A METHOD FOR SETTING PRIORITIES

Based on the ideas of Dr. Joan Thomas and other sources.

Many people know it is important to set priorities, but few people actually do it. At first glance, it seems that everything is a priority--so how can anything be dropped from your hectic schedule? If, however, you follow a specific method for setting priorities, you will probably find that actually you do care about certain things more than others. Once you have made this discovery, you will be able to make better decisions about how to spend your time.

You should go through this exercise at least once a year, since priorities change. The method works much better if done on paper; in fact, it will be easiest if you duplicate some of the sheets described below, so that you can use them each time you do this exercise. Allow several hours whenever you do the exercise. That may seem like a lot of time, but the time spent will be well invested.

I. Broad Life Goals

Make a sheet that lists the following topics:
AFFECTION--to obtain and share companionship and affection.
DUTY--to dedicate myself to what I call duty.
EXPERTISE--to become an authority on something.
INDEPENDENCE--to have freedom of thought and action.
LEADERSHIP--to become influential.
PARENTHOOD--to raise a fine family, to have heirs.
PLEASURE--to enjoy life, to be happy and content.
POWER--to have control of others.
PRESTIGE--to become well known and respected.
SECURITY--to have a secure and stable position.
SELF-REALIZATION--to optimize personal development.
SERVICE--to contribute to the satisfaction of others.
WEALTH--to earn a great deal of money.
Number the traits according to their importance to you. The first time you do this, it may be helpful to ask your partner and your parents to fill out such a sheet as well.

II. Wish List

Make a list of all your wishes, in every realm, from the sublime to the ridiculous. It helps to begin each with "I wish . . . ." Then go through the list several times, asking one of the following questions each time.

a. "In what area of my life does this wish fall?" Write P (personal), I (interpersonal), or C (career) by each wish. I find it helpful to add the area of O (other) and to add mixed areas, such as P/C.

b. "How long might it take me to make this wish come true?" Write down the number of months or years you think will be needed. In certain cases I find it helpful, if a bit depressing, to use the label X here, for wishes that, while heartfelt, will probably not come true in my lifetime (world peace, etc.).

c. "How high a priority is this wish *within* its area, such as the personal?" Write H (high), M (medium), or L (low). It is hard to compare apples to oranges, but asking this question *after* deciding areas enables you to compare apples to other kinds of apples.

d. "Is this wish something I should do (S), something I need to do (N), something I want to do (W), or some combination of those?"

III. Setting Goals

Divide a sheet into two parts, with short-term goals (within one year) at the top, and long-term goals (within five years) at the bottom. In each half, make three columns: personal, interpersonal, and career (plus other and mixed, if desired). Refer to your wish list while filling out this sheet. For short-term goals, in the personal column, list the personal wishes that have first, second, and third highest priority. Do the same in the other columns, then repeat the procedure for long-term goals.

IV. Goals and Plans List

Make a sheet with the following points on it, leaving plenty of space for each:
--The goal I want to accomplish this week is:
--The steps I will take to accomplish my very short-term goal are:
--The goal I want to accomplish in the next three months is:
--The steps I will take to accomplish my somewhat short-term goal are:
--To work on my somewhat short -term goal this week, I will:

Choose a few goals from your "Setting Goals" list and think about them while filling out this sheet. It is important to start working toward some of your goals during the week in which you do this exercise.