

# Stories about **LEADERSHIP**

## A STORY ABOUT PRIORITIZING



Tuesday, 5:12 PM. My inbox has passed the 200-email mark. The counter in the upper right corner looks like a small red pulse. I know my condition: above 200, I become tenacious. Above 250, I become dangerous – because then I want to save everything at once.

The list of "top priorities" for OnePlatform is openly displayed on the screen. It's become so long that I have to scroll to see the end. That's not a good sign. Five workstreams are labeled "critical." Three are described as "strategically essential." Each has good arguments. Each has real risks. And that's precisely why what always happens, happens: We dabble in everything—and don't really get anywhere.

The executive update is in two days. My sponsor wants to "hear clearly how we're going to make it through Q1." I see the bars on the Gantt chart, these colored rectangles pretending to be reality. Something inside me tenses. We won't make it through Q1 like this.

In the weekly call, urgent matters collide like billiard balls.

"Frederik, we urgently need the additional features in the pilot," says Marketing. "Otherwise, the thing will seem unfinished."

"We urgently need process harmonization," says Operations. "Otherwise, we'll have chaos during the handover."

"We urgently need security clearance for all regions," says Jonas. "Otherwise, I won't get approval."

Three "urgent" situations. Three "otherwise." Three logical blackmails born of complexity. Nobody means any harm. That's precisely the problem.

After the call, I get up and take a walk around the stairwell. Movement is my way of thinking when my head gets too full. On the third floor, I can hear the coach in my head, as if she were walking beside me: "Focus is what remains after you've said no."

Saying no. I know I can do it. I just haven't done it often enough in recent months because I thought it was "cooperative" to take everything.

Back at my desk, I open a blank document. Title: Q1 Pilot – Must / Should / Later.

It feels strange to write down something so obvious. But I've learned that if it's not in black and white, it's just a thought lost in the noise.

I'm starting brutally.

MUST: Stable pilot project in two regions. Interfaces. Training. Legal approval.

TARGET: Two features that have a real impact on customers. Not five.

LATER: Everything that would be good, but doesn't work.

While I'm sorting things out, I feel resistance within me. Not professional. Emotional. Because every "later" is a small "no" to someone who was telling me just yesterday why their topic is the most important one.

When I'm finished, the list is half as long. Eighteen initiatives have become seven. It feels like both relief and betrayal. Relief, because I can breathe again. Betrayal, because I know I'll disappoint expectations.

I'll invite the leads for tomorrow morning to a short call. No big meeting, no show. I want to get things clear before it gets political.

"I'm being transparent about this today," I say right at the beginning. "Because otherwise we'll get bogged down in details and lose Q1."

I'm sharing the screen.

Quiet.

It is this special silence that arises when people realize: A decision is being made here that they can no longer reverse.

Marketing is the first point. "You're removing the self-service section entirely?" Her voice is sharp, but not disrespectful. More like hurt.

"Yes, for Q1," I say. "Because it's not pilot-critical. If we build it now, we risk compromising stability. We'll bring it back for Q2 – as soon as the pilot is ready."

"But we need it for the customer experience."

"Above all, we need a pilot that doesn't waver." I hold her gaze. "Customer experience isn't just about flashy features. Customer experience is also about the system being reliable."

The atmosphere at the operation seems tense. "And what about harmonization?"

"Harmonization is a MUST," I say. "But within clear limits. Only the processes that are essential for the pilot cutover. Not the entire package."

Jonas nods. "Please. If we do it this way, I'll get the security clearance faster."

The marketing department audibly exhales. "And what do I tell my team? They've been working on this for so long."

I can feel that point where I would have caved in before, out of guilt. A sentence like, "We'll take another look." And then the focus would be gone again.

"Tell them," I say calmly, "that their work is valuable. But that we want to win now. Not everywhere, but where it counts. And that Q2 will be their moment."

I see her swallow. Then she nods slowly.

There is no applause at the end of the call. But there is guidance. And guidance is worth more than harmony.

Two hours later, I receive an email from my sponsor. One sentence: "Tough, but correct. Thank you for the clarity."

I lean back. The rain is still drumming against the window. I feel calmer inside.

Focus is not a talent. Focus is courage: the courage to accept that not everything can be done at once. And the courage to accept that I might disappoint, so that we can deliver.

I'm saving the document under the name "Q1-Reality". And I know: I'll have to defend it many times.

But now I have something I can defend.

# Takeaway inspiration

## Prioritizing

Prioritizing is having the courage to consciously say no to important things so that what truly matters can be accomplished. Focus doesn't arise from a lack of options, but from the clear decision of where all energy should now be directed.

Today, eliminate a task that is "also important" but not crucial to your core goal. Consciously say no—and feel how space opens up for effectiveness.

## REFLECTION QUESTIONS ABOUT PRIORITIZATION FOR YOU

1. Where am I spreading my energy so broadly that nothing really gets done?
2. What fear lies behind my "yes" to everything (conflict, disappointment, loss of control)?
3. What are my absolute MUST-DOS for the next 8 weeks – and what do I consistently say no to?



Feel free to contact me anytime::

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