

‘Truth is, there is no one who can do what I do’

As a startup scales, a complex organisation settles — one with too many meetings, where everything seems to be both urgent and important. Many people will tell you that joining a startup is like taking a bullet train in the face. Caroline Franczia, founder of Uppercut-First, looks to *The Devil Wears Prada* for answers.

Andrea Sachs must have felt a similar feeling when joining Miranda Priestly, editor-in-chief of *Runway* magazine, as her junior personal assistant in ‘*The Devil Wears Prada*’. But, as much as you may be able to run fast – in trainers or Chanel boots – this is not a sprint. It is a marathon.

Miranda: ‘By all means, move at a glacial pace. You know how that thrills me.’

The rise of social media and instant messaging has increased this perception. Digital technology makes it seem like all requests have become equally urgent and pressing. The acceleration of remote work and video conferences, and the subsequent lack of breaks and fresh air, has increased our actual productivity

time. We are now 'always on'.

Nigel: 'Come on. Miranda's pushed the run through up a half hour. And she's always 15 minutes early.'

Andy: 'Which means?'

Nigel: 'You're already late.'

However well you think you prioritise, take a second, pause and ask yourself: are you really getting stuff done properly? Countless times in the last few weeks have I discussed the necessity of reviewing time management. Why is it then that many tasks and requests end up being both urgent and important even for the most mature executives?

Getting everything done at once, right away – and done well – is not impossible... It is merely ridiculously inefficient. Forgetting that prioritisation is essential may kill your company's productivity and effectiveness in the long run.

Emily: 'You know, I rarely say this to people who... aren't me, but you have got to calm down! Bloody hell...'

Even Dwight David Eisenhower, a five-star general in the United States Army who served as Supreme Commander and was responsible for preparing the Allied invasion of Europe strategy, required prioritisation management. That's why he invented the matrix named after his own name – the Eisenhower matrix. Nevertheless, knowing about such a matrix does not mean you master it. How confident are you that you are practising it right in your daily startup life?

Let's go back to the basics – the ones that you, deep-down, know very well, yet that you have to read again to act upon. It's time to realise how much impact this five minute daily exercise could have on you and your team.

Urgent: means that it requires your immediate attention. I often tell the people I work with that no position in the B2B tech startup world compares to being a heart surgeon. What does this mean? You have at least a few seconds, if not a few minutes, to decide whether a task is urgent, if you can delegate it (not important), to whom, or even postpone (not that urgent after all) and how.

Nigel: 'And that's my problem because... Oh, wait. No, it's not my problem.'

Important: means that the task is meaningful. Whatever it is, it will have an impact on your company's long-term vision, value, and objectives. Because of its long-term perspective, an important task requires more than one=person organisation, strategic thinking, and reiteration. It is therefore uncommon that such a mission be both important and urgent. Any assignment or meeting scheduled to fulfill a critical mission should always come first. It should not be postponed under any circumstances. Avoiding proper delegation of other lesser important tasks shows that your prioritisation is wrong. Without understanding this you'll just go through the unhelpful urgent/ important spiral again.

Emily Charlton: 'I don't care if she was going to fire you or beat you with a red hot poker. You should have said no!'

Now that we have established what is what, here is a simple plan of action:

Not important/ not urgent: these issues usually solve themselves in time.

Important but not urgent: long term planning with an established rhythm.

You must schedule and list all actions in your calendar

Not important but urgent: delegate; find someone who has the skills so you can focus on your own tasks.

You don't need to step in every time you are asked to do something – think stepping in a last-minute meeting to save the day –but you do do it... Admit it.

Andy: 'That's not what I... no, that was different. I didn't have a choice.'

Miranda: 'No, no, you chose. (...) You want this life. Those choices are necessary.'

Why do you? Because of a thing we commonly refer to as ego: a dangerous combination with this new always on, always connecting space-time continuum we live in. News flash: having a busy schedule does not mean you are essential. Having ten meetings per day does not mean you are efficient. Make the choices that matter to make a difference; make yourself impactful.

How do you avoid getting in that crazy spiral where time management is impossible? Where you can never catch the bullet train, and your agenda becomes Tetris level 10?

Fill your calendar based on an operating rhythm. Know and own your non-negotiable tasks: the ones you must accomplish to be productive and efficient. Schedule them weekly and never ever deviate from them.

Reduce interactions to the actual time (do you really need an hour for this meeting, or would 45 minutes be enough?) and frequency (do you really need to meet every week, or would bi-weekly be enough?)

Identify requests that flatter your ego versus those that bring added value to your personal and company goals. Will you make a difference in this last-minute meeting that is entirely unprepared, or will you lose your time? Should you fix this line of code or recruit to avoid being understaffed?

Miranda: 'Find me that piece of paper I had in my hand yesterday morning.'

If this seems straightforward and easy enough for you, you may want to check your whole team are also applying these 'simple' principles. You may be surprised by what is actually going on.

Nigel: 'Excuse me, can we adjust the attitude? Don't make me feed you to one of the models.'

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