



TIME, PRIORITIES & FOCUS TOOLKIT

Building a culture where leaders use time wisely, focusing on what matters most, protecting wellbeing, and leading with calm, purposeful intent.



Time, Priorities & Focus Toolkit

for Busy & Successful School Leaders



A practical toolkit designed to help busy school leaders manage time, energy, and focus with clarity and purpose. Each tool offers a simple framework for reflection and action, supporting wellbeing, prioritisation, and effective leadership across the school year. The toolkit aligns with *People First's* coaching approach, encouraging thoughtful reflection, self-awareness, and sustainable performance.

How to use this toolkit




- Choose one or two tools that best match your current challenges.
- Use them individually, or explore them through coaching or team reflection.
- Revisit and adapt over time as your leadership focus evolves.
- Encourage colleagues to use them too — these are practical tools for whole-school wellbeing and leadership culture.

Reflect, refocus, and realign



These tools are not about doing more, they're about doing what matters. Use them to slow the pace, focus your attention, and create the space needed for calm, confident, and sustainable leadership.

What's inside:



Prioritisation Tools

-  **Eisenhower Matrix**
Prioritise tasks by urgency and importance to focus on what truly matters.
-  **4D Method – Do, Defer, Delegate, Delete**
Simplify daily decision-making and regain control of your workload.
-  **Weekly Priority Planner – Top 3 Method**
Clarify weekly focus areas and celebrate meaningful progress.

Time & Energy Management

-  **Time–Energy Matrix**
Balance performance and wellbeing by aligning tasks with energy levels.
-  **Value vs Effort Matrix**
Identify high-impact, low-effort wins to work smarter, not harder.

Reflection & Boundaries

-  **Boundary and Reflection Planner**
Protect time for focus, reflection, and recovery to sustain effectiveness.
-  **Meeting Purpose Filter**
Run purposeful, outcome-driven meetings that respect everyone's time.

Eisenhower Matrix

A tool for effectively managing your time and priorities, helping you focus on what truly matters. The matrix divides tasks into four quadrants based on urgency and importance, supporting reflection, focus and balanced workload management.

Use the tool for:

- Workload Management** – Identify where time and energy are being spent and make adjustments.
- Wellbeing and Balance** – Reduce stress by aligning daily actions with values and goals.
- Leadership Focus** – Help leaders prioritise strategically and delegate effectively.

How to use the tool:

1. List all current tasks or responsibilities.
2. Categorise each by urgency and importance.
3. Focus first on urgent & important; plan time for important but not urgent.
4. Delegate or minimise the rest.

Regular Reviews - Revisit your matrix weekly or monthly. Tasks and priorities shift, so reviewing regularly ensures time and energy align with goals and wellbeing.

To get the most from this tool:

1. Reflect weekly on where your time is going.
2. Notice which quadrant drains or energises you.
3. Choose one task to delegate, one to delay, and one to ditch.
4. Discuss insights with your coach, manager, or peer for accountability

IMPORTANT

Urgent and Important
Act now – critical and time-sensitive tasks.

Q. What could you do differently next time to reduce how often these tasks become urgent?

NOT IMPORTANT

Urgent, but Not Important
Delegate or streamline – avoid getting stuck in others' priorities.

Q. Who else could take ownership of these tasks, or how might you streamline them?

URGENT

NOT URGENT

Important, but Not Urgent
Plan ahead – invest time for long-term impact.

Q. What time can you protect this week to focus on your most important long-term priorities?





Not Urgent and Not Important
Eliminate or minimise – protect your time and wellbeing.

Q. What would change if you let go of these tasks entirely?

The 4D Method

A tool for helping school leaders make quick, confident decisions about how to manage their workload. It supports effective prioritisation, delegation, and time management by encouraging leaders to focus on what really matters and to let go of what doesn't.

Use the tool for:

-  **Daily Decision-Making** – Quickly assess each task and decide its best course of action.
-  **Delegation and Empowerment** – Build trust by giving others ownership of appropriate tasks.
-  **Workload Management** – Prevent task overload by identifying what can wait or be removed.
-  **Wellbeing and Focus** – Reduce stress by aligning time spent with priorities and impact.

