

TOOL: The prioritisation Matrix for Time Management

Today's environment brings with it demands, tasks and responsibilities that can leave us feeling under pressure and out of control. Finding an easy way to prioritise means we can increase our productiveness and reduce the pressure on ourselves.

This Prioritisation Matrix is an excellent planning tool that was originally developed by Stephen Covey in his book, *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People**. It is simple and straight forward, and once you know how to organise your activities with the use of this tool, you can maximise your productivity and identify and eliminate a number of time wasting activities and unproductive behaviours.

Its principle is based upon a 4-quadrant system to sort according to importance and urgency. You spend a few moments assigning your needs, tasks and activities into the appropriate quadrant. You then evaluate where you need to make changes and plan your time accordingly. If you are honest with yourself and your time, this matrix is an extremely useful way to help you focus, and prioritise where to place your attention.

We have provided two separate examples. The first being for the working environment and the second more applicable to the domestic setting. Use the guidelines that follow to go through the process.

WORK ENVIRONMENT EXAMPLE

	URGENT	Not Urgent
IMPORTANT	<p>Quadrant 1. URGENT AND IMPORTANT (FIREFIGHTING - NECESSITY)</p> <p><i>Crises</i> <i>Pressing Issues</i> <i>Deadline driven meetings, projects and reports</i> <i>Essential Commitments</i></p> <p>DO NOW</p>	<p>Quadrant 2. IMPORTANT BUT NOT URGENT (QUALITY WORK - INCREASE)</p> <p><i>Planning and Preparation</i> <i>Prevention</i> <i>Relationship building</i> <i>Self-Development</i> <i>Developing strategy</i> <i>Recognising and grasping opportunities</i> <i>Recreation and exercise</i></p> <p>PLAN NEXT AND SCHEDULE MORE</p>
Not Important	<p>Quadrant 3. URGENT BUT NOT IMPORTANT (DISTRACTIONS - AVOID)</p> <p><i>Needless Interruptions</i> <i>Unnecessary reports</i> <i>Unimportant meetings, phone calls and mail</i> <i>Other peoples minor issues</i> <i>Meeting other peoples priorities and expectations</i></p> <p>MANAGE AND DELEGATE</p>	<p>Quadrant 4. NOT URGENT AND NOT IMPORTANT (TIME WASTING - STOP)</p> <p><i>Irrelevant phone calls, Junk Mail</i> <i>Trivia</i> <i>Unproductive or excessive relaxation, social media usage/TV, Internet browsing</i> <i>Mindless diversions</i> <i>Timewasters</i> <i>"Escape" activities</i></p> <p>IGNORE/DUMP</p>

DOMESTIC SETTING EXAMPLE

	URGENT	Not Urgent
IMPORTANT	<p>Quadrant 1. URGENT AND IMPORTANT (FIREFIGHTING - NECESSITY)</p> <p><i>Medical Emergencies</i> <i>Essential Commitments</i> <i>Projects with timeline</i> <i>Pressing problems</i> <i>Last minute preparations</i> <i>Urgent Bills</i></p> <p>DO IT NOW</p>	<p>Quadrant 2. IMPORTANT BUT NOT URGENT (QUALITY WORK - INCREASE)</p> <p><i>Studying</i> <i>Investing</i> <i>Savings</i> <i>Learning and Reading relevant books</i> <i>Goal setting and following through on actions</i> <i>Exercise</i> <i>Recreation/Relaxation</i> <i>Quality time with friends and family</i> <i>Contribution to others</i> <i>Spiritual faith</i></p> <p>PLAN NEXT AND SCHEDULE MORE</p>
Not Important	<p>Quadrant 3. URGENT BUT NOT IMPORTANT (DISTRACTIONS - AVOID)</p> <p><i>Ringing phone when they can leave a message</i> <i>Internet chatting or browsing</i> <i>Facebook/Twitter/Social media notifications</i> <i>Gossiping</i> <i>Needless interruptions</i> <i>Popular activities</i></p> <p>ASSESS VALUE AND MOVE ONTO QUADRANT 2 ACTIVITIES</p>	<p>Quadrant 4. NOT URGENT AND NOT IMPORTANT (TIME WASTING -STOP)</p> <p><i>Chat/ Gossiping</i> <i>Excessive trips away</i> <i>Oversleeping</i> <i>Daydreaming, doodling</i> <i>Excessive Drinking & Smoking</i> <i>Mindless Television watching</i> <i>'Escape' activities</i> <i>Procrastination</i> <i>Un-purposeful shopping</i></p> <p>ELIMINATE</p>

