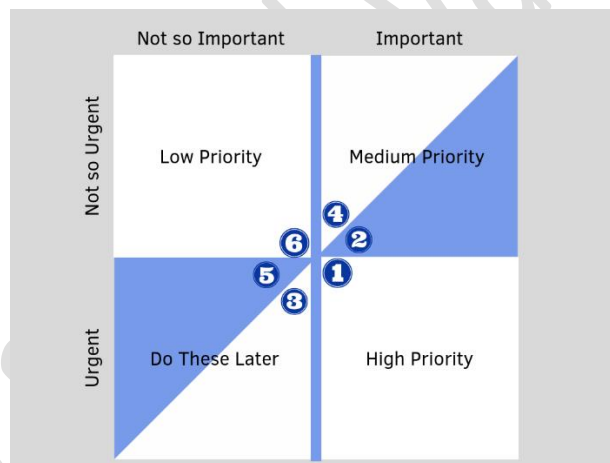
- List out your task in vertical form
- Compare the top two (2) tasks to determine which should have higher priority
- If the lower is more important, swap their positions
- Repeat for all tasks
 - Know when to stop

8. The Worth Your Time Test

- Am I the right person?
- Is this the right time?
- Do I have enough information?
 - If any question is answered with “no,” do not do it

9. MoScoW Technique

- Must do = mandatory
- Should do = high priority
- Could do = preferred but not necessary
- Would do = can be postponed



Tips You Can Use Today

The above methods can be used in a variety of ways for many different tasks. They can be used at the office and even while at home (especially if you work from home). If you aren't familiar with using one of these techniques, give them a try. See what feels natural to you – there is no point in using something that doesn't help you in the long run. If one doesn't work, try another. Keep trying different ones (and even create your own) until you find something you feel you can honestly work with.

I will end this discussion with several tips and tricks I've come across over the years. I also happen to use many of the above-mentioned methods (and a few that aren't) in my own business and personal life:

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1. Master List

- Be sure to include short- and long-term projects
- Write down the daily tasks you would like to complete in a day
- Write down the daily tasks you realistically believe you can complete in a day
 - Compare and adjust the two lists to what fits you and your business
- Identify due dates for as many as possible
 - Make sure to always keep an eye on due dates so things do not get lost or misplaced
 - Add in a buffer for each task
 - Give yourself early completion deadlines so you aren't working to the wire
 - Set reminders for deadlines
- Break down larger tasks into manageable bite-sized pieces

2. Questions to ask yourself when setting priorities:

- What are the consequences for me and others if the task is not done?
- What has not been done but should have been done?
- What needs to be done immediately?
- When should you start working on a task?
- If you need the help, is there anyone available to do that?
 - If the answer is no (within your company), would you benefit from using an outside source to help complete aspects of your list?
- How will you handle interruptions?
 - Are there any that could be potentially disruptive to what you are currently doing?

3. Questions to ask while tracking your progress:

- Do I need to update my Master List?
- What can I do to automate some tasks?
- What tasks am I missing?
- What was the outcome when a task was completed?
- Which tasks are continually being postponed? Why?
- Which tasks have been completed in full?
- Which tasks should not have been on the list?
- Have I conducted a Lessons Learned Analysis on my most recent project?

As you can see, there are many ways to handle a large task list. Sure, in the beginning it will be a bit overwhelming – simply by just staring at the full Master List alone. But once you begin to evaluate each task and determine where they stand on the *Urgent* and *Important* spectrum, things begin to get easier.

It will take some time before a routine settles in but once it does, you will begin to see how much you are accomplishing. And everyone needs a good nudge of accomplishment in their lives – even if we don't always admit it to ourselves.