LEAD ABOVE NOISE
LEADERSHIP EXCELLENCE. SIMPLIFIED.

Leading With Impact:
Getting Prioritized!

A simple, action-oriented guide to help leaders prioritize… so there
is actually time to dedicate to leadership!

*"The task of leadership is not to put greatness into people, but to elicit it, for the
greatness is already there"*
-John Buchan

What's this guide all about?

Leadership matters. If you're reading this, you know as much. But often the question is – when am I supposed to find the time? Have you seen my calendar? Do you think that TPS report is going to cover itself? All fair.

At Lead Above Noise, we work with leaders who simply want to make work work better. Your day-to-day experience – and that of your teams – it really matters. We all deserve to *want* to come to work every day and do great things. Feeling great about being at work engages us. It drives our commitment levels and our ability to innovate and think critically. All of which yields results. But how do we find the space to make this happen? It begins, of course, with getting prioritized.

And we do all of this through simple solutions and techniques that are (a) easy to apply, and (b) yield results. We keep our distance from complex theories and frameworks that look great on the page, but don't always translate to reality.

So we developed this simple guide because we find that one of the most common challenges faced by leaders and their teams is straight-up overwhelm. Leaders *want* to be doing a better job… they simply can't find the time to catch a break and figure out how. And to achieve this – well – you've got to prioritize. So let's cut out all of the noise that isn't serving you in the here and now.

This guide is designed to help you do just that. With the support of this guide you'll be fully armed and ready to

1) Understand the full impact prioritization can have (we need it!)

2) Identify the obstacles (wait – why aren't I doing this?)

3) Develop an action plan to overcome the obstacles (I can see clearly now!)

4) Finally remove the noise (… and here are the things we WON'T be doing)

Are you feeling ready to dive in and clear out the noise?

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1. I know prioritization matters... but tell me why again?

Yes – prioritization is largely about creating time and space. But if that's not a strong enough case for you, imagine what a prioritized world could do for you/your team / the business:

You / your team would…	The business overall would…
o See a direct link between effort expended (inputs), and meaningful business outcomes (outputs). Put busy work down, mercifully of course.	o Better balance work that (a) delivers on current commitments, while also (b) allows for innovation, experimentation, and focus on longer-term growth
o See how John's work + Jane's work + your work accumulate to total something bigger (when we're all working toward fewer, same goals… our outputs accumulate even more)	o Plan more strategically to acquire and develop the right, key skills, rather than urgently hiring the most available talent just in time
o Spend more time, *focused* time, on the right activities… and deliver more effectively	o Maximize its investment dollars in key areas, rather than "peanut butter" spreading its investments across a series of bets
o Not feel compelled to fill every minute with meetings	o Maintain a more engaged workforce who sees a direct link between the work they do, and the business's outcomes
o Experience fewer "firedrills"	
o Actually learn to say "no" when something isn't aligned to a priority	

Are you sold yet? Then read on…

2. Wait – why the heck am I not already focused on doing this?

Let's be honest. Prioritizing effectively is easier said than done. Often there are big, hairy obstacles standing between us and a focused set of priorities. But before we can remove them, we must know them. In the table below, you'll find a list of obstacles commonly articulated by leaders. Review the list, and identify the two most applicable to you and your team

 *(**Note: the exercise can be more impactful when your team is engaged in contributing thoughts. To the extent it's appropriate, seek and leverage their inputs).*

Common Obstacle	Select 2
1. Prioritization takes an investment of time – our most valuable commodity – that we can't afford	
2. We need to feel like we can "do it all" – I don't want to have to admit I can't fit something in	
3. We haven't identified clear, big-picture goals… so it's not really clear what the priorities should be	
4. We tend to do what we enjoy or are good at versus thinking about what truly needs to be done	
5. Senior leadership may have its priorities, but as they aren't cascaded consistently, different team members have different perceptions	
6. Clients / customers are constantly presenting challenges we've not planned for…really anything they want becomes a priority	
7. There is always something "urgent" at hand	
8. "No" never seems like an acceptable response	
9. Other	

Know what's standing in your way? Then read on…

3. Let's get real

OK. You've named the enemy.   Now we don't want to oversimplify… but often we (as in humans) have a tendency to see obstacles as insurmountable. We see the mountain before us, realize we can't move it, and we simply give up… when we should be thinking of ways to get *around* it.

