

Quadrants of Time Management

(Adapted from *First Things First* by Stephen Covey)

This resource helps you think about your time and your priorities. Often we go through life without thinking through what is really important and waste precious time on things that aren't worth it.

Thinking in Quadrants

There are two variables when thinking about our time: important vs. not important, and urgent vs. not urgent. This may not seem like revolutionary insight, but it is unfortunate how much of our time we unknowingly (or sometimes knowingly) spend on things that are not important. Urgency is often the trump card in how we spend our time. We cannot get to things that are important and not urgent if we are constantly living in the urgent.

Take some time to look through these four quadrants. Everything we do falls into one of these categories. Examples of activities that could fall in each quadrant are given, and further explanations of each quadrant are listed below.

Quadrant 1 Crises, pressing problems, deadline-driven projects, health issues, etc.	Quadrant 2 Preparation, advance study, prevention, exercise, planning, clarification of values, relationship-building, true recreation, rest, etc.
Quadrant 3 Interruptions, phone calls, drop-in visits, etc.	Quadrant 4 Excessive time online, social media scrolling, TV, video games, vegging out, etc.

Quadrant 1- Urgent

This quadrant is sometimes unavoidable, as life sometimes throws us a lemon or a curveball. However, many important activities become urgent because of our procrastination, or because we do not have adequate planning or prevention. This quadrant zaps your energy, creates tons of stress, and can have huge snowball effects for all of your time.

Quadrant 2 - Important

This is where we do our long-term planning, anticipate problems and prevent them, study ahead, broaden our minds, and increase our ability to adapt through self-development. This quadrant can increase your productivity in the long-run, minimize stress, and improve your immediate performance. This quadrant is perhaps the most essential in time management, but is often the most neglected. These activities are easily surrendered to those that are more urgent.

Quadrant 3 - Not Urgent

These are activities that can seem important because of their urgency, but are really not. We have to learn to minimize these distractions and say “no” to them.

Quadrant 4 - Not Important

These are time-wasters. We all need time to refresh and relax, but those activities are important and do not belong in Quadrant 4. These hamper productivity and development. Often we spend time in Quadrant 4 if we spend too much time in the urgent. We “escape” from the urgent by going to this quadrant, instead of allowing Quadrant 2 to help prepare us and refresh us. This can be a dangerous cycle of living in the urgent, and escaping to Quadrant 4.

Questions for Discussion

- What Quadrant do you feel you spend much of your time in?
- What is one activity that you know if you did superbly well and consistently would have significant positive results in your personal life? How about your professional/academic life?