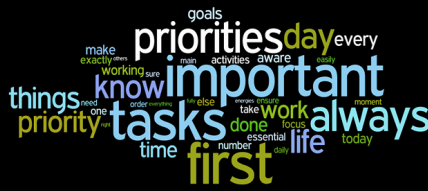


## Leadership Letter

*Are you living your priorities?*



I was sitting in a meeting the other day hearing a number of leaders share the challenge of wearing a number of hats and having too many things to fit into their schedule. It's probably the one thing that we can all relate to and understand.

Sometimes I sit at my desk and make the mistake of looking at all the unanswered emails, reading my to do items, thinking of the people I need to see and the projects I really must start and feel the cloud of overwhelmingness, if that's a word, descend on me. I start asking myself questions like: Where do I start? Will I ever get this stuff done? How can I get away from this feeling of being trapped and the fact that the more emails I answer the more emails I receive back – it's a never ending nightmare. We have all been there and perhaps you are experiencing it right now.

It's not just leaders though, mums often feel the pressure of looking after a young family where they are expected to give attention to each child, play games, cook meals, keep the house clean, often having a job at the same time and then they fall into bed exhausted at the end of the day often without having had any time for themselves.

If there were any easy solutions we would know them already and would have put them into practice. Making priorities is the critical issue for everyone in this day and age but especially for those in leadership. Solve this and life begins to be more enjoyable. I always find the New Year is a good time to think about our priorities in a fresh way and hence the topic of this letter. So here's my attempt to give you a few things to think about.

**1. Relational or Task focused:** We are all unique in our make up but there are some clear traits in an indicator like DISC that point to the fact that some will prioritise relationships, others tasks. Some work from a to do list, others tend to be more spontaneous. Some love set routines, others feel trapped by them. Some are self-motivated and have an internal structure, others need the encouragement of an external structure or help from others to stop them flitting from one thing to another. Here's a question for you: If having some form of structure is so important, what hinders us from establishing structure when we need it and following through on our priorities? What keeps us from maintaining a daily, weekly and seasonal rhythm that will serve us in living according to our priorities? Make a list right now of your priorities for this season, in your own life, your family life, your friendships and your work life. What could stop you fulfilling them? PAUSE FOR THOUGHT!

So many movies play on the role of fathers who have given their lives to the office and have neglected spending time with their wives and children. Spending relational time is difficult for someone who is looking for a list of accomplishments at the end of each day. When you build into a relationship, it's hard to quantify what you have actually done. I attended a meal the other night for pastors and ministry leaders along the coast. There was no agenda, no networking happening, no ability to tick off anything from the to do list. It was simply an evening to relate. Life is all about relationships after all. Jesus called us to love God, love one another and love ourselves. So if you find yourself on the task road, take a deep breath and receive permission to spend time just relating.

As Mary sat at Jesus' feet listening to his words, he addressed Martha and said, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and upset about many things, but few things are needed—or indeed only one. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her." Luke 10:41-42

As Jesus was in the midst of leading revival meetings, he slipped away to the mountains and everyone was looking for him. He accepted invitations to the homes of Pharisees, Mary and Martha and Zacchaeus. When the holy week was approaching he focused on his calling and set his face like a flint towards Jerusalem. Jesus had clear relational and task priorities.

**2. Boundaries:** As I write this sentence, there is a beautiful black and white furry face that is nudging me. My border collie wants me to take her for a walk. For her it's the number one priority of the day and she won't stop pestering me until I make some time for her.

The Grinch understood boundaries: "The nerve of those Whos. Inviting me down there - on such short notice! Even if I wanted to go my schedule wouldn't allow it. 4:00, wallow in self pity; 4:30, stare into the abyss; 5:00, solve world hunger, tell no one; 5:30, jazzercise; 6:30, dinner with me - I can't cancel that again; 7:00, wrestle with my self-loathing... I'm booked. Of course, if I bump the loathing to 9, I could still be done in time to lay in bed, stare at the ceiling and slip slowly into madness. But what would I wear?"

We have so many calls on our time and we hate to say 'no' to this person, that project and especially the things that we enjoy and that give us life. I remember when I first came into leadership, the pioneer team in the city was starting all kinds of initiatives and new teams were forming. The leaders appreciated my time in mentoring with them and so I started investing a day a month with each team leader. My time was quickly being filled and this meant I had limited time for speaking on DTS's and investing in the nations that I really enjoyed. So I created a boundary - I made a commitment that I would only speak for 2-3 days at a time on a training school. Because of that decision, many places stopped having me as the schools wanted teachers for a full week. However, it was a decision I knew was right even though it was a sacrifice.

Boundaries enable us to focus on the things that are most important for us. What boundaries do you need to make? What do you need to say 'no' to? What do you need to say 'yes' to?

