

## Stephen Covey's 4 Quadrants

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### Focus on preserving and enhancing relationships and on accomplishing results

QUADRANT II – The essential focus of the fourth generation of management can be captured in the time management matrix diagrammed on the next page. Basically, we spend time in one of four ways. As you can see, the two factors that define an activity are urgent and important.

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Urgent means it requires immediate attention. It's "Now!" Urgent things act on us. A ringing phone is urgent. Most people can't stand the thought of just allowing the phone to ring. You could spend hours preparing materials, you could get all dressed up and travel to a person's office to discuss a particular issue, but if the phone were to ring while you were there, it would generally take precedence over your personal visit. If you were to phone someone, there aren't many people who would say, "I'll get to you in 15 minutes; just hold." But those same people would probably let you wait in an office for at least that long while they completed a telephone conversation with someone else.

Urgent matters are usually visible. They press on us; they insist on action. They're often popular with others. They're usually right in front of us. And often they are pleasant, easy, fun to do. But so often they are unimportant! Importance, on the other hand, has to do with results. If something is important, it contributes to your mission, your values, your high priority goals. We react to urgent matters. Important matters that are not urgent require more initiative, more proactivity. We must act to seize opportunity, to make things happen. If we don't practice Habit 2, if we don't have a clear idea of what is important, of the results we desire in our lives, we are easily diverted into responding to the urgent.

Look for a moment at the four quadrants in the time management matrix. Quadrant I is both urgent and important. It deals with significant results that require immediate attention. We usually call the activities in Quadrant I "crises" or "problems." We all have some Quadrant I activities in our lives. But Quadrant I consumes many people. They are crisis managers, problem-minded people, deadline-driven producers. As long as you focus on Quadrant I, it keeps getting bigger and bigger until it dominates you. It's like the pounding surf. A huge problem comes and knocks you down and you're wiped out. You struggle back up only to face another one that knocks you down and slams you to the ground. Some people are literally beaten up by problems all day every day. The only relief they have is in escaping to the not important, not urgent activities of Quadrant IV. So when you look at their total matrix, 90 percent of their time is in Quadrant I and most of the remaining 10 percent is in Quadrant IV, with only negligible attention paid to Quadrants II and III. That's how people who manage their lives by crisis live.

There are other people who spend a great deal of time in "urgent, but not important" Quadrant III, thinking they're in Quadrant I. They spend most of their time reacting to things that are urgent, assuming they are also important. But the reality is that the urgency of these matters is often based on the priorities and expectations of others. There are other people who spend a great deal of time in "urgent, but not important" Quadrant III, thinking they're in Quadrant I. They spend most of their time reacting to things that are urgent, assuming they are also important. But the reality is that the urgency of these matters is often based on the priorities and expectations of others.

Effective people stay out of Quadrants III and IV because, urgent or not, they aren't important. They also shrink Quadrant I down to size by spending more time in Quadrant II. Quadrant II is the heart of effective personal management. It deals with things that are not urgent, but are important. It deals with things like building relationships, writing a personal mission statement, long-range planning, exercising, preventive maintenance, preparation—all those things we know we need to do, but somehow seldom get around to doing, because they aren't urgent.

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To paraphrase Peter Drucker, effective people are not problem-minded; they're opportunity-minded. They feed opportunities and starve problems. They think preventively. They have genuine Quadrant I crises and emergencies that require their immediate attention, but the number is comparatively small.

Whether you are a student at the university, a worker in an assembly line, a homemaker, fashion designer, or president of a company, I believe that if you were to ask what lies in Quadrant II and cultivate the proactivity to go after it, you would find the same results. Your effectiveness would increase dramatically. Your crises and problems would shrink to manageable proportions because you would be thinking ahead, working on the roots, doing the preventive things that keep situations from developing into crises in the first place. In time management jargon, this is called the Pareto Principle—80 percent of the results flow out of 20 percent of the activities.

*Covey, Stephen R. (2009-12-02). The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People (Kindle). RosettaBooks - A. Kindle Edition.*