



WORKING THROUGH HECTICITY

Every day, there's more to do. Calls to make, reports to prepare, staff to coach, meetings, email, deadlines... it keeps piling up, and everything has to get done *now*. How can you possibly bring it under control?

This everyday time/work crunch—sometimes called "*hecticity*"—is not only extremely stressful, but a recipe for poor results. To get things done on time, you have to be constantly multitasking on everything, which means you're not devoting your full attention even to the things that really need it.

The result: things slip through cracks and unnecessary mistakes get made. Because you can only deal with the things that are most urgent and critical, issues that don't look immediately urgent get shuffled to the bottom of the heap—until neglect turns small problems into crises.

What can you do to get out of this trap?

SPEND TIME WHERE IT COUNTS

You can never save time. At the end of an hour, the hour is gone forever. But you can choose how to spend it. Good time management depends on careful prioritization, so you can focus on the right things to do, when it's the right time to do them.

The key to prioritization is to identify all your tasks and goals by two distinct criteria: how **important** are they, and how **urgent** are they?

- Important tasks are critical to your overall success.
- Urgent tasks are critically time-sensitive.

Obviously, the tasks that are both important and urgent need to be tackled first: these are true emergencies. Just as obviously, those that are neither important nor urgent can be dropped to the bottom of your list and ignored. But what about the tasks that are either important or urgent, but not both?

Focusing on the urgent, unimportant tasks is tempting but wrong. Doing that means you're in fire-drill mode, rushing from crisis to crisis. Consider why you put a task in this category. Urgent means it has to be done *now*—but unimportant means if it won't be a serious problem if it doesn't get done at all. If you ignore these issues, often they just go away quietly.

Instead, you should spend the bulk of your time on the things that are **important but not urgent**. These are often tasks that require concentrated thought and attention but don't have an immediate deadline, so there's no adrenaline rush in doing them. Also in this category are issues that are not crises yet, but could turn into crises if you neglect them. Identify them early, deal with them now, and save yourself a lot of stress later.

WORK YOUR PRIORITIES

It's not enough to have a list of prioritized tasks—you have to build a work schedule that reflects it.

- **Use To-Do lists: daily, weekly, and monthly.** Work on high priority items first. Keep your daily list to no more than 10 specific items you hope to accomplish, including no more than two large or difficult tasks.
- **Schedule the most important work during the time when your energy is highest.** Know your own work rhythms. Build your natural peaks and valleys into your schedule as much as you can for the most efficient results.
- **Make sure to schedule** time for uninterrupted and priority work each day—don't fill your entire day with appointments and meetings. Don't cram things together back-to-back, but allow enough time between activities that you won't be rushed and stressed.
- **Don't be afraid to slow down.** The rhythm of urgency is pervasive and can be addictive. Doing important, thoughtful work may mean you have to just sit still and think for long stretches. Quiet time may not feel productive if you're in the rush-rush-do-do rhythm, but that can be deceptive. Some important activities require a slower pace.

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