



SETTING PRIORITIES

BACKGROUND

Crisis is disorienting, fast paced, and exhausting. Information changes rapidly and pressures can be overwhelming. One of the hallmarks of crisis is that the status quo is untenable. Change cannot be avoided, nor can everything be preserved. Most people have been untested by true crisis, and the pressure can feel insurmountable, leading to reactive behavior or paralysis. Reactive decision-making gives the illusion of control but can't be successful because it lacks focus and goals. When you become paralyzed, you surrender agency and become a passive observer. The simple act of setting priorities can make all the difference.

Setting priorities is crucial to successfully navigating a crisis. Priorities are both an anchor and a way of evaluating decisions. They allow you to make difficult choices in a manner that aligns with your long-term goals and values. Priorities ease the chaos of crisis while providing clarity. Priorities are also different than goals. Goals are part of planning. They are a target, an achievement, something to tick off of a list. But goals are inevitably tied to outcomes – either you achieve the goal or you don't. Priorities are not outcome-based; they emphasize states of mind rather than external factors or actions.

Your priorities are a guide. You can use them as a way of evaluating decisions throughout the duration of the crisis. They are a way of staying centered on a larger purpose in the midst of hardship and doubt. Use them to problem-solve: "How should I solve x?" Then ask: "How does it align with my priorities?"

Priorities sound deceptively straightforward but, like all big ideas, they are deeply powerful. You won't get everything right. You won't have the resources, time, or foresight to address every challenge. But if you set priorities and stick to them, you will know that you are working on what really matters.

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EXERCISE

Step 1

Set two or three personal priorities. Formulate your priorities to be short and easy to remember. Don't forget that your priorities should be oriented around inner focus and experience rather than external factors, actions, or desired outcomes.

If you are having trouble, here are some questions you can ask yourself to help you get started:

- What do you want to maintain, safeguard, and work for in this crisis?
- What traits or characteristics do you want to display in this crisis?
- What is going to help you survive the crisis?
- Who or what does this priority serve?
- How will this priority make you feel?
- Are there particular morals or guiding principles that feel important to you at this time?
- What part of yourself is setting this priority (i.e. fear, ego, courage, purpose, meaning, inner critic, sense of obligation)?
- What key relationships do you want to maintain during this crisis?

Step 2

Set two priorities for your family organization or team. We will then discuss these together as a group to find consensus.

All of the questions from Step 1 can also help you arrive at work-related priorities. Additionally, these are more work-specific.

- What would make you feel proud even if the crisis ends badly for you or your business?
- What is most important to preserve during the crisis? (reputation, connection with customers, expertise, momentum on a certain project, etc.)

