



Help! I'm overwhelmed!

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COLUMNIST

DEAR CHIEF: I can't seem to concentrate on tasks. I feel like I'm losing my mind at work because I have a hundred things going on at once. At some point, every day, I find myself just staring at my office walls, not knowing what I should do next. With many deadlines and little time, it's evident to everyone that I'm struggling to get things done. I'm afraid this is having a negative impact on my career. I need help. I'm so overwhelmed!

OVERWHELMED OFFICE GUY



DEAR OVERWHELMED OFFICE GUY: I certainly understand your feeling of being overwhelmed. There have been many times when I would freeze up when my phone rang, someone knocked on my door, my text message alerts were chirping, and my email notifications buzzed relentlessly, all at the same time! It felt like paralysis overtook my body and I couldn't move anything but my eyeballs.

This kind of paralysis is a natural sensation that occurs when a human or animal brain becomes inundated with many things at once. For instance, do you know why a lion tamer uses a stool

to control a lion? What's so powerful about the stool? Wouldn't a sword or baseball bat be a better option?

A lion tamer uses the stool by holding it up and pointing the four legs toward the lion's face. At that moment, the lion tries to focus on all four legs at the same time. This is difficult for the lion to do so it becomes overwhelmed and remains still as it tries to decide which leg to focus on. See? It's not just you and I who freeze up when trying to focus on too many things at once.

To prevent this from happening, it is imperative that you concentrate on one task or activity at a time. A good method to do this is to prioritize and work on the most important and urgent tasks/activities first and then moving to the less important and less urgent ones.

A great way to prioritize is to place each task or activity into one of the following four categories:

- 1) Important & Urgent
- 2) Important & Not Urgent
- 3) Urgent & Not Important
- 4) Not Urgent & Not Important

Tasks/activities in #1 need to be accomplished first and immediately! Tasks/activities in #2 need to be given deadlines for attention later on. Tasks/activities in #3 need to be delegated

to another capable person if one is available. And tasks/activities in #4 need to be set aside or filed away for another day or perhaps postponed indefinitely!

The key to all this is knowing what to overlook. Not everything is important and urgent. Like a wise man once said, "If everything is important, then nothing is important."

So organize or agonize. Don't get wrapped up in a life and job where everything goes or you'll end up in a life and job where nothing goes.



Are you someone striving to achieve your maximum potential, develop your leadership and/or management skills, enhance your professional development or self-improvement efforts, or improve your professional relationships? If so, then get advice from a proven leader and mentor. Jeff Urbaniak is a retired Air Force Chief and current Leadership Consultant with over 30 years of leadership and management experience. For an opportunity to have your issue or concern addressed in the Dear Chief column, go to www.DearChiefAdvice.com and submit your comments or email them to Jeff@DearChiefAdvice.com.