

Project Focus

We are all busy people, spinning plates to keep everything going. If it's making you dizzy, stop, clear some space on your desk and get yourself some clarity.



Who this tool is for

If you're running multiple projects over multiple areas and clients, with operational and strategic objectives alongside all the other things you want to get done in your life, you can easily feel overwhelmed. With so much going on you can't always focus clearly. Even if things are going well it is often at a cost to your own wellbeing: anxiety, sleeplessness, indecisiveness all take their toll.

What you will get out of it

This tool will help you get an overview on all the things calling for your attention. It will help you decide what to drop, what to pause and what to focus on first.

What you'll need

- 90 minutes free of interruptions
- A stack of Post-it notes
- A wall or table space to spread out on
- A pen
- Access to your calendar and task lists



The tool

1. list projects

List all the projects you are working on and expect to work on in the near future, both personal and professional, big and small, on Post-it notes, one per Post-it note. It might help to review your calendar, task and project lists to remind you.

2. Now sort your projects

It's useful to sort projects in two steps, according to criteria that make sense to you. The double sort really helps to focus.

Take all your project Post-it notes from step 1 and arrange them on a wall or table and group them in a way that makes sense to you, for example, use one of the following sets or a variant that makes sense to you.

Any one of:

- Strategically important / Operational tasks that feel urgent
- Work projects / Home Projects
- Client work / Development work / Pro Bono work

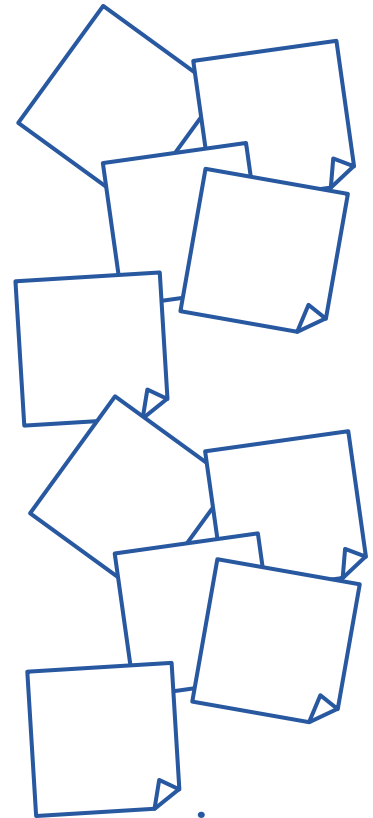
Separating them in this way helps you untangle the different aspects of all the work you do and helps you consider how you divide your time between them.

Without mixing them, cluster the groups of projects by a second filter that makes sense to you, for example use just one of the sets below, or apply your own.

Any one of:

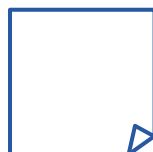
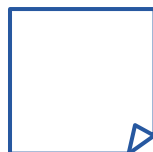
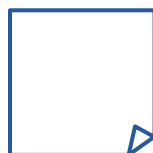
- Things only I can do / Things I could delegate / Things I have delegated
- Needs doing now / Needs doing soon / Could wait
- Does / doesn't take a lot of time
- Gets me closer to / further from where I want to be

Now you should be starting to have a sense of what you should be focusing on.



A

B



3. Identify the projects you feel are most important

If there is a group or a category within each group that clearly stands out as a priority, collect up those Post-it notes into a pile. We'll need to find time in our calendar for these.

If there is a group that is clearly now a low priority put all of those Post-its into a pile we'll call 'Backburner'.

Collect the remainder into a third pile. These we'll add to a list to address in the near future.

4. Add tasks to your calendar

Taking the calendar pile, decide on the most appropriate next step for each project. Schedule this task into your calendar giving yourself clear instructions, use verbs and be realistic about how much time you think you'll need (Use the 'Managing Your Calendar' tool to help you do this).

If you find you still have too much to handle, go back to your priority projects and pick just three to focus on over the next week or two. You can't do everything, so make a choice now. If you continue to deny your capacity limitations you increase the risk of failure across all of your projects.

Create two lists in a way that makes sense to you, and that you can easily refer to over the coming weeks, for the other piles. Those low priority tasks can go on a 'Backburner' list - you aren't going to do them now, but may do in the future. The middle priority projects can go on a 'Do Soon' list to be reviewed in a fortnight.

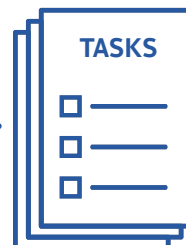
5. Schedule time

Schedule time to manage expectations and review your projects again

Put time in to manage the expectations of anyone involved in a project you aren't able to focus on in the next two weeks. People are happier if they know where they stand.

If there is a lot going on, it makes sense to repeat this tool every couple of weeks. You can review all your projects in the light of progress you have made and changes in circumstances that may have occurred in the meantime. Put time in your calendar for this too.

If this tool helps, commit to doing this at least once a quarter by putting a recurring event in your calendar. You can also review your backburner list then and bring forward anything that feels manageable again.



What will you focus on next? Tell us on Twitter
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