That's what we're going to do here. We're not going to move the mountain. But we're going to identify some *simple,* next-step actions we can take to get us one step closer to moving around the mountain.

For each of the two obstacles you've selected above, answer the following questions for yourself… with your team where applicable. You will find a sample set of replies below.

1) Select an obstacle. How does it present itself as a challenge to you?
   Clients are constantly putting forth challenges we've not planned for. I get 3 – 5 calls per day from clients seeking project updates, wanting to edit a campaign, or just wanting to vent about something. The interruptions are distracting and they knock my concentration, and in turn my ability to prioritize and manage my team.

2) How would things look and feel different if that obstacle were suddenly removed?
   I would better triage the inbound calls. My clients would know who their account person is, and exactly when to escalate something to me. Non-urgent questions for me could either be sent via email or perhaps we could set up a weekly 30 minute touch base to serve as a standing forum.

3) What would you require in order to be able to make that happen?
   I would need air cover and alignment from my boss to (1) reassign client contact points, and (2) tell our clients I can no longer take unscheduled, non-urgent calls. I would also need to establish greater role clarity across my team, and ensure a dedicated Account Manager is fully trained to handle the majority of questions and issues arising.

4) What is one step you can take in the near-term to action this?
   This week I will create a proposed plan – with both my challenges as well as proposed solutions -- to share with my boss. With his support, I can move forward with the plan.

Feeling ready to rock? Then read on…

4. Time to take out the trash (or rubbish, if you prefer)

Once you execute your plan to get to your core priorities, this will illuminate where you should be spending your time. Which means… of course… you'll need conversely to identify the things you should be decommissioning.   And that can be difficult… but truly essential.

Here is a simple exercise we offer our clients when working to strip the noise out of their days:

It's called the Stop/Start/Continue, and here's how it works

Purpose: With clarity of priorities, you and your team will need to align on how and where your time is being spent.   This tool should help you and your team understand and asses this, with a focus on identifying (a) Where we're doing things that aren't serving us in achieving our goals, and (b) Where we're _not_ doing the things that _would_ be serving us. The end result should be that people are able to get done more of the work that truly matters, often by cutting out the pieces that don't.

How to use it: You may want to start by doing this with only yourself. And with your answers below serving as a template, invite your team into a discussion in which you make choices together. The questions are simple. Answer them honestly, and you'll be amazed at the shift you'll see emerge.

Again, you'll find sample answers to help get your thinking started.

Exercise

STOP	List one or two things I'm currently doing that are not working (I should STOP doing them).
	I send constant emails to my team members, which I know serves to distract them. I need to stop doing this – and perhaps send each a daily email at the end of the day.
	I have my team complete a weekly dashboard of achievements. Frankly this takes time, and it's not adding incremental value. I will give them this time back to do more important things.
START	List one or two things that would be beneficial for me to START doing.
	I often find myself answering the same questions time and again. I will start distributing a weekly FAQ to clients, to reduce inbound volume on my end.
	I will start having a monthly career development conversation with each member of my team. I will ask them to create the agenda – I simply have to carve out the time. But this is important.
CONTINUE	List one or two things I am currently doing well that I should CONTINUE doing.
	We should continue doing our monthly financial analysis to see how we are trending relative to our budget. This really supports and drives our ability to assess our performance and course correct real-time.

And that's that.

About Lead Above Noise

Lead Above Noise is a Leadership and Organization Development consultancy focused on Making Work Work Better. We believe to our core that great organizations are grounded in great leadership. And it is our personal mission to partner with leaders and teams who believe the same, and are looking for simple (but not easy!!) tools and strategies for evolving their work, and in turn, their ability to deliver delight.

We offer

(a) *Organizational "Tune Ups"* – for organizations who believe their strategy and products are right… but something is falling down in delivery or execution. A tune up can help diagnose the problem areas, yielding recommendations that drive measurable improvements to your business

(b) *Facilitated Leadership Workshops* – for leadership teams looking to build awareness and skills, and come away with tools and action plans for driving change

(c) *Advisory Services* – for organizations interested in taking more of a DIY (do it yourself) approach to Leadership and Organization Design… but is just looking for some coaching and support along the way.

To learn more, visit http://www.LeadAboveNoise.com where you can sign up for our free weekly email newsletter, Making Work Work Better.