

# How to Decide What's Important

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**Last week we looked at distinguishing between the Urgent on the one hand and the Important on the other.**

We used a matrix, sometimes called the Eisenhower Matrix. And if you haven't seen that video, [here's a link to it](#). I recommend you go back and check it out real quick before we get into today's topic which really flows from that.

I got quite a bit of feedback from folks saying that they found the matrix really helpful, but they were having difficulty in struggling sometimes to distinguish between what was 'merely' urgent and what makes it important. So I want to share with you how to do that - how to make that distinction.

The way to decide whether something is important or not, is to understand the degree to which it helps you achieve your OMG. Not what 'OMG' usually stands for text messages etc., but your Overarching Medium-term Goal.

You need to have an OMG - an overarching medium term goal as a North star. What is it? It's essentially something that's really important for you to achieve in the medium term, and in this context, I mean something that you can do within the next three to twelve months, so it's not such a short-term project that you can knock it out in a day or so, and it's not something that rolls on for many years. It's your overarching medium-term goal and I'll give you some examples in a moment or two.

The key thing is that your overarching medium term goal (A) it should stick around until you've accomplished it, and (B) it becomes, like I say, your North Star. It's the degree to which any specific action gets you closer to accomplishing your OMG that makes the distinction between something being merely urgent or being important.

And that being so I'm sure you can see that you really can only have one OMG at a time. You can't really do this with more than one overarching medium term goal. Actually, you can have two. You can have an OMG for what you're trying to achieve at work, and you can have a personal OMG and that's fine. But in either of those two spheres having more than one OMG doesn't really add up.

Let me give you an example. Let's think about two people. We've got Juan and Jenny. Juan is the head of IT in a large training company and as head of IT he does a bunch of stuff, probably the majority of his time is making sure that the core software that they use for their online trainings - a piece of software called LearnDash is up-to-date and working well and all that sort of stuff

and you know, he's in charge of all of the email and slack and everything else that they do from an IT point of view.

Jenny's an independent yoga instructor. She's based in Manhattan. And as with so many people in the same field, she had a thriving personal practice where she taught classes in person and coached one-on-one with her clients, and then of course with COVID all of that has changed radically and dramatically.

Now, at home Juan and Jenny face two very different situations. Juan has realized over the last probably a couple of years that he's been putting on weight. He's got sluggish. He's lost his edge. So he set his personal OMG to radically change his diet - after some thought and research and counseling, he's realized that exercise is important, but diet is really where he's getting it wrong. So he's going to be working with a nutritionist - he's radically going to change his diet. That's what his OMG is - change his diet and fundamentally change his eating habits.

Jenny on the other hand is having a battle with her daughter. To be precise her teenage daughter has been in a snit for a long time and eventually came out and accused Jenny of not loving her the way she should, not paying attention to her being way too much consumed with her work, and that she - her daughter - was feeling left out. And so she set her 'home' OMG to be to fundamentally change her relationship with her daughter. This breaks her heart, she wants to make sure that her daughter really knows she's loved and cared for.

Now in that context, in terms of setting their priorities domestically - we'll come to work in a moment or two - let's say they both get the same text. It's just, you know early in the morning and both of them get a text from their daughter. It says that they're out in their socially agreed 'bubble' with friends, but have left their cell phone behind. They're texting from their friends cell phone. To Juan this is a bit of a nuisance. It's sort of urgent. This is his daughter. Somebody's got to fix this. He'll get round to it, but the reality is it's urgent, but it's not important. His daughter might be having, you know a bad morning as a result, but it's not going to change the world.

For Jenny because of her OMG, this is urgent and important. This is a specific example where she needs to be able to show her daughter that she comes first. And so for the two of them the same text will have different results. Neither of them loves their daughter less than the other. It's just they're in a different context.

