



Prioritize the 80/20 way

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DEAR CHIEF: I learned from your previous column “Help! I’m overwhelmed” to prioritize things based on what is important and urgent. However, I’m having a hard time determining what is really important at work. I get conflicting opinions from others and begin to question my own judgment. What’s a good method to help me truly determine what’s important?

SECOND GUESSER



DEAR SECOND GUESSER: Don’t panic. It can be very difficult, at times, to determine your most important priorities, but with a proper analysis, it could become quite obvious what they are. A great concept that can help you in determining your priorities is the 80/20 principle.

The 80/20 principle applies to almost everything. It’s practically a law of nature that tells us that 20 percent of people, natural forces, economic inputs, or any other causes we can measure typically lead to about 80 percent of the result, outputs, or effects.

Richard Koch did some research on

this phenomenon and here are some examples he shares in his book *Living the 80/20 Way*:

1) In a poker match it’s not uncommon that 20 percent of the players will walk away with 80 percent of the money.

2) In any large retail store, 20 percent of the sales staff will make more than 80 percent of the dollar value of sales.

3) About 20 percent of a company’s customers lead to more than 80 percent of that company’s profit.

4) About 80 percent of books sold come from 20 percent of authors.

5) More than 80 percent of scientific breakthroughs come from fewer than 20 percent of scientists.

6) Criminal statistics tell us that about 20 percent of thieves make off with 80 percent of the loot.

Leadership expert John Maxwell also did some research on the matter and he revealed that 20 percent of your people will take up 80 percent of your time; 20 percent of products bring in 80 percent of the profit; and with humor he even said that 20 percent of people at a picnic will eat 80 percent of the food--ain’t that the truth!

All of these statistics tell you that 20 percent of your priorities will give you

80 percent of your production if you spend your time, energy, money, and personnel on the top 20 percent of your priorities.

Now that you know what the 80/20 principle is, go ahead and make a list of everything (in your situation) considered to be an impactful result. Then answer these questions:

How are you or your company arriving at those results? Who are the main players or what are the main factors creating the impact?

Whoever or whatever they are, they are your “20 percent”--your most valuable players--your most important things--your top priorities.

Once you accurately know your “20 percent,” you can begin committing 80 percent of your time, effort, and resources to it. Doing this will enable you to accomplish the most important and urgent things in a timely manner.



For an opportunity to have your question, 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.