

A WEEK IN *Learning*

Sharpening Your Axe: The Importance of Prioritization

Gwen Ahlbrecht, Learning & Development Sr. Consultant

“Do the hard jobs first. The easy jobs will take care of themselves.”

-Dale Carnegie

Dale Carnegie, an author and lecturer, highlighted a longstanding story about two woodcutters and their learned lesson on prioritization. In this story, one man worked hard all day, took no breaks and only stopped for a short lunch. The other man took several breaks, had a leisurely lunch and even found time for a short nap. At the end of the day, the first man, who had worked with almost no breaks, was quite upset to see the other had chopped more wood than he had. Stunned, he asked how he was able to chop more wood than him. The second man replied, “You didn’t notice that while I was sitting down, I was sharpening my axe.” In summary, the man who ended up chopping more wood, in less time, had thoughtfully planned how he was going to spend his day. A sharpened axe cuts much more wood.



“Sharpening your axe is a sure way to meet your professional goals, as well as the demands of your busy, personal lives.”

- Gwen Ahlbrecht

It’s that time of year when we have to begin preparing mentally, and physically, for the busiest time of the year. We are heading into the last quarter of 2018, Halloween is right around the corner, and as we continue to grow as an organization – we are busy! For many of us, our personal lives are just as busy. Our calendars have us going somewhere, or doing something, nearly every single day. How many of you reading this article often feel overwhelmed with your professional and personal schedules, to the point where you don’t know what to work on next? Sharpening your axe is a sure way to meet your professional goals, as well as the demands of your busy, personal lives.

How do I sharpen my axe you ask? Proper planning and prioritizing! As human beings, we all get the same 24-hours in our day and it’s up to each of us to decide how to use that time. While making a list of tasks is a great start, we won’t get far without prioritizing each task. To paraphrase what Carnegie said, we are more likely to do all the easy tasks, and get nowhere near finishing the hard tasks. Making a list of the tasks we want to accomplish does not have to be difficult. In order to help you prioritize your list, follow these five, simple steps:

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1. **Identify urgent vs. important** (Is there anything that has a negative consequence for taking no action today? These are high priority items and you will want to do them first)
2. **Assess value** (What has the highest value to your role, department, family, home, etc.)
3. **Order your tasks by estimated time to complete** (Don't focus the first half of your day on the 10 or 15 minute tasks. You will come to regret this. Can some tasks be grouped together?)
4. **Be flexible and adaptable** (Uncertainty and change is a given, your priorities will change and you must be prepared to adapt)
5. **Know when to say when** (It's okay to say no and it's okay to take breaks)

The benefits of proper planning include, but are not limited to, less stress, better night's sleep, better results at work, and a more balanced personal life. Every time you make a list, sharpen your axe by properly planning and prioritizing. You won't be overwhelmed and your to-do list will become a ta-done list!

To contact Goodwill's Learning and Development team, please email learninganddevelopment@goodwillaz.org

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