How to use the tool:

1. List the key tasks, emails/actions currently on your to-do list.
2. For each one, decide whether to **Do**, **Defer**, **Delegate**, or **Delete**.
3. Focus your time on tasks that deliver the greatest value and align with your leadership goals.
4. Revisit regularly to maintain clarity and avoid task creep.

Regular Reviews - Set aside time each week to review your task list and reapply the 4D method. As priorities shift, ensure your focus and effort stay aligned with the school's strategic aims and your personal wellbeing.

To get the most from this tool:

1. Ask whether each task is truly yours to complete.
2. Reflect on where you can trust others to take the lead.
3. Notice tasks that repeatedly return – could they be system issues to address?
4. Share this method with your team to model effective prioritisation.

DO

Act now – focus on tasks that truly matter and require your expertise.

These are high-priority actions that directly contribute to strategic goals, student outcomes, or essential leadership responsibilities.

Q. What impact will completing this task today have on your wider leadership priorities?

DEFER

Plan – important tasks that can wait until the right time.

These are tasks that need your attention but not immediately. Schedule them thoughtfully to maintain control of your time and prevent unnecessary urgency.

Q. What would be the best time to give this task your full focus, and how can you protect that space?

DELEGATE

Empower others – tasks that can be completed effectively by someone else.

Delegation builds capacity, trust, and shared ownership within your team. Focus on outcomes, not methods, and use it as a development opportunity.

Q. Who could take ownership of this task and grow through doing it?

DELETE

Let go – tasks that add little value or distract from your priorities.





These are tasks that may no longer serve a purpose or could be discontinued to create more time for what matters most.

Q. What would change if this task no longer existed — and what might that free you to focus on?

Weekly Priority Planner

A tool for helping school leaders focus on the most important outcomes each week, rather than reacting to constant demands. It supports reflection, planning, and balanced workload management by identifying the three priorities that will have the greatest impact.

Use the tool for:

-  **Weekly Planning** – Start the week with clarity about what matters most.
-  **Workload Management** – Prevent overwhelm by narrowing focus to high-value tasks.
-  **Strategic Focus** – Align weekly actions with whole-school goals and personal objectives.
-  **Reflection and Review** – Celebrate progress and identify lessons for the week ahead.

How to use the tool:

1. Begin each week by listing all upcoming tasks/ responsibilities.
2. Identify your **Top 3 Priorities** – the tasks that will make the greatest difference.
3. Record additional **Must Do** and **Nice to Do** actions separately.
4. Revisit midweek to check progress and refocus where needed.
5. Reflect on Friday – what went well, what you learned, and what to carry forward.

Regular Reviews - End each week by reflecting on your progress. Recognise what you achieved, note what you'll continue next week, and celebrate small wins. Over time, this builds consistency, confidence, and calm focus.

To get the most from this tool:

1. Choose priorities that align with your core goals and values.
2. Be realistic – less is often more.
3. Protect dedicated time for the work that matters most.
4. Use reflection time to acknowledge effort, not just outcomes.

TOP 3 PRIORITIES

Focus – what will make the biggest difference this week.

These are your highest-impact tasks or projects that align directly with strategic goals.

1

2

3

Q. What three outcomes will make you feel that this week has been successful?

MUST DO

Essential tasks – complete to maintain daily operations.

These are non-negotiable actions that keep the school running smoothly (e.g., deadlines, meetings, safeguarding tasks).

Q. How can you complete these efficiently without letting them dominate your week?

NICE TO DO

Optional – tasks that add value but are not critical right now.

These might enhance systems, relationships, or long-term improvements but can wait if capacity is tight.

Q. Which of these tasks would you enjoy doing most — and when could you realistically make time for it?

Pause – recognise progress, learning, and next steps.

End the week with a brief review. Reflect on what worked, what challenged you, and what you'll do differently next week.

Q. What are you most proud of achieving this week, and what will you take forward into next week?

Time-Energy Matrix

A tool for helping school leaders manage their workload by recognising not just *how much time* tasks take, but *how much energy* they require. It supports reflection on personal effectiveness, wellbeing, and the balance between effort and impact.