How to use the matrix

- Start with making a list to identify all your needs, demands, activities and tasks. This can be for this moment in time, day/week/month ahead or for the timeline of a project.
- Now place them in the corresponding quadrant that you feel is the most appropriate.
- Review each box and re-evaluate each demand/task and decide if it is in the right box.
- Act upon Quadrant 1 and then focus efforts and attention in Quadrant 2.

Further guidelines for prioritising your life

Quadrant 1 activities are both urgent and important, usually called 'problems' or 'crises'. 'Urgent' means requiring immediate attention and we have a natural instinct to attend to urgent things, meaning to do these things first whether they are important or not. For example a ringing phone is urgent, as it is occurring NOW, but it may not be

important and may not be the best use of your time and effort at that point, if you want to focus on important work. Instead, they could leave a message or you call them back when the time is right for you leaving you free to focus on the important things. Yet many people can become consumed in Quadrant 1. It is the realm of the crisis managers and trouble-shooters, problem-minded people, and project managers driven by deadlines. Yet, the more you spend time focusing on these tasks, the less focus there is for long-term solutions, strategies and delegation. Spending too much time overwhelmed and running on adrenaline in Quadrant 1 can potentially lead to stress, burnout, and constant crisis management and escaping to quadrant 4.

Quadrant 2 is the place of positive focus. Completing important things leads to achievement of your goals and outcomes. By devoting a good deal of time to that area you create strategies for the future, act upon fulfilling your mission and meeting your values. You will naturally eliminate many of the crises that tend to happen in Quadrant 1, as well as providing yourself and others with definite direction and drive, which in turn will help eradicate spending excess time in either Quadrant 3 or 4.

Quadrant 3 identifies urgent but not important tasks and needs. There is a tendency to confuse urgency with importance, but this urgency is more based on the needs and priorities of OTHER PEOPLE and is on their agenda as opposed to yours. It can also be tempting external interruptions such as social media and instant messaging that distract your attention away from important tasks.

Quadrant 4 is the area of escapism and time wasting. By factoring in productive relaxation, quality times with others and hobbies into quadrant 2, time wasting is not necessary and leads to a build-up of tasks in quadrant one and minimal time for the productive focus of quadrant 2.

**Adapted from Covey, S (1989) The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People, Free Press, United States*

The efficient and productive person

Effectual people avoid Quadrants 3 and 4 and make Quadrant 1 small and manageable by spending more time in Quadrant 2.

People who place their attention on Quadrant 2 gain an abundance of benefits. They:

- Are in control
- Feel balanced and driven
- Have vision and perspective
- Write personal mission statements and align their actions to meet these
- Create long-term plans and carry out actions
- Build successful relationships
- Maintain their health by creating time for exercise and healthy eating
- Operate through prevention rather than 'cure'
- Experience few crises
- Seek opportunities
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In which quadrant do you spend most of your time each day?

Summary of prioritisation

- ✓ Aim to work in the TOP two boxes
- ✓ The balance may alter from time to time, but aim to have most demands and tasks in the top right box
- ✓ Set realistic expectations and break your goals into smaller, more manageable tasks
- ✓ Be aware that what is important to others may not be one of your key priorities
- ✓ In order to make positive change in your daily schedule, you need to aim for spending the most time in Quadrant 2.

PRIORITISATION MATRIX TOOL

	URGENT	Not Urgent
IMPORTANT	<p>Quadrant 1. URGENT AND IMPORTANT (FIREFIGHTING - NECESSITY)</p> <p>DO NOW</p>	<p>Quadrant 2. IMPORTANT BUT NOT URGENT (QUALITY WORK - INCREASE)</p> <p>PLAN NEXT AND SCHEDULE MORE</p>
Not Important	<p>Quadrant 3. URGENT BUT NOT IMPORTANT (DISTRACTIONS - AVOID)</p> <p>MANAGE AND DELEGATE</p>	<p>Quadrant 4. NOT URGENT AND NOT IMPORTANT (TIME WASTING - STOP)</p> <p>IGNORE/DUMP</p>