

Learn the ABC's of PRIORITIZING:

WHY Prioritizing Feels So Challenging!

HOW You Can Develop This Most Essential Skill



One-on-One Coaching for faculty and graduate students who live with the constant pressure of high expectations and need confidence and practical tools to meet these expectations AND to dial back an active mind that compromises recharging time.

PRIORITIZE! I GET IT...

Can You Relate to Sabrina?

Sabrina's Situation:

Sabrina has a meeting in 1 hour she's not prepared for. She also needs to grade and return to her students an assignment from 2 weeks ago that's already late. She needs to make progress on her revise and resubmit article to meet the journal's very hard deadline. She's away on Friday for an all-day workshop so she won't have that afternoon to catch-up. Never mind pending class prep, which never seems to be adequate. Plus, Sabrina promised her family not to spend all weekend working. Then her colleague steps into her office to share the latest gossip about a leadership shake-up in the department.

Sabrina's Thinking:

How can I possibly prioritize my commitments today? I have more to do than I can possibly do. I'm tired from staying up late working last night. It's hard to focus. If everything's already late, what's the point?

Sabrina's Action:

So, Sabrina invites her colleague to join her in a walk to a nearby coffee shop where she can enjoy the gossip. She'll wing the meeting and consider the rest later.

When overwhelmed, Sabrina prioritized her desire to escape her frustrations and relax, connect with a colleague, and stimulate her desire to know some inside information. Without judging her as wrong, asserting she has misplaced values, or assuming she's neglected to prioritize what matters most, we might conclude that her approach to making a decision in the moment was heavily influenced by feeling overcommitted.

DO YOU EVER FEEL LIKE SABRINA? TOO MUCH TO DO—MUCH OF IT LATE—WHAT'S THE POINT?

Priorities? Impossible! Unrealistic! Too Rigid!

Does the idea of setting priorities and actually honoring them seem overly idealistic as well as unrealistic?

- Is there something about prioritizing that implies right and wrong things to do and a proper order for completing the right things?

Do you imagine priorities are only for those who script their lives and you want none of it since you prefer the freedom of living and deciding in the moment?

Let go for a moment of right and wrong, good and bad, and simply view priorities as those things that get done—the things that literally take priority over the rest.

A better question might be, what's **the filter** and **process for choosing** priorities? Here are examples of filters for prioritizing:

You prioritize the tasks that:

- Scream the loudest
- Feel the best when done
- Have the closer due dates
- Effect those with the most power over you
- Effect the most people
- Yield the greatest good
- Yield the greatest return on investment
- Are easier to complete
- Are quicker to complete

When processing by these filters, there's not much "choosing." Instead, default thinking and behaving, which are shaped by your existing beliefs, experiences and habits, are primarily driving these filters. Yet, a different approach is absolutely possible.

Rigidity NOT a Criteria for Prioritizing

You can make prioritizing possible, realistic, and flexible. Rigidity isn't part of the criteria for prioritizing.

Life is dynamic and constantly changing. You can't necessarily know today how to "prioritize" your time for Thursday's afternoon. And you don't need to know. You can live "in the moment" and decide in the moment. BUT that only works if you are well briefed in the moment.

Consider the Dynamic Course Airline Pilots Take

Pilots file a flight plan with a clear destination set, but the specific route the pilot takes is made in the moment with consideration of many factors along the way. Throughout the flight, pilots seek relevant information, including the weather, context of air traffic at the destination—departures and arrivals, and guidance from air traffic controllers, to guide their course.

Just as flying a plane is a dynamic process, living by your priorities is also dynamic. When you embrace this dynamic, ever-changing process of living with priorities, you are charting your own course that you designed to work for you.

HOW Do You Set Priorities AND Honor Them?

- **Choose** Intentionally and **Create** Limits.

What do you need to **Choose** Intentionally and **Create** Limits?

Here it comes—the secret. To **Choose** Intentionally and **Create** Limits, you need **mental space**, allowing you to think clearly and choose what best fits the current circumstances given your journey. Be aware, however, people, circumstance, and your ever-vigilant mind crowd out that space constantly. ***So, the real key to prioritizing is having a clear mind, desired outcome, articulated values, and accurate information.*** Without these you will always react rather than respond. Additionally, the gauge for reacting will be heavily biased in favor of embracing the urgent and exciting while avoiding fear and uncertainty.

HOW do you find and maintain that much needed mental space that enables you to **Choose** Intentionally and **Create** Limits?

Simple formula: **A + B, then C**

A = Basic Awareness

B = Basic Tools

C = **Choose** Intentionally and **Create** Limits



With A + B you can **Choose** Intentionally and **Create** Limits. It is that simple!!! But remember simple isn't always easy! Setting priorities is simple. Choose intentionally with a clear mind and **create** limits you **choose**. But without (A) Basic Awareness of some vital realities and some (B) Basic Tools you will discover that you prioritize by default as you react to what comes your way. This puts others having much greater influence on your priorities. Additionally, prioritizing by default empowers your fears, which often sends you seeking pleasure and novelty while avoiding pain, all survival focused behavioral reactions to fear and anxiety.

Next: Discover A and B and Learn the Cost of Missing Them

A. Basic Awareness

1. Urgency has a powerful appeal & quick wins are enormously gratifying
2. Far more possible tasks/opportunities exist than you could choose in multiple lifetimes!!! You've got options—and you can't do it all!!!
3. What you do consistently matters far more than what you do occasionally. Consistent daily action on YOUR Long-term Aspirations makes them REAL
4. Energy Ebbs and Flows through the day & week
5. Life and career have seasons

Costs of Missing That Awareness

1. Urgency has a powerful appeal & quick wins are enormously gratifying

Without this awareness urgency can take the place of priorities. Urgencies have a tendency to masquerade as priorities. As your responsibilities grow to include leading others, you've also expanded the source of urgency.

