



# **A Practical Guide to Regaining Focus, Setting Priorities, and Moving the Needle**

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In today's demanding work environment, it's all too easy to become consumed by urgency — responding to every request, solving everyone's problems, and finishing each day wondering if you made any real progress.

This toolkit is designed to help you break that cycle.

It gives you a practical process for filtering tasks, protecting time for strategic work, and reflecting on your typical use of time. Whether you're in a leadership role, managing projects, or simply trying to lead your life with more clarity, this toolkit will help you move from reactivity to purposeful action.

### What it helps you do:

- Filter incoming work through a strategic lens
- Identify recurring time traps
- Prioritize based on goals, not noise
- Protect space for deep, meaningful work
- Build month-over-month improvement through intentional reflection

You can use this toolkit at the beginning of a month, as a weekly reset, or any time you feel your focus slipping. It pairs well with personal planning rituals or team strategy sessions.

### Step 1: The Strategic Time Filter

Before you can reclaim your calendar or realign your focus, you need a better lens.

Most professionals are inundated with competing demands — requests from colleagues, recurring tasks, unexpected fire drills, and projects that seem important to someone... but not always to you. The goal of this section is to help you pause and evaluate those demands objectively.

We do that using the **Strategic Time Filter** — three simple but powerful questions that help you decide which tasks deserve your attention and which ones might need to be delegated, delayed, or dropped.

### The Three Filter Questions:

**1. Does this move me closer to a meaningful goal?**

If the task doesn't clearly contribute to one of your personal, team, or organizational goals, it may be noise — even if it's urgent.

**2. Must I be the one to do this?**

If the task could be handled by someone else (with the right support or training), it may be a delegation opportunity or even a chance to develop others.

**3. What is the cost of doing this now versus later?**

Some tasks feel urgent, but can safely be postponed without consequence. Others carry an opportunity cost: by doing this, you're not doing something more important.

### How to Use This Section:

1. Identify 6–8 recent or recurring tasks that are consuming your time or energy.
2. Run each one through the three filters.
3. Use your responses to flag which tasks should move forward, which could be reallocated, and which you might need to rethink altogether.

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### Three Filters Template (with examples):

Task	Goal-Aligned?	Do It Myself?	Now vs. Later?	Next Step
Write department Q2 report	Yes (stakeholder alignment)	Yes	Medium urgency	Schedule 2-hour block Friday
Fix recurring printer issue	No	No	Low cost to delay	Submit to IT support
Review junior staff timesheets	Yes (team oversight)	No (can be delegated)	Medium	Train coordinator to review first
Accept 30-min intro call from vendor	Not aligned	Yes	High cost (time sink)	Decline or reschedule in 6 weeks

### Tips for Applying the Filter:

- If you hesitate on any of the questions, that's a flag to reassess.
- Use this filter weekly as part of your planning ritual — not just when you feel overwhelmed.
- Keep the “Next Step” column realistic. You don't have to solve the problem today, but decide how you'll address it.


### Step 2: Identify Your Strategic Priorities

This section is all about getting clear on what truly matters.

Strategic priorities are the activities, goals, or initiatives that move the needle — they advance your role, your team's performance, or your organization's long-term success. They're rarely urgent in the moment, but they're essential over time.

### Think of strategic priorities as:

- Delivering on key projects or initiatives
- Driving innovation, efficiency, or impact
- Developing your own leadership or technical capabilities
- Building your team's capacity or future readiness
- Aligning your work with high-level business objectives

 *Tip: If your list feels vague, try finishing this sentence: “If I had 10 extra hours per week, I would use them to...”*

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### Instructions:

- List up to 3–5 strategic priorities for your current role.
- Be specific. “Improve communication” is vague. “Hold monthly team retrospectives” is actionable.
- If helpful, revisit your annual goals, KPIs, or team objectives to guide you.

