



TenStep Supplemental Paper

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On Your Fingertips

Even though identifying what is most important in one's job sounds easy, selecting priorities is not. It should be a systematic and thoughtful process.

Ten tips for setting priorities

Prioritizing is a personal process. However, the following suggestions can help in identifying commitments:

- 1. Be serious.** Prioritizing is serious business. If not done correctly, it could be disastrous. Careers have been scuttled for less.
- 2. Be honest.** Cosmetic choices are the bane of goal setting. "Phony priorities" are only false promises.
- 3. Be realistic.** Establishing unreasonable/unattainable priorities is only establishing failure.
- 4. Be specific.** Vague or ambiguous priorities foster confusion, not commitment.
- 5. Be flexible.** Priority should be what is most important, not what is most comfortable.
- 6. Be focused.** Not everything can be a priority. The whole idea is to focus on something.
- 7. Be selective.** Not selecting enough areas for emphasis is as bad as picking too many. Five or fewer priorities are usually considered best.
- 8. Write them down.** Writing down priorities is an act of commitment in itself. Until it is put in writing, it's just talk.
- 9. Word them carefully.** Language is powerful. It can motivate and evoke strong emotional reactions. How the priorities are phrased determines the response.
- 10. Make your own.** Letting others define priorities is a cardinal sin. Prioritizing is not a matter of plebiscite. Individual's priorities should support and mesh with organizational priorities.

Setting priorities is the first step to successful leadership. Effective leaders in all fields know what their real priorities are, keep them straight despite distractions and live them every day on the job.

To stay focused and to keep priorities continuously relevant, many successful leaders surround themselves with daily reminders. They note their top priorities on their calendar, daily planner or palm pilot. They stick post-it note reminders in special places around their homes and offices and in their cars where they cannot miss them.

Priorities are easy to forget or ignore in the press of daily activities. However, good leaders simply refuse to be distracted.



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Repeating positive self-affirmations at the beginning and ending of each day defines the context during the day. Priority-conscious leaders habitually question everything they do.

- Does this fit with my priorities?
- Is this the best use of my time?
- Is what I'm doing moving me toward achieving my goals?

Another important step towards living your priorities is to empower assistants and co-workers. Of course, the most important way that effective leaders live their priorities is by using them as a screen that can filter all decisions about use of their time and energy and allocation of resources.

If there is a secret to success, it may simply be defining priorities, internalizing them and practicing them every day on the job. Real priorities are what you do, not just what you say.