

Urgent / Important Matrix

Time stresses are the most pervasive source of pressure and stress. Effective time management is essential, this means being effective as well as efficient.

Managing your time both in a personal arena and professional nature means spending your time on things that are important as well as urgent. To define the difference, see below:

Important: activities have an outcome that leads to the achievement of your goals

Urgent: activities demand immediate attention and are often associated with the achievement of someone else's goals.

Urgent activities are often those that we concentrate on as they demand attention because of the consequences attached if these actions are not carried out.

A powerful way of thinking and prioritising is by using the Urgent / Important Matrix.

	Urgent	Not Urgent
Important	Urgent <u>and</u> Important Critical activities Crisis Pressing issues Deadlines	Not Urgent <u>but</u> Important Important Goals Planning Preparation Personal Development
Not Important	Urgent <u>but not</u> Important Interruptions More 'interesting' activities	Not Urgent and <u>not</u> Important Trivia Time wasting Distractions

What other ideas can you add to the matrix? Write these in the boxes.

The first step is to list all the activities and projects that you feel you have to do on a blank sheet of paper. Try to include everything that takes up your time at for your business. Even those areas that you currently feel are unimportant.

Next assign a level of importance to each of these activities. Use a scale of 1-10. 1 being low importance and 10 being very very important. How important is this activity on a scale of 1-10 to help you achieve **your** goals? Try not to concern yourself with the urgency attached to them at this stage. This will help establish the true IMPORTANCE.

Once you have assigned importance to each of the activities evaluate the urgency of each activity using the same scale.

Now consider each of the activities and decide which quadrant they fall into based on your figures:

Urgent and important

Falling into this category are often tasks that you could not foresee happening or that you have left until the last minute to complete.

Now that you have identified these activities, once completed reflect on those that could have been planned for so that you can schedule similar activities ahead of schedule in the future.

Urgent but not important

Urgent but not important activities are often activities that prevent you from achieving your goals and completing your work. Ask yourself whether these tasks can be rescheduled or delegated to someone else.

Not urgent but important

These are the activities that help you achieve your personal goals and complete important work. Make sure you have enough time to do things properly so that they do not become urgent.

Not urgent and not important

These activities are just a distraction and should be avoided where possible. They maybe activities that others wish you to complete but do not help you move towards your own goals. Often when people can clearly see that you are clear about your objectives and boundaries they will often not ask you to complete unimportant tasks again.

Each of these definitions are general definitions. How you categorise your tasks and activities is down to you. There is no right or wrong, but you must assign each activity to one of the quadrants.

By using this matrix you can shift your attention to the areas that need your attention first and foremost and support the development of the other areas into a plan of action that works for you.

Note:

The idea of measuring and combining these two competing elements in a matrix has been attributed to both former US President Eisenhower and Dr Stephen Covey.

Eisenhower's quote, "What is important is seldom urgent and what is urgent is seldom important," sums up the concept of the matrix perfectly. This so-called "Eisenhower Principle" is said to be how Eisenhower organized his tasks. As a result, the matrix is sometimes called the Eisenhower Matrix.

Covey brought the idea into the mainstream and gave it the name "The Urgent/Important Matrix" in his 1994 business classic The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People.