

Planning and Organizing Excellence

Planning and organizing? Isn't this just another phrase for time management? Aren't we, as front-line leaders, expected to effectively manage our time and the time of our employees? The answer is...yes and no. Yes, front-line leaders are indeed expected to effectively manage both their time and their team's time. No, planning and organizing is not just another phrase for time management.

Unfortunately, most managers attempt to manage time itself. But by only managing your time, you end up doing a lot of stuff you do not need to do, even though you can't find the "time" to fit it into your schedule. Time management has become a catch-all phrase for how to squeeze more and more stuff (activities) into our already overloaded schedules.

Effective front-line leaders manage their priorities then let their priorities manage their time. They focus on achieving their priorities—the stuff that really matters, such as achieving the organization's purpose, building and reinforcing a great culture and growing great people. They do not get caught in the trap of trying to cram more things into their already filled calendars. Rather, their calendars are filled with the things that matter—achieving great results!

"A carelessly planned project will take three times longer to complete than expected; a carefully planned project will take only twice as long."

—Old Planning Proverb

Planning vs. Organizing

Planning means to set priorities. As a manager, your top priority in planning the work of your team is to...well...set the priorities of your team. It is your responsibility to determine and communicate those priorities that will best reach your company's goals. It is therefore imperative you set the right priorities, for the right reasons, at the right time.

As a leader, you must surround your team with the appropriate environment to be successful. Be it the right tools, processes, or reporting relationships, your role is to ensure the structure of the work leads toward fulfillment of the team goals.

So which one comes first—planning or organizing? If you guessed organizing, think again. How can you effectively create structure that ensures the right results unless you first set the right priorities? Planning comes first.

Here is a fun activity that will illustrate the importance of properly setting priorities. I call it the Priorities Worksheet. It is a four-box model with two key elements (below).

Across the top axis you see the word "Urgent" with both a high and low rating. The vertical axis is the word "Important" also with a high and low rating.

Rank in order which box you would do first, second, third, then fourth at work. Write your answer for that box right within the box. Then brainstorm 2-3 activities that fall within each of the four boxes. Take three minutes to complete this activity before you move into the next section.

What Are Your Priorities?

Like most leaders, you probably ranked the upper left-hand box, the one that is both important and urgent, as your No. 1. That is correct. If something is both important and urgent, you had better spend time on it right away.

Likewise, you probably ranked the lower right-hand box, the one that is not important or urgent, as No. 4. If so, you are right again. If something is neither important nor urgent, you should not be spending time on it.

The challenge then becomes which to rank as No. 2: the upper right-hand box that is important but not urgent, or the lower left-hand box that is urgent but not important?

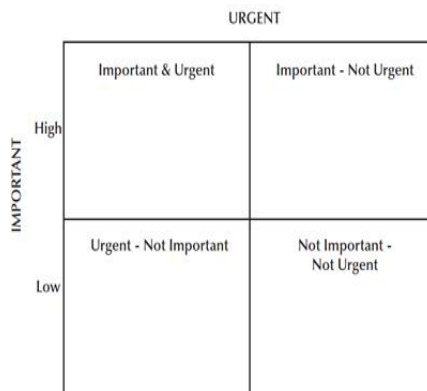
Most managers rank the urgent but not important box as No. 2, because, whatever the activity, it is a time-sensitive item or it needs to be completed before moving into the upper right-hand box of something important but not urgent. But, if you ranked the lower left-hand box as your No. 2, you are wrong.

Here is why: By placing urgency ahead of importance, you have just elevated the clock over the priority. Now all I would have to do as your boss or colleague is place a fast deadline on what I want you to do and you will do it—regardless of how important it is.



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		URGENT	
		Important & Urgent	Important - Not Urgent
IMPORTANT	High	1	2
	Low	Urgent - Not Important 3	Not Important - Not Urgent 4

The proper rank ordering for each box is shown on this page (above).

Where Do You Live?

It is important to assess where you tend to live within this worksheet and why.

Box No. 1: Important and Urgent: Reactive Managers. Managers who live in Box No. 1 are reactive managers. They tend to see everything as an emergency. Always in a perpetual state of stress, these manager tend to spread the stress to others. They are often characterized by a “need everything yesterday” approach, since they seldom take time to plan ahead and prioritize.

Box No. 2: Important—Not Urgent: Proactive Managers. Managers who tend to live in Box No. 2 are proactive and typically far more productive, less stressed, and more in control of themselves and their environment. Realizing that a few minutes of planning now saves hours of headaches and wasted energy in the future, they fiercely fight for “head time” and “quiet time” to properly set priorities for themselves and their employees.

Although they still have some Box No. 1 items, proactive managers have far fewer urgent activities than others. They are therefore less stressed out and so are the people around them...including their family! All effective leaders live here in Box No. 2!

Box No. 3: Urgent—Not Important: Clock Managers. Managers who live in Box No. 3 are run by the clock—not by priorities. They fool themselves into thinking that activity equals productivity. They fail to grasp that a little bit of planning reduces headaches, backaches, and stress for themselves and others.

Box No. 4: Not Urgent—Not Important: Fired Managers. Managers who live here are quickly demoted or replaced.

Priority Maximization

To maximize your ability to set the right priorities, you minimize the impact of Box No. 1 items while simultaneously increasing the size of your Box No. 2.

To become less of a reactive manager, ask yourself:

Does this really belong here or does it actually belong in another box?

Does this really help us achieve great results or is it just something we have always done?

Does this really need to be done now? If yes to all the above, what is the fastest way to complete it?

To become a more proactive leader:

Schedule a block of time every day for planning and nothing but planning—and stick to it!

Effectively delegate career-enriching tasks to your staff.

Discuss with your boss how best to shift low essentials to other employees.

Decide today to set priorities in all you do—for today, tomorrow, next week, and even into next year.