

# The 80/20 Rule of Time Management

This technique teaches you to focus on what's really important in your life and your life's goals.

This may come as a surprise, but despite all the talk about life and balance, you can benefit tremendously from introducing a little imbalance into your day. I'm referring to the 80/20 rule of time management, which is rooted in what is known as the Pareto Principle.

Simply put, the 80/20 rule states that the relationship between input and output is rarely, if ever, balanced. When applied to serves, it means that approximately 20 percent of your efforts produce 80 percent of the results. Learning to recognize and then focus on that 20 percent is the key to making the most effective use of your time. Here are two quick tips to develop 80/20 thinking:

**Take a good look at the people around you.** Twenty percent of your colleagues probably give you 80 percent of the support and satisfaction you need. They are your true advocates. Take good care of them. Likewise, you can probably name several friends and family members who would be there for you under any circumstances. Try not to put them on the back burner.

**Examine your Task.** Ask yourself, "What do I really want to do with my life and my time? What 20 percent of my efforts should I be focusing on?"

## Implementing the 80/20 rule

Even if you're skeptical, follow the 80/20 principles for a few days just to see what happens. You can start by implementing these "20-percent" tasks right now:

**Read less.** Identify and read the 20 percent of the study materials you get that is the most valuable.

**Keep current.** Make yourself aware of new information and innovations. [For example: Rick Warren's Book *The Purpose Driven Life: What on Earth am I Here For?*] At the very least, you may be moved to challenge established routines that could be shifting your focus away from your 20 percent.

**Remember the basics.** As you grow in your life's journey, remember your ethics and values. Let them guide your decision making process, and you're bound to end up focusing on your 20 percent.

**Here are some signs** that will help you to recognize whether you're spending your time, as you should:

You're in **your 80 percent** if the following statements ring true:

- You're working on tasks other people want you to, but you have no interests in them.
- You're frequently working on tasks labeled "urgent."
- You're spending time on tasks you are not usually good at doing.
- Activities are taking a lot longer than you expected.
- You find yourself complaining all the time.

You're in **your 20 percent** if:

- You're engaged in activities that advance your overall purpose in life (assuming you know what that is — and you should!).
- You're doing things you have always wanted to do or that make you feel good about yourself.
- You're working on tasks you don't like, but you're doing them knowing they relate to the bigger picture.
- You're designating people to do the tasks you are not good at or don't like doing.
- You're happy with your journey in life.

**NOTE:** If you'd like more information on this time management principle, I'd suggest *The 80/20 Principle: The Secret of Achieving More With Less* by Richard Koch (New York: Bantam Doubleday Dell Publishing; 1998). However, you don't need to read the book to begin using the 80/20 rule. Gain more control over your time and your work by taking one small step right now. Simply begin to look for the signs that will tell you whether you're in your 20 percent or your 80 percent. This increased awareness of what's vital to your life and your life's goals may be all you really need to start using your time more effectively.