



## LEADERSHIP COMPETENCY: SETS PRIORITIES

*“It is not enough to be busy;  
so are the ants.  
The question is: What are you busy about?”*

*Henry David Thoreau*

### Defining Characteristics

- Recognizes which goals are most relevant to the mission.
- Can rank order the importance of challenges and objectives to the organization.
- Sets high goals and standards for self and group.
- Maintains high levels of effort over sustained periods of time.
- Can separate out what’s “fun” to do and what needs doing.

### Development Activities

1. Walk through your goals and projects with your manager and get clear understanding of his/her priorities. Check to see if priorities have shifted.
2. Ask for feedback from customers or clients about what is most urgent for them and what are their priorities in the work you do for them.
3. List all the new and existing projects and tasks. On a scale of 1–5, rate each one on its importance to the mission.
4. Practice not responding to ‘urgent’ interruptions until you have work completed on your real priorities.
5. Apply the Pareto Principle to all of your initiatives. (Pareto’s Law states that 80% of the effect or success of an effort can be attributed to 20% of the resources or actions taken to achieve the effect. Therefore, ask:

- What are the 20% of activities that will achieve 80% of your goals?
  - What is the 20% of effort that can bring 80% of results?
6. Look at all the priorities and ask: “Am I doing this because it appeals to me (e.g. values, use of skills, fun) or for logical reasons (will help achieve our goals).
  7. Ask yourself these questions:
    - What are the costs vs. the benefits of doing it?
    - How valuable are the benefits?
    - How expensive are the costs (in terms of time, energy, money, peace of mind, etc.)?
    - How well does it fit into my goals, both long term and short term?
    - What are the likely consequences of postponing it or not doing it?
    - How well can I live with these consequences?
    - Have I promised/agreed to do it?
    - How negotiable is the agreement?

## Recommended Reading

- Covey, Stephen R. The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People. New York, Simon and Schuster, 1990.
- Covey, Stephen, A., Roger Merrill, and Rebecca R. Merrill. First Things First. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1997.
- Duke Corporate Education, Staying Focused on Goals and Priorities: Leading from the Center, Dearborn Trade Publishing, 2006.
- Koch, Richard. The 80/20 Principle: The Secret of Achieving More with Less. Currency Publishing Company, 1998
- MacKenzie, Alec, The Time Trap, AMACOM, 1990
- Tracy, Brian, Eat That Frog: 21 Great Ways to Stop Procrastinating and Get More Done in Less Time, Berrett-Koehler, 2006.

## Other Resources

1. “Focus: Achieving Your Highest Priorities,” Steven Covey. Available as audio cassette or CD, this serves as a good support for managing your time as you work on priority setting.
2. Setting goals and establishing priorities – Tailored executive coaching sessions to individuals and teams.  
[www.LeadershipTalentSolutions.com](http://www.LeadershipTalentSolutions.com), Beverly L. Weise, MBA,
3. Time Management Systems, Michele Campbell, Clarity Consultants, Inc.  
[www.clarityconsultant.org](http://www.clarityconsultant.org), Los Angeles, CA 206-972-1653.