Use the tool for:

- Energy Awareness** – Identify when you're at your best and where energy drains occur.
- Workload Balance** – Ensure high-effort tasks are balanced with recovery and reflection.
- Delegation Decisions** – Recognise when tasks could be shared or simplified.
- Wellbeing Reflection** – Align time use with energy levels to prevent burnout.

How to use the tool:

- Plot your typical weekly tasks or responsibilities on the matrix according to **time spent** (low–high) and **energy level** (low–high).
- Notice where your energy is invested most and whether it matches your priorities.
- Identify tasks that could be adjusted, delegated, or removed.
- Reflect on when your energy naturally peaks and plan demanding tasks during those periods.

Regular Reviews - Review your matrix monthly or each half-term. Over time, your energy patterns may shift depending on workload, personal circumstances, and school priorities. Regular reflection helps maintain sustainability and wellbeing.

To get the most from this tool:

- Observe your energy patterns across the week – when are you most effective?
- Build in time for recovery and reflection after demanding tasks.
- Discuss patterns with a coach or mentor to explore adjustments.
- Consider small changes that make a big difference — environment, timing, or support.

TIME

RECONSIDER

Review or redesign – draining tasks that take too much time and energy.

These may need to be delegated, redesigned, or approached differently.

Q. What would make these tasks less draining — and who could support you in that?

OPTIMISE

Maximise impact – use your strengths where energy and time align.

These are key leadership activities where you're fully engaged and effective. Protect and prioritise them.

Q. How can you protect time for the work that brings both energy and impact?

RECHARGE

Rest and restore – necessary pauses to sustain wellbeing.

These are moments for recovery, reflection, and rest. Without them, productivity and wellbeing decline.

Q. What helps you recover energy, and how can you protect that time without guilt?

MAINTAIN

Keep doing – short, energising tasks that sustain motivation.

These activities recharge you and build momentum — like mentoring conversations or creative planning sessions.

Q. What small, energising activities could you build into your week to maintain motivation?

Time & Energy

ENERGY

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Task Audit: Value vs Effort

A tool for helping school leaders evaluate tasks, projects, or initiatives based on the value they bring compared with the effort they require. It supports evidence-informed decision-making and helps ensure that time and energy are invested where they will have the greatest impact.

Use the tool for:

- Strategic Planning** – Identify which projects deliver the biggest impact for the effort required.
- Workload Review** – Streamline priorities and remove unnecessary or low-value work.
- Team Decision-Making** – Support collaborative discussions on where to focus attention.
- Continuous Improvement** – Encourage smarter working, not harder working.

