Sizing, prioritising, and scheduling work

Introduction

Organised people are recognisable. They get the right things done, at the right time, to the right quality while being responsive to genuine urgency.

Bringing order to the way you work acts as an antibody to urgency, interruption, and distraction – freeing up time to work on what is most important. This is becoming a rare and sought-after skill.

The World Health Organisation notes being recognised as a burnout preventer.

Principles

- There will always be more demands on your time than time available.
- Allocating a finite amount of time (a constraint) for work helps you prioritise.
- It is very common to underestimate how long it will take to get things done.

Process

In the absence of judgement and without overthinking, work through the following steps as you prepare for the next working week. You are practising, not looking for perfection.

Measure

- Time available: your time envelop[1].
- Deliverables and commitments: capture on an extensive list the things to be done; scheduled internal meetings, business-as-usual work, emails, projects, reports, planning, administration/ filing, external meetings[2], events/conferences – and lunch.
- Importance: highlight the must be done (priorities) and move everything else out at least a week.
- Time required: estimate how much time you will need to get what is prioritised done (be generous). Note fixed deadlines.

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[1] Note public holidays, absences for training and development / other leave.
[2] Include travel to and from, prep-time and post-meeting review/actions, avoid back-to-back meetings.

Migrate: allocate priorities into your calendar leaving 10-20% of the time over the day and week unallocated. Avoid back-to-back scheduling wherever possible.

Minimise: continue to refine prioritised deliverables and commitments (if needed) until the work reflects the hours available including having white space (unallocated time).

Maintain: review the next day ahead of time and adapt as needed.

Further reading

For further reading, please click here.