

How to be Effective Professionals- Important Vs Urgent

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We as professionals sometimes wonder why we are not reaching our goals in profession and life. This is inspite of putting in hard work and wanting to do all activities well. This is especially true in growing in career or in practice.

We find that: long term goals are lost in day to day execution; our prioritisation is blind/ misplaced, we are stagnating, some of us are getting burnt out with long hours and anxiety.

One possible solution is that we may not be differentiating between the important and urgent. Several management gurus including Stephen Covey have written about this. In this article a bit of analysis on the subject has been attempted.

In our everyday life we have many aspects which are foreseeable and in those areas we find we are able to get it done within the time. At times the unforeseen crisis in work or clients emergency leads to the foreseen work getting delayed. If we were to examine all the “unforeseen” we maybe able to see that it can actually be foreseen. For example as a busy executive or practitioner, one may get sudden calls for spending time every day. If time can be allocated for these every day, then even those can be categorised as foreseen. If we were able to do this then the majority of the work would be done in the time available and nothing would become urgent.

Important activities are those activities which meet our goals in life or profession. These normally have longer term consequences. The activities could include: planning, proper delegation, good clear communication, reading (knowledge is power), skilling ourselves, monitoring the job of juniors, brand building, being of service to clients (empathy)...All these activities would ensure sure shot positive results. One cannot fail in growing ones career or practice.

Urgent activities are those which are to be done immediately. These activities could be filing of appeal – last day, overdue audit to be undertaken, report overdue, offers not sent – basically where firefighting is to be done to deliver. The disadvantage is that the quality may suffer (even though one has the capability), client is anxious (his faith in our reliability is eroded somewhat), we are stressed/ anxious, our image among our peers, seniors suffers.

In most cases the important becomes urgent and results are not as favourable as they should be mainly due to our habit of putting off- postponing. We do not meet our targets internal or external, we do not meet our commitments, our integrity is in question. We do not like any such results, but month after month we see it happening. We start becoming cynical and frustrated, the meaning of our effort seems vague.

Examining some possibilities can make the concept clear:

Imports + Urgent = These type of activities should be prioritized. They need to be done in time. AMC vs repair when equipment breaks down is an example. In profession scheduling with sufficient time for

revising, clients inputs incorporation for say an opinion. If 7 working days have been allocated, then finishing the opinion say in 4 days would provide time for revision, improvement and avoid stress etc. Sending the opinion on the 6th day would delight the client, rather than after 2 reminders.

Important Not Urgent = This type of activity is the most import. This involves long temr goal setting, monthly/ weekly plan, exercising (many students as well as professionals do not take care as they are busy!!) , reading in general and maybe industry/ business. New sunrise areas where knowledge is essential (GST, Latest Standards of audit/ accounting, IFRS etc) .Training oneself – at least 10% of time spent for profession can have amazing results. All this requires is will power, self discipline and being proactive. We are that most times- maybe increase the extent. Whatever such activities are postponed, they will end up with results like poor health, feeling inadequate, losing grip in office etc.

Not Important but Urgent = This type of activity maybe due to not doing some of the best practices discussed earlier. These matters need to be done and we have to do. While doing this most of us think about the important activities we are not doing over and over again. This is also the area where maximum amount of time is spent. It is important to execute work but equally important that at the end of that we feel satisfied with our effort and ultimate delivery. When in the middle of the work we get phone calls from seniors, clients, professional friends and for everybody the matter is urgent. At this time we need to be clear that unduly long time for any of this can lead to working very late etc. Text messages, using what's up for official work (maybe for short time spent on other non officeactivities?) Co-workers finding you available drop in to get clarifications. Maybe time allocated for each one, asking them to send a mail (so that you can answer when free) are measures to mitigate and gain time and respect.

Not Urgent + Not Important = Most successful professionals do this type of activity which includes watching TV, browsing sites of interest, catching up on friendswhatsup.... All these are also ideally necessary in ones life. However maybe this can be done once one is home and unwinding. Also the time spent on these activities if in office or if unduly long leads to becoming lazy, unwilling to take up additional work, totally losing sight of your goals. For an average professional who wishes to grow, 1 hour at these type of activities could be the maximum.

We have a wealth of articles on google on this subject. Reader may validate. Wish all professionals an empowered career and life.