On another day later in the week - It's Saturday lunchtime - and both Juan and Jenny have realized 'I got to go get the groceries in for next week'. So they sit down to pull together a list of grocery shopping. The list for Jenny is just an interruption. It's got to be done. Let's dash it off, get it done get to the store get the groceries, get back. For Juan with his OMG, this is important. This is precisely the sort of thing that if he doesn't take time and get right he's going to end up walking around the store filling his basket full of stuff that he shouldn't really have in the house

to start with, not thinking through a planned meal ahead of time and the week will go to pot in terms of fundamentally changing his eating habits.

So here are two people in different environments. And in both cases are finding themselves meeting exactly the same situation, but for each of them, it's fundamentally the opposite, which bucket they put it in, Urgent or important.

Let's peer into their work lives. As we've already seen Juan is head of IT in a large training company that has both online and offline training offerings, and he spends most of his time just keeping everything up to date. Now, along with his CEO, they have decided that email has become a really inefficient way of communicating, and so Juan's work OMG - his overarching medium term goal at work is within the next six months to move 90% of their internal communications as an organization off of email and on to Slack, which they've been using as a communication channel, but only a little, but they've found it incredibly effective from a communication productivity point of view. And so Juan's OMG is to get 90% of internal emails off of there and on to Slack channels.

Jenny on the other hand as an independent yoga instructor - her OMG is quite straightforward and a not uncommon one for many people in a similar position right now. She wants to get her first online class recorded online and sell it. That's what she wants to do over the next six months. It's really really important for her to start the process of moving her services online. So she wants to record her first class, get it online, start selling - it's her OMG

They both come in Monday morning, and they both have the same email from the same product / service provider. It's from LearnDash, a pretty preeminent hoster if I can put it that way for hosting online courses, and it's the one Jenny has decided to go with, it's one that Juan's company uses. The email offers a 50% discount for upgrading to the newest version of LearnDash, which happens to have 11 fantastic new features.

For Jenny, this is really important. She's about to bake in her productivity, her technology stack for the whole new next avenue - next chapter - in her professional career. She's deciding precisely what pieces of software to put together to get her courses online. And if she's going to go down the LearnDash route, she's got to make that decision now, and it probably means making a lot of investment there for the next number of years. So for her, thinking through and acting on this decision on this email that she's received, is urgent because it's a time-sensitive offer, and it's important.

For Juan, it's sort of urgent because the time sensitive thing. It's frankly not that important. Their online training is going gangbusters. If some of those features are things that folks in the field come back and tell him later on: "We've really got to have this", the 50% discount is not the biggest deal in the world to him - his budget is such that in his budget, it's not a huge amount. They're already hooked into LearnDash so he doesn't have a fundamental decision to make



about it. So it's sort of urgent - 'Let's look at it and not waste money - if it's definitely a no-brainer, let's do it.' But it's not that important in the wider scale of things.

On the other hand the next email he looks at, which Jenny also has got, which is from Slack, offering a similar 50% discount on an upgrade to a whole new paid version that allows him to put together multiple Slack channels, private and public - this is right in the sweet spot of his OMG. It's what he's here to do over the next number of months - that's important. That's important.

To Jenny, who's a member of a bunch of public Slack Channels with other yoga instructors, other service providers, you know, maybe a channel that tells her about you know, some cool stuff that's happening around Manhattan, for her it's not urgent or important. It's not either of those things. It's just a thing in the background if she has time. She might get to it, but for her that's definitely down in the bottom 'not urgent, not important' quadrant.

So I hope you can see that it's your overarching medium-term goal that is really really important in helping you decide what's important, and I've linked below to a couple of pieces that I've written in the past about setting an OMG.

And I know what your next question is, which is how do I decide what's my overarching medium-term goal? I'll share that with you next week.

But in the meantime, please scroll down, leave me a comment. Tell me what you think about urgent versus important in your world. What criteria are you using? What about an overarching medium term goal - is it something you've never thought of - or as I talk about it, have you realized you've got that, you just call it something else? Share perhaps your OMG for the rest of the folks.

And in the meantime, despite everything, let's have a great week.