

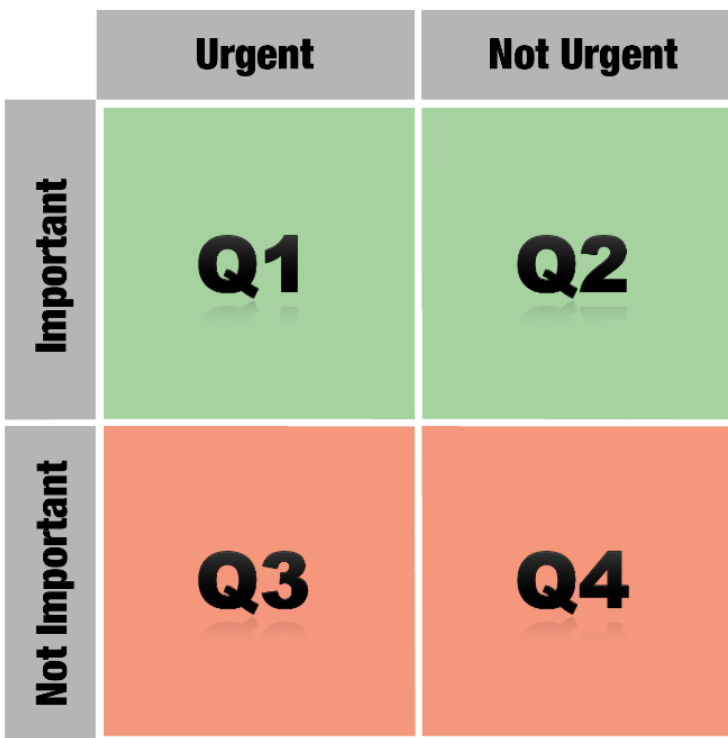
Tips to Improve Time Management Skills

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How many times have you gotten home after a long day at work and realized you did not accomplish half the things you had planned on completing throughout the day? Time management can be a challenge for many of us; however, there are many tools out there to help guide us toward that perfect balance.

One principle that I wanted to share today, which I have found extremely helpful, is the Quadrant of Productivity, discussed in Stephen Covey's book, *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*. Covey introduces the idea that there are four areas where we can find ourselves at any given point throughout the day.



Let's begin by defining two simple words: urgent and important. Urgent is defined as a matter requiring immediate action or attention. Important is defined as a matter of great significance or value, likely to have a profound effect on success, survival, or well-being. If we use these two definitions to map out the quadrant, we get the following four areas where we can find our tasks or activities at any given point of the day.

Q1 – The quadrant of necessity

Activities in this quadrant are both urgent and important. This quadrant can be described as dealing with crises. Not performing these tasks will set you back. Activities in this quadrant are extremely deadline driven, and they needed to be completed yesterday. Activities in this quadrant should be proactively eliminated by using Q2. In a good balanced day, it is believed that any given person should spend 20-25% of their day in this quadrant.

Q2 – The quadrant of productivity

Activities in this quadrant are important but not urgent. Performing activities in this quadrant will move you closer to your goals and missions while at the same time, reducing stress levels. You will perform proactive work, important goals, creative thinking, planning and prevention, relationship building, learning and renewal, and/or recreation. Ideally, the majority (55-65%) of our day should be spent in this quadrant. In this quadrant, we are planning to proactively complete activities in order to avoid being in Q1.

Q3 – The quadrant of distraction

Activities in this quadrant are generally not important but may seem urgent. This is when you are dealing with needless interruptions, unnecessary reports, irrelevant meetings, unimportant email, etc. Activities in this quadrant can sometimes be deceived as activities relating to Q1. Typical activities in this quadrant will not align with your goals. Try to eliminate as many activities related to this quadrant by identifying what activities will help you reach your goals and moving them to Q1 or even Q2 if completed proactively. Spending only 10-15% of your time in this quadrant will help you reach full productivity.

Q4 – The quadrant of waste

Activities in this quadrant are both not important and not urgent. Examples of activities belonging in this quadrant can be surfing through social media, playing video games, watching TV, etc. Some of the activities that you may think belong in this quadrant, when evaluated, can belong to Q2. Watching TV may help you relax and therefore help you reach your goals, however when done in excess, is a waste of time. Activities in this quadrant should be evaluated to see if they help you relax, rejuvenate, build relationships, etc. It is a matter of being careful and not wasting time. Being in this quadrant should be avoided.

Now that you have learned about the quadrant, you can use it to help you prioritize your days. Make lists and identify where your activities fall. Evaluate what is important and will move you closer to reaching your goals and well-being. Be proactive and identify activities that belong in Q2 now. If you spend more time on Q2 activities now that they are not urgent, you will minimize the number of Q1 activities in the future. Evaluate Q3 activities and eliminate them if they will not move you closer to your goals. Evaluate your Q4 activities and do not necessarily eliminate them but instead, move them to Q2 by minimizing and evaluating how they help you reach your goals.

Now, go back and look at your list for the day. Try to move as many activities as possible to Q2 and eliminate those that will not help you reach your goals!

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