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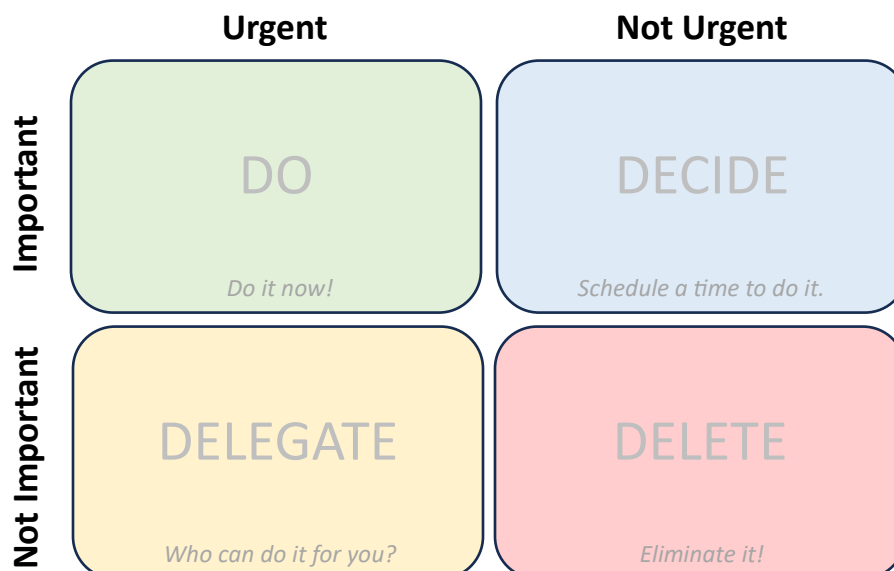
### Example Strategic Priorities:

- Launch of new vendor onboarding SOP by Q3
- Mentor 2 high-potential employees for promotion readiness
- Reduce downtime by 10% through maintenance program upgrades
- Transition from reactive to planned scheduling across 3 departments

### Step 3: Apply the Eisenhower Matrix to Prioritize Action

Now that you’ve identified your strategic priorities, it’s time to sort your current commitments through a practical framework.

The **Eisenhower Matrix** is a simple yet powerful tool to clarify what deserves your time and energy:





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### How to interpret the matrix:

- Quadrant 1: Urgent and Important (**Do**). Tasks that require immediate attention and are critical to your goals or well-being → **Do it now!**
- Quadrant 2: Important but Not Urgent (**Decide**). Tasks that are important, but not time sensitive. These tasks should be scheduled and addressed proactively → **Schedule it.**
- Quadrant 3: Urgent but Not Important (**Delegate**). Tasks that are urgent but don't contribute significantly to your goals or priorities. Consider delegating these tasks to others → **Delegate it.**
- Quadrant 4: Not Urgent and Not Important (**Delete**). Tasks that are neither urgent nor important. These tasks can be eliminated or minimized to free up time for more meaningful activities → **Eliminate it!**

### Tips for effectively using the matrix:

- **Be Honest:** Be honest with yourself when categorizing tasks to ensure accurate prioritization.
- **Regularly Review:** Regularly review and update the matrix as priorities shift and circumstances change.
- **Flexibility:** Be flexible and willing to adapt your plans based on new information or changing priorities.
- **Focus on Quadrant 2:** Prioritize Quadrant 2 tasks to prevent them from becoming urgent and stressful, allowing you to be more proactive and strategic in your approach.

### Example:

Let's say you're a business owner with:

- A long to-do list that includes tasks such as responding to urgent client emails (Quadrant 1)
- The need to develop a marketing strategy for the upcoming quarter (Quadrant 2)
- A scheduled, non-critical meeting (Quadrant 3)
- A habit of browsing social media during work hours (Quadrant 4).

By using the Eisenhower Matrix, you can prioritize tasks based on their urgency and importance, ensuring that you allocate your time and resources effectively to achieve your business objectives.

👉 Now go back to the activities you identified in your time audit (Step 1). Ask:

- Which of these activities align directly with my strategic priorities?
- Which tasks fall outside them — and where do they belong in the matrix?

Once you have prioritized tasks in each quadrant, take action accordingly. Start by addressing tasks in Quadrant 1, then move on to Quadrant 2, delegate tasks in Quadrant 3, and consider eliminating tasks in Quadrant 4. Regularly review and update the Eisenhower Matrix as priorities shift and circumstances change.

