In this lesson, you'll learn a simple scoring system that will help you take an objective look at the existing systems in your life. You'll analyze them and choose the ones with the best opportunities for improvement so that you can focus your effort.

Now that we know that systems are all around us and everything we do is already part of an invisible routine, we don't actually have to think so hard about building new ones. Instead, we can shift our focus to improving all the ones that exist already.

That's a big benefit because it's easier to change something that already exists than it is to create something new from thin air.

With all the opportunities around you, though, how do you know which ones are the best to focus your time and energy on?

You need some type of criteria to judge all those opportunities against—a way to score them so that you pick the best ones.

The four criteria that I like and that I teach are:

1. Frequency of use. So, how often do you use this system or routine?
2. Cost to complete. This could be the time it takes to run the system or the actual cost involved. Time is money, of course, so it's all kind of the same.
3. Dependence. This is a measure of how much you rely on the results of a system. And,
4. Ease of improvement. How much work will it take to build or improve that system?

Let's take a closer look at each of those.

First up, there's frequency of use. This is a pretty simple concept to understand. If you're wanting to improve a system that's giving you trouble, knowing how often you actually use it will help you figure out whether it's worth it or not to invest your time to make those improvements.

If you use a system every day or even multiple times per day, you're probably going to be better off spending your time working on that rather than on a system that you rarely use at all.

For example, I have a system for writing. It's something I do all the time. Pretty much every day. I also have a system for doing my bookkeeping.

They're both useful systems, but if I were judging them only on how often I used them, I would weigh my writing system more heavily than my bookkeeping system because I interact with that system a lot more often.

Then, there's cost to complete.

Like I said, cost could mean different things depending on how *you* interpret it. It could be a time cost, where a system that takes a long time to complete is eating up your free time or holding you back from making progress elsewhere.

An example from my own life is house cleaning. When my wife and I first moved into our home, I realized that we spent a lot of time during the week as well as most of the weekend just keeping the darn place clean.

It ate up so much of our personal time. It was obvious that there was a lot of opportunity to improve it.

Or, there could be a financial cost involved. Maybe each time you run a system, it costs you real money.

For instance, if you drive a long way to work every morning and stop somewhere for breakfast each day as well as somewhere for a snack on the way home, then you're paying a lot to maintain your car, there's a gas expense, and your food expenses are high. Wherever you spend a lot of money and wonder, "Huh, I wonder where it all went?"—that's a sign that you have a system that's leaking money and needs improvement.

Time is worth money and money buys time so, in some ways, they're the same. You can choose for yourself how to define cost.

And the cost involved could also be stress. That's a real cost that has a toll on your life. If there's an area of your life where you're filled with stress, that's a sign that the emotional cost is high.

Alright, let's talk about dependence. Dependence is our 3rd criteria, and what I mean by "dependence" is "How important is it that the result of running a system is accurate?"

Sometimes a system is helpful, but you're not really dependent on it. Maybe you like to keep your desk clean, and you have a system to organize papers and digital files on a regular basis.

It's a nice system to have and could even help you reduce stress, but it's not really critical. Meaning, if you skipped it occasionally or didn't perform it perfectly, there aren't any terrible consequences.

Of course, if your job is to be an archivist for a museum or a government agency or something, then maybe your filing and organizing system really is mission critical. If you skipped out on the system or the results weren't dependable, you could lose your job and cause a lot of problems for a lot of people.

As you can see, whether a system is mission critical or not depends on your own personal situation, so it's up to you to decide what your level of dependence on it is. Finally, ease of improvement is a useful criteria when you're trying to decide where to focus your time and effort.

Some of your systems are probably extremely disorganized and just a little bit of effort could make a big impact. That would give it a high score.

Then, there are probably others that are either really complicated or already dialed in. These are the ones where it might take a lot of effort for just a little bit of gain. That would give it a low score.

The best way for you to decide what your greatest opportunities are will be to look at multiple criteria instead of just one. And you'll weigh those criteria based on what's important to you.

A system that you use every single day might seem best at first, but then you might realize it doesn't cost much to run it, the results are not so mission critical, and you'd have to work really hard to make even the slightest improvement.

All of a sudden, you realize that it might not be your best opportunity.

On the other hand, you may have a system that seems incredibly difficult to improve, but it also takes a tremendous amount of time to use and you really depend on the results of that system.

What looked like a waste of time at first could actually be your best opportunity.

For most of us, though, the best opportunities are in this kind of sweet spot that are somewhere between those extremes. By using these four criteria, you'll be able to find which ones are in that sweet spot because they'll naturally score the highest.

So, what we just went over was a type of system—a scoring system—you can use to decide which of your own systems should get your attention for improvement.

The four criteria were:

1. How frequently you use the system.
2. How costly it is to use.
3. How much you depend on the output of the system, and
4. How hard it will be to make improvements.

You can weigh those four criteria differently to find the best results for you, but using all of them will help you find the biggest gains by not over-relying on just one.

Of course, if you do this and you're still having trouble deciding what to focus on, I also have a fifth criteria that I'll sometimes use. I call it the "frustration factor." Basically, how frustrating is the problem?

Sometimes, that's the only criteria you need to make a choice because the more frustrated you are with a problem, the more naturally motivated you are to fix it and the more rewarding it is when you do.

But that's more of a free-floating criteria. It doesn't really fit in the scoring rubric, so I use it as more of a tie breaker. If I'm feeling lost and can't figure out what to focus on next, I'll just choose whatever is frustrating me the most. And that's a fine way to go as well.

Go ahead and start judging your own system-building opportunities based on these criteria you learned, and I'll see you in the next lesson.