

# 3 ways to set priorities to ensure productivity

By TRENTON HIGHTOWER

If there's a buzzword in the workplace today, it's multi-tasking.

In today's lean and mean economy, every employee needs to be able to perform dozens of functions, many at the same time. Unlike the 1980's when companies could afford to be staffed to the hilt, today's workers are being called upon to do more...with less....and faster.

Most progressive, savvy companies have come to the same conclusion: a skilled workforce accomplishes more. Even in an age of tighter budgets, managers seem to realize that resources allocated to training employees — in hard skills, and the so-called "soft skills" — is money well spent.

First of all, when we equip our average employees with a better than ordinary skill set, that employee is bound to be more productive. For a company looking to accomplish the same results with 10 employees as

they did with 20, this has to be very appealing. Giving staff the tools they need to be the most productive — in technology, communications and job-specific areas — is bound to result in higher sales, more revenue and all-around better results.

Less obvious, however, are the real but sometimes underestimated benefits of training our employees in the so-called "soft skills." Problem solving. Conflict management. Leadership. And one of the most important, time management and priority-setting.

An employee who can manage his or her time effectively knows how to set priorities. Members of your staff who can apply three important steps to their daily mountain of tasks — many of which have simultaneous completion dates — are going to be among the most productive you have.

1. Identify the results we need or expect. Take a page

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TRENTON HIGHTOWER

## Curriculum vitae

As Frederick Community College's associate vice president for customized training, Trenton Hightower oversees the training needs of more than 5,000 employees at 75 area companies. Mr. Hightower is a board member for the National Council for Continuing Education and Training. With a bachelor's in communications and public relations, and a master's in administration of higher education, Mr. Hightower still maintains his best education was basic training at Fort Benning, Ga., home of the Army's Infantry Branch.

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out of Steven Covey's blockbuster, "The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People," and begin with the end in mind. Once we've spelled out the results we seek, we have our list of priorities.

2. Once you have the vision of what you need to happen, continue by setting goals you need to accomplish to realize those results. The more specific you can be, the better.

3. Identify the tasks you

need to accomplish to meet those goals. This is where the rubber meets the road, so to speak. This is the practical part that many good employees need help with to become better employees.

Be mindful of all the things that can steal your time, energy and focus as you use this 3-step plan to align your priorities. Many people find it helpful to post a list of priorities in a prominent place — perhaps their office wall, or their desktop. When confronted with an

activity, opportunity or assignment, consider it in light of your priorities list. If it furthers one of them, take it on. If it will have a contradictory or even a neutral effect, pass it by. At the very least, you will have a logical basis for a productive discussion for the person who has approached you.

Managing priorities takes practice. Give your employees the time and the tools they need to get better at it.

Everyone wins.