

## News & Views

# Escaping the Tyranny of the Urgent

**tyr·an·ny** *noun*: cruel, unreasonable, or arbitrary use of power or control

**ur·gent** *adjective*: acute, pressing, dire, desperate, critical, compelling, extreme

The term Tyranny of the Urgent has been described as “letting the urgent things crowd out the important things”

In 1967 Charles E. Hummel published booklet called Tyranny of the Urgent, the concept was immediately appropriated by the business community and became a hot topic of conversation.

I first heard the term in the mid 1990s. It is one of those concepts that made me think, well of course, why didn't I recognize that, I should start doing that today!

Well I have learned over the years that very often it is not easy to do what seems so simple. Escaping the Tyranny of the Urgent; takes patience, planning and perseverance.

## Patience

To escape the pattern of responding to the current “crisis of the day” and instead focus on the important things requires patience. I have to “give” myself time to look at the big picture, to see if the “Urgent” thing or the “Important” thing brings me closer to achieving my business goal.

## Planning

To know what moves us closer to achieving our business goals requires planning. To be successful a business must have a business plan. A good business plan must have short term and long term goals and a way to measure if you are achieving those goals. That takes planning.

Now here is where the “Tyranny of the Urgent” really gets in the way. If we only respond to the urgent things we are never going to have the time to do the important things like planning and reviewing and making good reasoned decisions about how to improve our business.

## Perseverance

Perseverance, it is the commitment to seeing something through to the end. That is what we need to have when it comes to managing our businesses. We must schedule a time to review, to plan, to make necessary adjustments if we see that we are not achieving our business goal.

Some very successful business people schedule a day away from the office every few months just for planning. Some schedule Friday afternoons for planning out the next week's activity. There is no perfect or correct schedule, the key is to commit to a time to review your business and persevere until it becomes habit.

Our focus needs to be on training ourselves to quickly recognize the "Urgent" from the "Important" in the chaos of the work day. The way to do that is to know our business plan so well, that the things that are "only" urgent become obvious to us and we can and stay focused on the "really" important things.

Our business strategy should be to develop **Patience**, take time to **Plan** and to **Persevere**.

Before his passing in August 2004, Charles Hummel was formerly director of faculty ministries for InterVarsity Christian Fellowship and president of Barrington College in Rhode Island. The booklet: *Tyranny of the Urgent* is available from InterVarsity Press.