

# Think Before Your Act: Four Important Ways to Keep Your Priorities Straight

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**Pam Vaccaro, MA, CSP**

Traditional wisdom about productivity suggests that a well-focused leader write out a to-do list, prioritize it by order of importance and urgency and then tackle it with stealth efficiency, right? However, you still might find yourself succumbing to the "ACT then *THINK*" method of setting priorities. It is common to default to this approach when multiple tasks and requests on your time as a busy professional start to overwhelm you. To help you break these old patterns, understand these four common priority-setting traps and how you can avoid them.

## **Whatever hits first**

Do you "choose" your priorities simply by responding to things as they come across your desk? The *THINK then ACT* approach suggests that you negotiate with people to respond in a time frame that's convenient to you and agreeable to them. Knowing what is your top priority—Pareto's 20% theory—helps you keep your footing when the unexpected to do's start to come across your busy activity screen!

## **Path of least resistance**

When was the last time you heard yourself say, "It's just easier to do it myself"? This is not always an incorrect assumption. However, staying at the helm means you need to ask yourself these questions: Am I trying to avoid conflict? Do I need to invest time or money to train someone to take on some of the lower-priority tasks? Take appropriate action.

## **Squeaky wheels**

You know who they are in your life. Their requests are always urgent and they are very successful at getting you to respond according to their time frame. Give them a specific time or date when they can expect you to respond. They may squeak a little more initially, but hold your own.

## **Inspiration**

If you wait until you're "inspired" or motivated, a lot of what you want to do is simply not going to happen. Sometimes this kind of thinking is actually one of the biggest time-waster commonly known as procrastination. High-priority items like a strategic marketing change or retooling your technology won't always be the easiest or most pleasant tasks on your list. Do them anyway. You'll be glad you did.

Avoid these four traps and watch yourself feel a lot more like you are at the helm of your life and time.

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