Without this awareness, quick wins can push out the time needed for daily action on your long-term aspirations. Quick wins have their place but it's not in your high energy time of the day. That's where your writing and research belong.

2. Far more possible tasks/opportunities exist than you could choose in multiple lifetimes!!! You've got options—and you can't do it all!!

Without this awareness you'll be working all the time and notice what's undone. You'll feel you don't have time to exercise or cook or take a day off or something similar. Intellectually you absolutely know there's more to do than can be done, but you absolutely HATE choosing what to eliminate and you feel guilty if you put something for yourself ahead of others' requests.

3. Energy Ebbs and Flows through the day & week

Without this awareness you'll miss out on the efficiency that comes with aligning tasks with your energy levels. You find you become exhausted and discouraged when trying to do focused work at low-energy times. Or you'll find that your best hours of the day are tied up in meetings, commuting, or in conversation with colleagues.

4. Consistent daily action on YOUR Long-term Aspirations makes them REAL

Without this awareness you'll find that you work most frequently when the pressure builds and when the deadline approaches. You'll miss out on the benefit of staying connected to your ideas. You'll miss out on one of the core components of creativity needed for making original contributions--incubation! Ideas need time to percolate. Don't miss out on the great benefit of your brain working on your project when you're sleeping and doing other things. When your ideas are incubating, the subconscious is working away making connections, shifting and sorting.

5. Life and career have seasons

Without this awareness you might pursue it all with great frenzy. Or you might become overly discouraged when particular seasons aren't as fruitful and present unique challenges on your time and energy.

B. Basic Tools

1. Long-term Aspirations
2. Identified Values
3. Comprehensive Commitments List
4. Calendar
5. Accountability Partner



Cost of Missing These Tools

1. Long-term Aspirations

Without this tool you can easily lose sight of why you're asking yourself to do these hard things. On days when it doesn't seem worth the effort this tool renews your motivation, that perishable resource that offers both the short shelf life and the life-giving energy of veggies! Without long-term aspirations, you might begin to think your life is simply "one damn thing after another." With long-term aspirations you keep moving in the direction of **your** choice. Yet don't allow this tool to become your gauge for daily success. Every tool has its purpose you know.

2. Identified Values

Without this tool you might discover that your commitments are a mixed bag of things that fit and things that don't. You might discover that you've picked up much along the way because you were seeking to influence others' perception of you. You might have picked up commitments because you were guided by your interests and your abilities. As your skills grow, however, if you're primarily accepting opportunities simply because you enjoy them and have the necessary abilities, your commitments will quickly start outpacing your capacity. With the additional filter of your values you have a tool for aligning all the stuff with what matters most to you.

3. Comprehensive Commitments List

Without this tool you won't have a quick reference for getting back on track when things don't go as expected. After being away at a conference and returning to a back log of unread emails and a long list of requests, nothing can hone your focus like pulling out YOUR list of commitments and deciding

what's next. Without this tool you can't easily consult your previous ideas when planning your day or week. You'll experience more forgetting. You'll need to rely more heavily on your memory and experience the stress that accompanies that. Wow, without a comprehensive commitment list you'll miss the valuable perspective that seeing ALL your commitments at a quick glance offers. When presented with a new opportunity that perspective just might help you avoid future regrets.

4. Calendar

Without this tool you'll need to remember things, increasing the probability you'll forget. When time-based commitments you know well, like your courses, aren't on your calendar, it takes much longer to make decisions about future opportunities because you have to consult your memory rather than rely on a quick glance. Plus, you can lose sight of how full your schedule has become when you don't include all of your time-based commitments on the calendar.

5. Accountability Partner

If writing and publishing or completing long-term projects are part of your career success, you've likely discovered that these projects never pop-up in your email, call during office hours, or ask you what's getting in the way of making steady progress. Without this tool you'll find you gravitate toward prioritizing tasks by deadlines. That often works beautifully, but very often deadlines are other people's priorities, not yours. Accountability partners can give you the added incentive you might need when being accountable only to yourself is insufficient.

Exercises to Aid You in the ABCs of Prioritizing

Now that you understand the Essential Tools (A) and Awareness (B) that are needed to choose intentionally and create limits (C), you can begin to set priorities!

Set Priorities (Choose Intentionally):

One year from now I want to be able to say this about my research/writing (or other Long-term Aspiration).
E.g. I submitted a manuscript for review to a top-tier journal in my field.

90 days from now I want to have reached this milestone on my Long-term Aspiration in #1. E.g. I have identified my collaborators. I have framed my research questions, methodology, and data collecting method. I have completed the literature review.

Make Choices (Create Limits):

What am I choosing to do today that will move me closer to my 90-day milestone of my Long-term Aspiration?

Today's Intentions (Create Limits)

Identify 3 things I **intend** to do today that will make today successful? (Ideally consult your Commitments List and Calendar in choosing these.)?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Identify 2 things I intend NOT to do today to enhance the possibility of completing the 3 above

1. _____
2. _____

Create One of Your Essential Tools: Comprehensive Commitments List

Create a list of your current commitments. To make your list most valuable, create general categories that correspond to your professional and personal responsibilities. E.g. If you're a college professor consider: Teaching, Research, and Service as your major areas and then start listing your current commitments within each.



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Personal and Professional Development Coach, especially for faculty in higher education who are overwhelmed with competing expectations, too much to do, and too little time to get it all done.

I'm the coach for you if YOU WANT TO:

- Make consistent progress on your most important projects
- Align your time with your values and priorities
- Master productivity habits that fit your style
- Combat procrastination with evidence-based strategies that work for you
- Enjoy a life filled with rewards other than academic success
- Respect your physical, emotional, and spiritual needs along your professional journey