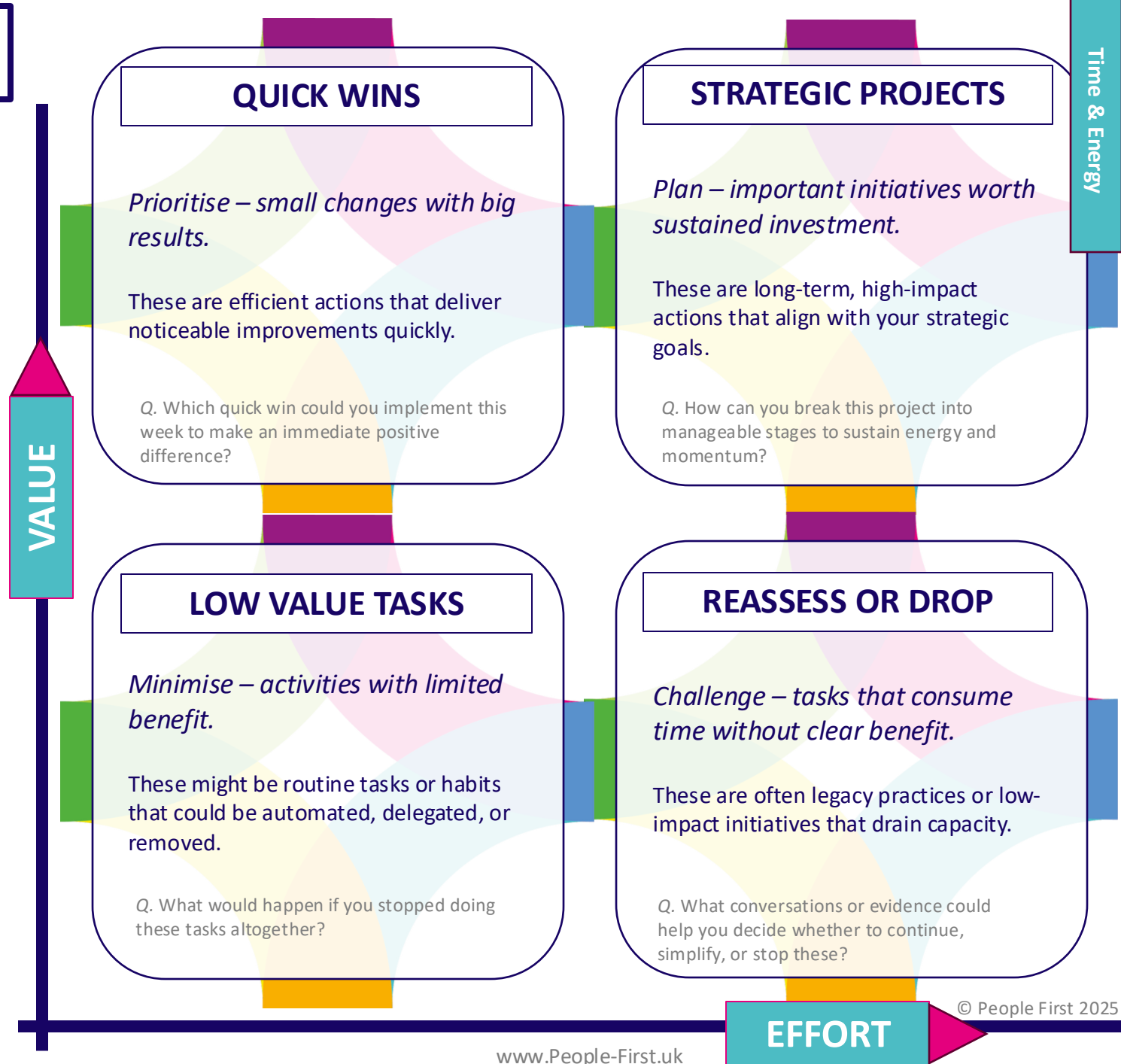
How to use the tool:

- List current projects, initiatives, or recurring tasks.
- Plot each one on the matrix according to **effort required** (low–high) and **value or impact** (low–high).
- Identify where your time is currently spent and where adjustments could be made.
- Focus on high-value, manageable tasks first; review or redesign those with high effort and low return

Regular Reviews - Revisit your matrix each term or after major projects. As priorities evolve, this reflection ensures your time and energy are directed towards the greatest benefits for pupils, staff, and the wider school community.

To get the most from this tool:

- Be honest about how much effort a task truly takes.
- Challenge assumptions about what is 'essential'.
- Share your matrix with colleagues to gain perspective.
- Focus on simplifying, not adding, to create meaningful capacity.



Boundary and Reflection

A tool for helping school leaders create time to pause, think, and recover within the rhythm of their week. It supports sustainable leadership by helping you plan boundaries that protect focus, wellbeing, and reflection time, preventing burnout and promoting balance.

Use the tool for:

- Work-Life Balance** – Create clear boundaries between work and personal time.
- Focus and Recovery** – Build in short, purposeful pauses to reset and refocus.
- Reflective Practice** – Develop habits that encourage calm thinking and professional growth.
- Wellbeing Leadership** – Model healthy boundaries for others and lead by example.

How to use the tool:

- Map out your typical week and identify high-pressure periods or non-negotiable commitments.
- Add planned **Boundary Blocks** – protected time for focus, breaks, or non-work priorities.
- Schedule short **Reflection Windows** – moments to pause, reset, and consider what's working.
- Review and adjust regularly as the term progresses.

Regular Reviews - Check in weekly to see how well your boundaries are holding and whether reflection time is being used effectively. Notice where boundaries are being eroded and what adjustments could help maintain balance.