**3. Think about your grid:** We all have numerable events, people to see, things to do and it all has to be slotted into our busy lives. In order to do this we need some kind of grid to help us in our decision-making and bring order to our calendar. People with a regular consistent schedule often use a weekly or monthly grid, others like myself who have a wildly different schedule over the year find a 3 monthly grid serves them best. It also fits the seasons well. For each season of the year, we tend to wear different clothes, eat different food and do different things - so it is in our leadership. There are times to focus on different aspects of our life and ministry. Think of the things you would like to do - time with friends, date nights, people to invite home for meals, keeping in touch with family members, special events throughout the year. Now if you are married or living in some kind of community, agree together and with the Lord how much time you can be away from home in traveling and ministry. Then thinking about your ministry as a whole, how much time do you feel you are to give to your various commitments and roles. It takes intentionality to live according to the grid that you feel God is giving you for 2014.

Jesus had a grid for how much time he spent alone with his Father, with his team of disciples and in preaching and healing on the streets and in the synagogues. If we were to create his grid, we probably would have put more time in public ministry and less with the team! Jesus knew what he was doing. I am reminded of what Dr Atef says about the grid of western leaders: "Leaders spend too much time eating, sleeping and talking!"

**4. A daily habit:** Here is a great question to start off your day. What are my three top priorities to fulfill today? It's often easier to do the things we like doing, the things that give a sense of fulfillment, the things that can be done quickly rather than the things that are the most important. If there are some things that are not so enjoyable for me, I like to make a time for them in my diary as soon as possible and then I don't have them playing on my mind. It's the overwhelming things that seem to stay on our to do lists for too long - that email that you don't know how to answer, the crucial conversation that you need to have with a colleague, the writing project that you have been putting off for the last few weeks, the spring clean that is overdue ...

Starting your day with a sense of what needs to be done, is definitely better than simply winging it.

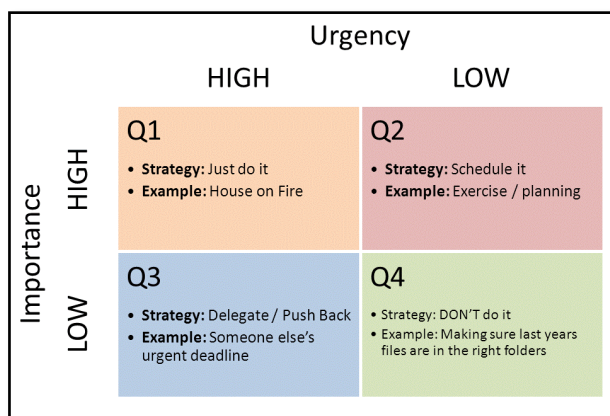
Without focus, yet another day will be gone and none of those priorities will be able to be ticked off the list. Rite and I have just started writing our priorities on a post it note on the bathroom mirror at the start of the day – it's been very helpful. Do whatever works best for you but do something to bring those priorities into focus!

**5. Value priorities:** There are some aspects of our life that are deeply rooted values, but with our changing schedules, transitions and lifestyle, these can still be a struggle to maintain. For example, our all important devotional time with God. For some scheduled people this is a no brainer – in every new situation they simply carve out the time and don't understand why anyone would struggle to re-order their schedule. For others it's not so easy to create a whole new structure in which to function. For instance my lifestyle is quite different if I am at home running a retreat, preparing for or cleaning up after a retreat or if I am travelling and speaking in other YWAM bases. Constant reorganizing or adapting of one's life is never easy but very important to do, if we are going to maintain those life giving values.

Other value priorities could be things like: praying into situations we hear about, opening our home on a regular basis for hospitality, responding to communication promptly, following through on commitments, enjoying time with people, random acts of kindness, creating a prepared environment, etc. The question for each of us is, what strategy can we put in place to protect these values?

Establishing value priorities in our calendar is like packing our suitcase. We place the large items first and then place the smaller ones around them. If we try to put the larger items last, there is never room! So similarly we place our value priorities in our calendars first.

**6. Living in quadrant 2:** Don't confuse the urgent with the important stuff. Take some time to think through what is important to you. You have probably all seen the diagram on the right, and know that it's easy to live in quadrant 1 - the urgent and important quadrant all our lives. This comes as a result of not planning, not prioritizing and leaving everything to the last moment. We carry our phone and respond to it whatever sound it makes as if it is in control of our lives – perhaps it is! We don't actually need to check our emails every hour or see how many likes we have had to our latest facebook addition. The best option is to spend as much time in the important but not urgent quadrant – number 2. What do you do everyday that is in line with what is important? What are the urgent but not important things that seem to disrupt your day? Ask for grace and discernment to live as much time in quadrant 2 as is possible.



**7. What to do?:** There's always meetings that I have to attend, documents that I have to write, places where I have to go and groups I have to speak to. There is often a fine line in practice between what I feel I need to do, what I actually need to do, and what I end up doing. Sometimes you need a good healthy discussion with people who know you well, to give feedback and help you develop clarity for your action. So, priorities are not what you say they are but what you intentionally take action to do! If you struggle with moving priorities to action, the next question for you to consider is this: What do you need to put in place so that the things you think and feel are priorities are the things that actually get done?

The key is “not to prioritise what's on your schedule but to schedule your priorities.” Stephen Covey

See you same time next month – if I get around to it!!

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