



How to Get It Done: Psychologists' Tips for Setting and Implementing Priorities

Do you ever wonder why some people seem to set and implement priorities easily while others struggle? Could you use some ideas about how to improve your own track record in completing your “top” priorities? To gain some insight into how to address this issue, three psychologists graciously agreed to provide some ideas about how you can improve your skills in setting and implementing priorities. Here are ten of their suggestions:

1. Check the alignment between your priorities and your values. Because our true priorities are derived from our values, when we struggle to accomplish stated priorities, often it's because they are not aligned with our values.
2. Break your priorities down into manageable steps so they don't seem overwhelming. Make sure the steps are specific, measurable, achievable, results-focused, and time-bound.
3. Partnering with someone increases the likelihood that you will implement the priorities you set.
4. Don't set yourself up for failure: be realistic about your talents and abilities.
5. View the inevitable glitches as opportunities to exercise your creativity rather than as setbacks that knock you off track.
6. Celebrate your progress toward accomplishing your priorities as well as their actual completion.
7. Develop a clear picture of where you want to be, then work backwards to identify and prioritize the steps necessary to get you there.

Allocate a small amount of time every day to doing something that will take you closer to achieving that picture.

8. Identify the barriers that are holding you back from setting and/or implementing priorities. If necessary, ask someone you trust to help you. Common obstacles include a variety of fears (e.g., fear of failure or ridicule), risk aversion in a given situation, low self-esteem, depression, and failure to see the task as meaningful.
9. Become aware of the negative “chatter” or self-talk in your head that makes you doubt your ability to set or implement priorities. Often we establish or buy into illogical “rules” or beliefs that set us up for failure (e.g., “I must be perfect,” “I can do anything”). Write down these thoughts so you can identify the negative patterns and begin to modify them. Don't give in to the “must/should” tyranny that impedes progress toward your priorities.
10. Ask for professional, confidential help if necessary, such as through an employee assistance program (EAP). Outside of work, assistance is available through sources like community agencies, mental health centers, and referrals by professionals.

What one small step will you take today to begin to improve your skills in setting and implementing priorities?

More about Dr. Pat Lynch

Pat Lynch, Ph.D. enables first responders to elevate the level of public safety in their communities and to keep their personnel safe. She is the primary author of *Every Fire-Rescue Professional is a Leader: A Practical Guide to Individual, Team, and Organization Development*.