To get the most from this tool:

- Protect at least one genuine “thinking space” each week.
- Recognise reflection as productive time, not a luxury.
- Use your boundaries to model healthy working habits to your team.
- Be flexible – boundaries can evolve as your priorities change.

Protect – dedicated time that supports focus and wellbeing.

These might include no-meeting zones, early finishes, or quiet work periods for planning and strategic thinking.

Q. What one boundary would make the biggest difference to your focus or wellbeing if you committed to it this week?

Pause – intentional moments to think & learn.

Brief, protected periods to reflect on progress, challenges, and next steps. These support clarity and continuous improvement.

Q. When could you build a short reflection pause into your week to review progress calmly?

BOUNDARY
BLOCKS

REFLECTION
WINDOW

RECOVERY
TIME

REALIGNMENT
CHECKS

Recharge – space to rest, reset, and renew energy.

Time away from work that restores perspective and helps maintain performance.

Q. What helps you switch off and truly recover your energy between demanding days?

Reset – review whether your boundaries still serve your goals.

Used termly or half-termly to reflect on what's working and what needs to shift.

Q. What signs tell you it's time to reset your boundaries or routines?

Meeting Purpose Filter

A tool for helping school leaders design and run purposeful meetings that make the best use of everyone's time. It supports strategic focus, shared ownership, and wellbeing by ensuring meetings are intentional, necessary, and outcome-driven.

Use the tool for:

- Meeting Design** – Clarify the purpose, people, and desired outcomes before scheduling.
- Time Efficiency** – Reduce unnecessary or repetitive meetings and free up valuable time.
- Team Clarity** – Create a shared understanding of why the meeting exists and what success looks like.
- Leadership Modelling** – Demonstrate respect for others' time through thoughtful meeting planning.

How to use the tool:

- Before arranging a meeting, define its **core purpose** – to inform, decide, solve, or connect.
- Ask whether the meeting is the most efficient way to achieve that purpose.
- Identify who genuinely needs to attend and what preparation is required.
- After the meeting, review whether the time spent delivered the intended outcomes.
- Adjust future meetings based on what added value and what could be improved.

Regular Reviews - At the end of each half term, review your calendar to see how much time is being spent in meetings. Identify where shorter, combined, or alternative formats (like updates via email or shared documents) could work better.

To get the most from this tool:

- Be clear about *why* you are meeting, not just *what* you'll discuss.
- Always define what a successful outcome looks like before the meeting starts.
- Encourage shared ownership – not all meetings need to be led by senior staff.
- Protect time for deep work by keeping only the meetings that truly add value.

Share – communicate key information efficiently.

Meetings that exist purely to update or share information should be short and focused, or replaced with written summaries.

Q. Could this update be shared in a different way to save time while keeping everyone informed?

Commit – reach an outcome or agreement.

Meetings designed to make decisions should include the right people, clear options, and agreed next steps.

Q. What decisions need to be made, and how will you ensure accountability afterwards?

INFORM

DECIDE

CONNECT

SOLVE

Collaborate – work together to address an issue.

These meetings focus on solutions and benefit from open discussion, creativity, and clear action plans.

Q. When was the last time you used a meeting to strengthen relationships rather than discuss logistics?

Engage – build relationships, trust, and culture.

Connection meetings focus on people, not processes — such as team check-ins, wellbeing sessions, or celebrations.

Q. How can you create the conditions for open, constructive problem-solving in your next meeting?

REFLECTION

Personal Reflection & Action Plan

- What have I noticed about how I use my time?
- What am I spending too much time on?
- Where is my biggest opportunity to simplify or delegate?
- What one action will I take this month to improve balance?
- Who will I share this with for accountability?



This toolkit was created for school leaders who want to lead with clarity, balance, and purpose. It's designed not as another checklist, but as a set of reflective tools to help you focus on what matters most — your students, your staff, your wellbeing, and your impact.

Use it as a companion throughout the year. One tool at a time, small shifts lead to sustainable change.

Amanda | People First – Supporting Educators to Thrive

My Reflections

TAILORED SOLUTIONS

Looking for something specific to support
educational wellbeing?

We create bespoke programmes to meet the
exact needs of your school.

Contact us to discuss creating a package to
support your staff to thrive.

CONTACT US



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