

THE LAW OF PRIORITIES

Leaders Understand That Activity is Not Necessarily Accomplishment

Leaders never advance to a point where they no longer need to prioritize. It's something that good leaders keep doing, whether they're leading a billion-dollar corporation, running a small business, pastoring a church, coaching a team, or leading a small group. I think good leaders intuitively know that to be true. However, not every leader practices the discipline of prioritizing. Why? I believe there are a few reasons.

First, when we are busy, we naturally believe that we are achieving. But busyness does not equal productivity. Secondly, prioritizing requires leaders to continually think ahead, to know what's important, to know what's next, to see how everything relates to the overall vision. That's hard work. Third, prioritizing causes us to do things that are at the least uncomfortable and sometimes downright painful. Leaders can't afford to just think inside the box. Sometimes they need to reinvent the box. Author Max Depree says, "The first responsibility of a leader is to define reality." That requires the Law of Priorities. When you're the leader, everything is on the table.

The guidelines I use whenever I evaluate my priorities are the three Rs. My three Rs are *requirement*, *return*, and *reward*. I believe that to do effective, leaders must order their lives according to these three questions:

WHAT IS REQUIRED? We're all accountable to somebody for the work we do. We also have responsibility for the important people in our lives, such as spouse, children, and parents. For that reason, any list of priorities must begin with what is required of us. The question I ask myself is, *What must I do that nobody can or should do for me?* As I have gotten older, that list has gotten shorter and shorter. If I'm doing something that's not necessary, I should eliminate it. If I'm doing something that's necessary but not required of me personally, I need to delegate it.

WHAT GIVES THE GREATEST RETURN? As a leader, you should spend most of your time working in your areas of greatest strength. People are more productive and more content when their work is within their natural gifting and strengths. Ideally, leaders should get out of their comfort zone but stay in their strength zone. What's the practical application for this? Here's my rule of thumb. If something I'm doing can be done 80 percent as well by someone else, I delegate it. If you have a responsibility that someone else can do according to that standard – or could *potentially* meet that standard – then develop and train a person to handle it. Just because you *can* do something does not mean that you *should* do it.

WHAT BRINGS THE GREATEST REWARD? The final question relates to personal satisfaction. Tim Redmond observed, "There are many things that will catch my eye, but there are only a few things that will catch my heart." Life is too short not to do some things you love. These things energize and keep you passionate. And passion provided the fuel in a person's life to keep them going.

"A leader is the one who climbs the tallest tree, surveys the entire situation, and yells, 'Wrong jungle!'"

Steven Covey

"Don't let the fear of the time it will take to accomplish something stand in the way of your doing it. The time will pass anyway; we might just as well put that passing time to the best possible use."

Earl Nightingale

"I am a member of a team, and I rely on the team, I defer to it and sacrifice for it, because the team, not the individual, is the ultimate champion."

Mia Hamm

"Optimism is the one quality more associated with success and happiness than any other."

Brian Tracy