

IMPORTANCE vs URGENCY

Many important things that contribute to our overall objectives, and give richness and meaning to life, don't tend to act upon us or press us.

This is because they're not urgent. Therefore, because they are important and not urgent they are the things that we must act upon.

That is, we need to be proactive rather than reactive.

Time Management Matrix

In order to focus on the issues of urgency and importance more effectively, look at the Time Management Matrix below. It categorises activities into four quadrants and these are as follows:

Quadrant I - Quadrant of Necessity

Important and Urgent

Action – Manage. Prioritise on degree of importance not urgency

Quadrant II - Quadrant of Quality and Personal Leadership

Important and not Urgent

Action - Focus yourself to spend more time here. Effective use will shrink Quadrant I

Quadrant III - Quadrant of Deception

Not Important and Urgent

Action - Avoid. Don't be deceived that you are in Quadrant I. Less time here means more time available for Quadrant II

Quadrant IV - Quadrant of Waste

Not Important and not Urgent

Action - Avoid

The quadrant is shown below:

	Urgent	Not Urgent
Important	I (MANAGE)	II (FOCUS)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Crisis • Medical emergencies • Pressing problems • Deadline-driven projects • Last-minute preparations for scheduled activities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preparation/planning • Prevention • Values clarification • Exercise • Relationship-building • True recreation/relaxation
	Quadrant of Necessity	Quadrant of Quality & Personal Leadership
Not Important	III (AVOID)	IV (AVOID)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interruptions, some calls • Some mail & reports • Some meetings • Many “pressing” matters • Many popular activities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trivia, busywork • Junk mail • Some phone messages/email • Time wasters • Escape activities • Internet
	Quadrant of Deception	Quadrant of Waste

Quadrant I

Represents things that are both “urgent” and “important.” Here’s where we handle an irate client, meet a deadline, repair a broken-down machine, undergo heart surgery, or help a crying child who has been hurt.

We need to spend time in Quadrant I. This is where we manage, where we produce, where we bring our experience and judgment to bear in responding to many needs and challenges. If we ignore it, we become buried alive.

But we also need to realise that many important activities become urgent through procrastination, or because we don’t do enough prevention and planning.

Quadrant II

Includes activities that are “important, but not urgent.” This is the Quadrant of Quality. Here’s where we do our long- range planning, anticipate and prevent problems, empower others, broaden our minds and increase our skills through reading and continuous professional development, envision how we’re going to help a struggling son or daughter, prepare for important meetings and presentations, or invest in relationships through deep, honest listening.

Increasing time spent in this quadrant increases our ability to do. Ignoring this quadrant feeds and enlarges Quadrant I, creating stress burnout, and deeper crises for the person consumed by it. On the other hand, investing in this quadrant shrinks Quadrant I.

Planning preparation, and prevention keeps many things from becoming urgent. Quadrant II does not act on us; we must act on it. This is the Quadrant of personal leadership.

Quadrant III

This is almost the phantom of Quadrant I. It includes things that are “urgent, but not important.” This is the Quadrant of Deception. The noise of urgency creates the illusion of importance. But the actual activities, if they’re important at all, are only important to someone else.

Many phone calls, meetings, and drop-in visitors fall into this category. We spend a lot of time in Quadrant III meeting other people’s priorities and expectations, thinking we’re really in Quadrant I.

Quadrant IV

This is reserved for those activities that are “not urgent and not important.” This is the Quadrant of Waste.

Of course, we really shouldn’t be there at all. But we get so battle-scarred from being tossed around in Quadrants I and III that we often “escape” to Quadrant IV for survival.

What kinds of things are in Quadrant IV? Not necessarily recreational things, because recreation in the true sense, is a valuable Quadrant II activity. But reading addictive light novels, habitually watching “mindless” television shows, or gossiping around the water fountain at the office would qualify as Quadrant IV time wasters.

Quadrant IV is not survival; it’s deterioration. It may have an initial cotton candy feel, but we quickly find there's nothing there.

QUESTIONS PEOPLE ASK ABOUT THE MATRIX

Real life is not as neat, tight and logical as the four quadrants would suggest. There's a continuum within and between each quadrant. There's some overlapping. The categories are a matter of degree as well as kind.

Below are some common questions people ask about the matrix:

Among all the urgent and important things that face us, how do we know what to do?

This is the dilemma that fills our lives. It's what leads us to feel we need to hunker down and do more, faster. But almost always, there is one thing among all the others that should be done first.

Prioritise on importance not urgency.

Is it bad to be in Quadrant I?

No, it's not. In fact, many people will spend a significant amount of their time in Quadrant I. The key issue is why you're there.

Are you in Quadrant I based on urgency or importance? If urgency dominates, when importance fades, you'll slip into Quadrant III—it's the urgency addiction. But if you're in Quadrant I because of importance, when urgency fades you'll move to Quadrant II.

Both Quadrant I and Quadrant II describe what's important; it's only the time factor that changes. The real problem is when you're spending time in Quadrants III and IV.

Where do I get the time to spend In Quadrant II?

If you're looking for time to spend in Quadrant II, Quadrant III is the primary place to get it. Time spent in Quadrant I is both urgent and important—we already know we need to be there. And we know we shouldn't be in Quadrant IV. But Quadrant III can fool us.

The key is learning to see all of our activities in terms of their importance. Then we're able to reclaim time lost to the deception of urgency, and spend it in Quadrant II.

What If I'm in a Quadrant I environment?

Some professions are, by nature, almost completely in Quadrant I. For example, it's the job of fire fighters, many doctors and nurses, police officers, news reporters, and editors to respond to the urgent and important.

For these people it's even more critical to capture Quadrant II time for the simple reason that it builds their capacity to handle Quadrant I. Time spent in Quadrant II increases our capacity to do.

Is there anything in Quadrant I that doesn't act on us and demand, our attention "right now"?

Some things are crises or problems in the making if we don't attend to them. We can choose to make these things urgent. In addition, what may be a Quadrant II activity to an organization, such as long-term visioning, planning, and relationship building, may be Quadrant I to its top executive.

This is his or her unique charge, the need for these things is great, and the consequences of either doing these things or not doing them are significant. The need for that executive is "now," it's urgent, and it must be acted on.

The value of the matrix is that it helps us to see how importance and urgency affect the choices we make about how to spend our time. It allows us to see where we spend most of our time and why we spend it there. We can also see that the degree to which urgency is dominant is the degree to which importance is not.

Sourced from Stephen Covey's book – "First Things first"