



accountabili-buddy

— CLARITY. COMMITMENT. FOLLOW THROUGH. —



CASE
STUDIES

CASE STUDY 30

COMPETING PRIORITY VS. RATIONALIZATION

1. TRAINING OBJECTIVE

Distinguish a legitimate recurring priority hierarchy from an explanation that frames repeated discretionary choices as though they were primarily imposed by external demands.

The trainee should identify discrepancies between stated priorities and actual allocation without assuming dishonesty or deciding which priority the client should choose.

2. CLIENT PROFILE

Client: Roberto

Goal: Develop a side business with the intention of leaving his current job within two years

Current Commitment: Two three-hour business-development blocks per week.

3. RELEVANT HISTORY

For five consecutive weeks, at least one business block has been displaced by additional work at Roberto's current job.

Roberto continues to describe the side business as his “top long-term priority.”

He often volunteers for optional extra work because it may improve his standing with his current employer.

4. CLIENT MESSAGE

Accountabili-Buddy: Neither business block happened this week?

Roberto: No. Work got crazy again.

Accountabili-Buddy: Mandatory overtime?

Roberto: Not exactly. There was a project going late, and I volunteered to help because it was important and I wanted my boss to see I was committed.

Roberto: The side business is still my real priority, though.

5. TRAINEE TASK

What are the strongest competing formulations?

What discrepancy should the trainee notice?

What evidence would help distinguish an externally imposed priority conflict from a repeatedly chosen allocation?

What would you say next?

6. EVIDENCE ANALYSIS

FACTS

- Work has displaced at least one side-business block for five consecutive weeks.
- Some of the additional work has been voluntary.
- Roberto values demonstrating commitment to his current employer.
- He describes the side business as his top long-term priority.

- His discretionary behavior has repeatedly allocated time toward his current employment when the two priorities compete.
- Roberto describes the recurring interference primarily as work becoming unusually demanding.

CLIENT INTERPRETATION

Roberto experiences his current job as a recurring competing demand while continuing to characterize the side business as his higher long-term priority.

ACCOUNTABILI-BUDDY INFERENCE

Both priorities appear genuinely important to Roberto.

However, there is a repeated discrepancy between his stated long-term priority and his actual discretionary allocation.

The issue is not whether Roberto is being dishonest.

The Accountabili-Buddy needs to determine whether Roberto's repeated allocation toward his current job reflects a priority hierarchy he deliberately endorses or whether his description of external work demands is obscuring choices he has not fully examined.

7. PRIMARY FORMULATION

Competing priorities with a repeated discrepancy between stated long-term priority and enacted discretionary allocation; whether Roberto endorses the current hierarchy remains unresolved.

8. ALTERNATIVE FORMULATIONS

LEGITIMATE CURRENT PRIORITY

Roberto may rationally value opportunities at his current job more highly in the near term while still considering the side business his more important long-term direction.

Under this formulation, his behavior reflects a legitimate distinction between current and future priorities.

RATIONALIZATION

Roberto may be describing repeated side-business displacement primarily as something work does to him even when some of that displacement results from discretionary choices.

Under this formulation, “work got crazy” does not fully represent the priority decision occurring when the two demands compete.

MIXED FORMULATION

Roberto may face genuine work demands while also repeatedly choosing optional opportunities at his current job.

External pressure and discretionary allocation can operate simultaneously.

9. MISSING INFORMATION

The Accountabili-Buddy needs to determine whether Roberto deliberately endorses the priority hierarchy reflected in his recent behavior.

The key question is not simply which activity has received more time. That is already observable.

The relevant uncertainty is whether Roberto believes that allocation accurately reflects what he wants his priorities to be during this period.

10. RECOMMENDED RESPONSE

“Work isn't only taking the time from you. You've chosen some of the extra work because doing well there matters to you. That may be completely reasonable. The question is whether that tradeoff reflects what you actually want your priorities to be right now. Does it?”

11. REASONING

The response distinguishes imposed demands from discretionary choices without accusing Roberto of making excuses or being dishonest.

His behavior already shows that current employment has repeatedly received discretionary time when the two priorities compete.

What remains uncertain is whether Roberto endorses that allocation.

If he does, the apparent contradiction may largely reflect a distinction between near-term and long-term priorities.

If he does not, the repeated allocation becomes relevant evidence that his behavior is not matching the priority hierarchy he says he wants.

The Accountabili-Buddy identifies and challenges the discrepancy but does not decide which priority should prevail.

12. PLAUSIBLE ALTERNATIVE RESPONSE

“You’ve described the business as your top long-term priority, but for five weeks your current job has received the time when the two compete. Is that because your job is actually the higher priority right now, even if the business is the higher priority long term?”

This version directly tests whether the apparent discrepancy can be explained by different near-term and long-term priority hierarchies.

13. WEAK RESPONSE EXAMPLES

WEAK RESPONSE A

“Stop making excuses about work.”

Problem: Roberto's current job is genuinely important to him, and some work demands may be legitimate. The response converts a discrepancy requiring examination into an accusation of dishonesty or avoidance.

WEAK RESPONSE B

"Your job obviously has to come first."

Problem: The Accountabili-Buddy decides the priority hierarchy for Roberto rather than helping him examine the tradeoff.

WEAK RESPONSE C

"Protect your business time no matter what."

Problem: The response imposes a rigid priority rule and ignores legitimate tradeoffs, changing circumstances, and Roberto's authority over his own priorities.

14. WHAT HAPPENS NEXT

Roberto may conclude that his current job is legitimately the higher near-term priority while the side business remains his longer-term direction.

He may conclude that the side business should receive more protected time when optional work opportunities arise.

He may decide that the current business commitment needs recalibration during this period.

He may reconsider whether the two-year exit goal still reflects what he wants.

Any of these decisions can be reasonable if they accurately reflect Roberto's priorities and are made deliberately rather than left implicit.

Roberto retains authority over the priority hierarchy and any resulting commitment or goal decision.

15. RECORD / UPDATE

Goal: Develop side business with intention of leaving current job within two years

Current Commitment: Two three-hour business-development blocks per week

Pattern: Side-business time displaced by current employment for five consecutive weeks

Important Evidence: Some additional work is voluntary; Roberto values demonstrating commitment to current employer

Stated Long-Term Priority: Side business

Observed Discretionary Allocation: Current employment repeatedly favored when priorities compete

Current Formulation: Genuine priority conflict with discrepancy between stated long-term priority and enacted near-term allocation

Missing Information: Whether Roberto deliberately endorses the priority hierarchy reflected in his recent behavior

Next Question: Does the current allocation reflect the priorities Roberto actually wants to hold right now?

16. SCORING CRITERIA

Full-credit responses should:

- Recognize the difference between imposed and discretionary competing demands
- Identify the discrepancy between Roberto's stated long-term priority and his enacted allocation
- Recognize that current and long-term priority hierarchies may legitimately differ
- Avoid treating the discrepancy as proof that Roberto is dishonest or consciously making excuses
- Ask whether the observed allocation reflects the priority hierarchy Roberto actually endorses
- Bring the recurring tradeoff into explicit decision-making

- Avoid deciding which priority should prevail
- Preserve Roberto's authority over his priorities, goal, and resulting commitments