Hey, everyone,

In this lesson we're going to talk about the power of prioritizing.

Now that you know what your purpose, vision, and goals are, what your unique ability is, and what your most successful work habits are, it's time to prioritize which actions you take on a monthly, weekly, and daily basis.

The reason for doing this is that it will ultimately allow you to accomplish more and reach your goals faster. Without setting clear priorities that actively move you closer to your goals, it's simply too easy to get distracted and pulled in a million different directions.

Here's an example. Let's say you wake up and get started with your work day. You don't really have a clear idea of what you want to accomplish that day, so you begin by opening up your email. You have several emails in your inbox. One is from a colleague telling you about a recent seminar he just took that he is excited about.

So you go off to check out the website for that seminar. When you open up the web browser, you notice that you have a few notifications in Facebook, so you head over there to check them. You see a post on your friend's wall with a link to an article that interests you, so you click on that. You read the article, and then remember that you were going to check out that seminar that your colleague took, so you head back there. As you're about halfway through that article, you get a notification that a new email has come in. It's from your office manager, and she has a few questions related to some new procedures you've just put into place. So you start answering that email.

Before you know it, half of the day has passed. And while you've surely done some work, it may not have been the work that you really needed to do … the work that gets you closer to achieving your goals and realizing your vision.

Here's a different possibility. You wake up and begin your work day. You open up the application you use to manage your goals and to-do list. You briefly check your priorities for the month and week and make sure they are still fresh and relevant. You then look at the list of the three most important tasks that you want to finish for the week, including any sub-tasks that you identified. Then you decide which three specific actions you can take today that will move those three important weekly tasks toward completion.

In the previous week when you got clear on your successful work habits, you realized that you're better off scheduling any important tasks earlier in the day. So you block out a chunk of time to finish the tasks in the morning, and you commit to not checking email or social media accounts, or doing anything else, until the end of that time block.

By mid-day in this scenario, you've accomplished exactly what you set out to, and you are one step closer to achieving your goals. You feel a sense of satisfaction and accomplishment at the end of the day, which gives you the confidence and motivation you need to continue moving forward.

This is the power of clear priorities.

If you wake up in the morning, and are faced with a day of nearly infinite choices, that is paralyzing. In his book Paradox of Choice—which I highly recommend reading—Barry Schwartz says that when we choose from a limited menu of choices, we feel less anxious about and more satisfied with our decision. On the other hand, when we have too many choices, we feel uncertain about how to choose, afraid that we'll make a bad choice, and often end up making no choice at all rather than risking disappointment or regret. This is a crucial concept to understand when it comes to managing your time.

So how do you prioritize? I gave you a few hints just now in the example that I used and in previous videos. I use a relatively simple system of monthly, weekly, and daily planning. I also have a set of "filters" for helping me to determine whether a new task or project is worth committing to.

First let's talk about the system. At the beginning of each month, I sit down and reflect on my long-term vision and goals. I then commit to three to five goals that I believe I can accomplish in the coming month, given my schedule and obligations, that will move me toward my long-term vision.

Then, on Monday of each week, I do a similar process for that week. I look at my three to five monthly goals and decide what three smaller goals I can commit to for that particular week that will help me to accomplish my monthly goals. I will also break down those smaller goals into distinct, doable tasks. This makes the daily planning that I do each day easier. I may also go ahead and assign each of the sub-tasks to particular days during the week.

At the beginning of each day, I check my weekly plan and the sub-tasks that I've assigned myself for that day. Sometimes I make changes if my schedule requires me to. Otherwise, I will then block out time in my calendar for that day to accomplish the specific tasks.

This system works very well because it clearly links what I am doing each day to my bigger picture goals, vision, and purpose. It means that every day I can have confidence that I am doing exactly what I need to be doing to achieve my purpose and live the life I want to live. And it means that I feel a tremendous sense of satisfaction and accomplishment at the end of each day, week, and month.

The second thing that has helped me to prioritize is developing a filter that I use to decide whether to take on a new project. Having a filter like this is absolutely crucial because the simple truth is that you will come across far more opportunities in your lifetime than you can ever participate in. And the more successful you become in your work, the more true this will be.

My current filter consists of four questions that I ask about a new idea, project, or opportunity:

1. Does it move me toward my purpose and vision?

2. Is it my unique ability?

3. Will it improve my quality of life?

4. Will it be fun?

Because I am committed to and clear about my purpose and vision, I am not interested in taking on work projects that don't move me closer to it. There just isn't enough time for those kinds of distractions.

But not all projects that would move me closer to my vision are necessarily a good fit for me. They have to fit within my unique ability. In other words, I have to know that I will be able to contribute in the way that I feel I am most capable of.

The third question, "Will it improve my quality of life?" is something I added to the filter a couple of years ago. There are so many worthy projects that have come my way that would get me closer to my vision and fit within my unique ability. But when I imagined what my life would look like if I took them on, I realized that I would actually see a decline in my quality of life. Perhaps they would add too many extra hours to my work schedule, or they would involve other types of work or details that I didn't feel well suited to.

The fourth question, "Will it be fun?" is the most recent addition. At this point I will only take on new projects that I know I will really enjoy working on. I am grateful to be in a position where this is possible, and I realize it is a place of great privilege. But I also believe that focusing on what I truly love doing is part of what has enabled me to accomplish what I have thus far.

I encourage you to create your own decision filter, or if mine resonates with you, of course you can feel free to use it. Whatever you decide, there are a couple of things you should be aware of once you put this system of prioritization and a decision-making filter in place.

The first is that you will need to get very good at saying "no." For some of you, this is easy. But for others, it can be excruciatingly difficult and painful. It will feel like you are letting everyone down. When you are crystal clear about your purpose, vision, and unique ability, however, I think it will be easier for you to say no to projects that aren't a good fit. The assignment for this week—the "To NOT do list"—will help give you some practice in saying no.

The second is that you will have to get very good at delegating. Next week we're going to explore this further by helping to answer the questions "Should I be doing this, or can someone else?" and "Can this be automated or outsourced?"

Okay, that's it for this week. See you next time!