This step will help you cut through the clutter, reduce reactive work, and ensure your calendar reflects what matters most.

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**Step 4: Audit Your Time Commitments**


Now it's time for an honest look at where your time is actually going.

Most of us assume we're too busy for strategic work — but often, our time is consumed by reactive tasks, meetings, or habits that don't truly serve our goals.

This section helps you quantify your time and assess whether it's being spent intentionally.

**Instructions:**

1. Choose a representative workweek (or 2–3 typical days).
2. Use categories like:
  - **Projects:** Deliverables, problem-solving, team leadership
  - **Admin:** Email, reporting, status meetings
  - **Development:** Learning, coaching, reflection
  - **Personal:** Breaks, mental reset, social time
3. Estimate the percentage of time spent in each category.
4. Highlight time blocks that felt out of alignment or low-impact.

 *Example Insight:* You might notice you spent 9 hours in status meetings but only 3 hours advancing a key initiative.

**Tips:**

- Consider using color-coded calendar blocks or time tracking software (e.g., Toggl, Clockify).
- Don't try to justify where your time went — just observe it.

Percentage	Category	Tasks or Activities
<u>15</u>	<u>Projects</u>	<u>Deliverables, problem-solving, team leadership</u>
<u>20</u>	<u>Admin</u>	<u>Email, reporting, status meetings</u>
<u>10</u>	<u>Personal</u>	<u>Breaks, mental reset, social time</u>

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### Step 5: Spot the Gaps and Friction Points

This is where the clarity starts to emerge.

Compare your strategic priorities (from Step 2) with your actual time usage (from Step 4). Are you spending time where it matters most?

This section guides you to identify where the gaps are — and why they exist.

#### Common Gap Types:

- **Crowded calendar:** No white space for focused work
- **Low-value meetings:** Recurring events that no longer serve a purpose
- **Unfiltered requests:** You say yes too easily
- **Firefighting:** Constant interruptions or reactive work
- **Underuse of delegation:** You're doing things others could own

#### Instructions:

- List 3–5 key gaps between intention and action.
- For each gap, identify the root cause and whether it's internal (e.g., saying yes too quickly) or external (e.g., management expectations).

#### Gap Identification (with examples):

Gap	Root Cause	Type
Spending <1 hour/week on mentoring	No time blocked on calendar	Internal
Reactive IT issues eat 5–8 hours/week	No tiered support process	External
Attending weekly update meetings for 3 projects I no longer lead	Habit; no one challenged it	Internal

💡 *Reflection:* Not every gap can be closed immediately — but awareness is the first step to reclaiming control.

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### Step 6: Reclaim and Refocus Your Time

This is where we shift from analysis to action.

Strategic focus isn't about doing more — it's about doing *the right things* more consistently. This section helps you define clear time boundaries and reclaim space for what matters most.

**Instructions:** For each gap or misaligned area you identified:

- Decide on one realistic action to eliminate, delegate, redesign, or schedule differently.
- Then, carve out protected time for strategic priorities — even just 1–2 hours/week to start.

### Options for Time Reclaiming:

Action	Example
Eliminate	Cancel or consolidate low-value meetings
Delegate	Assign status reporting to a direct report
Block	Reserve Friday mornings for strategy work
Delay	Say “not now” to side projects that dilute impact

**Engagement Tip:** Start small. Try one change in the next 7 days. Let the results build momentum.

📌 *Remember:* Strategic time won't appear on its own. You have to create it — and then protect it.

### Conclusion: Making Time Work for You

You've just taken a powerful step toward reclaiming your time and aligning it with what matters most. By auditing your current commitments, clarifying your strategic priorities, applying a proven prioritization framework, and committing to focused action, you're building a more intentional and impactful leadership rhythm.

This isn't just another productivity hack — it's a sustainable approach to leading with clarity, focus, and purpose in a world full of urgent demands.

👉 **Your next step:** Schedule a 30-minute reflection session with yourself to review what you've learned. Share it with a colleague or peer for accountability, or better yet, use it to spark a conversation with your team about time alignment and focus.

**Time is limited. But its impact? That's up to you.** Let's make it count.