

## Prioritizing Your Workload

### Time management and setting goals

The mnemonic SMART provides a useful guide for setting goals and objectives:

- Specific
- Measurable
- Attainable
- Realistic, and
- Time-related

### Creating effective to-do lists

A to-do list contains the tasks you need to complete in order to achieve your objectives and goals, reminding you of the tasks you need to accomplish.

It is important to identify the type of goal:

- A **short-term goal** is sometimes a stepping stone, enabling you to measure your progress in achieving longer-term goals. A short-term goal is also generally achieved in the near future.
- A **long-term goal** is a goal that is achieved over a longer period of time, such as a few months or even years.

The mnemonic AIMS is also helpful in organizing your to-do list. Your tasks should be:

- **action-centered**, pinpointing specific actions that are required for you to meet your goals
- **incremental**, breaking actions into smaller, more manageable activities
- **measurable**, including criteria you'll use to measure whether each task has been completed successfully, and
- **scheduled realistically**, based on the time frame within which you expect to complete them – working according to a schedule increases the probability that you'll complete each task

### The priority matrix

Once you have your to-do list, you need to prioritize each task.

- **Important and urgent tasks** have the highest priority.
- **Important but not urgent tasks** include longer-term planning, networking and relationship building, and personal development. Often, these are tasks or projects you would like to do first because they tend to be more interesting. Don't ignore these tasks, because if they are left too long, they can become urgent.
- **Urgent but not important tasks** include interruptions, some phone calls, e-mails, and meetings, and requests to help out another person. Deal with these as quickly and effectively as you can and move on.

- **Not urgent and not important tasks** include organizing office space, decorating office space, dealing with junk mail, social talks with colleagues, other time wasters, and things you might prefer but don't need to do. These tasks have the lowest priority.

### **Creating and Using Time Frames**

If you can estimate time frames accurately, you will work more efficiently and meet deadlines:

- **Schedule work efficiently** – Accurate estimates about how long tasks will take to complete make scheduling a lot easier. They ensure that you won't have to keep changing your schedule. If you have a task that you accurately estimate will take six hours, for example, you can allot that time in your schedule and be reasonably confident you won't have to change the schedule.
- **Meet deadlines** – If you're accurate in estimating the time it will take to complete tasks, you'll be better able to meet your deadlines. If your estimates aren't accurate, you may need to ask to change deadlines or disappoint others who are relying on you to complete certain tasks. With accurate time estimates, you'll also be more confident about setting deadlines because you know that the time you assign for completing each of your tasks is realistic.