

If everything is top priority, then nothing is top priority

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Raymond Chen

Last time, I mentioned that eventually everything is top priority. A similar topic is what I'm calling *priority inflation*, which takes more than one form.

Today's priority inflation is the introduction of new "top priority" items. ([Chris Becker has some thoughts on this topic as well.](#))

"XYZ is very important to our project. Please make it your top priority." A few weeks later, "ABC is very important to our project. It should take priority over all other issues." When this happens, I like to ask, "Is this even more important than XYZ?" I've done it so much that my management has changed the way it introduces new top priorities: Instead of just saying "Please make ABC your top priority," they list out all the existing top priorities... in priority order.

ABC is very important to our project. There are just a handful of ABC issues remaining, and we would like to close them out by the end of the month. If you have an ABC issue, please make it your top priority. To summarize:

1. ABC issues.
2. XYZ issues.
3. DEF issues.

I like this approach because it forces management to understand and acknowledge where their priorities are. If you're going to ship a product, you have to make hard choices, and one of them is deciding where your priorities are.

If everything is top priority, then nothing is top priority.

Update: Sometimes, the answer to "Is this even more important than XYZ?" was "No, XYZ is still more important than ABC." So it's not a gimme that if somebody says that ABC is top priority, it replaces what used to be the top priority. That's why it's important to keep track.

[Raymond Chen](#)

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