

Effective Time Management Techniques

A Time For Everything...

In the book of Ecclesiastes, we read that *"There is an appointed time for everything, and a time for every affair under the heavens."* (Eccles 3:1) ...And a time to put *"First Things First!"*



This issue of the HR Connect is designed to help you take a new look at your activities, prioritize where you spend your time and find those precious minutes to do the "First Things First".¹

Steven Covey, author of First Things First, offers a way to think of and categorize things that demand our time. With a model of four quadrants, our activities can be "organized" or categorized in the following quadrants:

Q1 - Urgent and Important
Q3 - Urgent but NOT Important

Q2 - Important but NOT Urgent
Q4 - Not Urgent and Not Important

<p>Q1</p> <p>Urgent and Important</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Crises • Pressing Problems • Deadline driven projects, meetings and preparations 	<p>Q2</p> <p>Important but Not Urgent</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preparation, Prevention, Planning • Relationship Building • True re-creation
<p>Q3</p> <p>Urgent but Not Important</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interruptions, some phone calls • Some reports, some meetings • Many popular activities 	<p>Q4</p> <p>Not Urgent and Not Important</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trivia, some phone calls • Irrelevant mail and e-mail • Time wasters • Excessive TV

Q1 – "Urgent and Important"

Most of us can easily recognize what we would quickly categorize as Q1 *"Urgent and Important"* things that demand our attention. Emergencies can happen any time of the day or night and we know we must stop all other activities and address the emergency. Other things may not be an "emergency," but we know the nature of the item demands immediate attention. Other examples include: A "drop-in visitor" guest arriving at our front door or our office door; A telephone call; A FedEx envelope marked "Urgent and Confidential." Initially, we are compelled to focus our attention, at least momentarily on the Urgent and Important item.



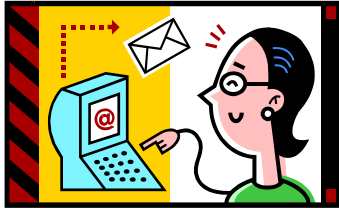
¹ Steven Covey, First Things First (Simon and Shuster, NY, 1994)

Q2 – “Important but Not Urgent”

After the Urgent and Important things, Q2 are these things are the most important things that should get our attention. We may recognize that if we do not address these **Important but Not Urgent** things in Q2, eventually they will move to Q1 as the activity’s due date now makes it Urgent and Important. Therefore, we should be diligent in using some of our precious time each day to address the Q2 - “Important but Not Urgent” things before they become “Urgent and Important.” If you identify an activity that you think might be a Q1 activity, ask yourself if the urgent activity contributed to an important objective. If not, it’s probably a Q3



Where do we find the time? Let’s consider Q3 – “Urgent but Not Important.”



Many things fall into this quadrant and are not always that easy to recognize. **Urgent but Not Important** things include: telephone calls, e-mail messages, envelopes that come through the US Mail, things that we “like to do, but could well be done by someone else or perhaps should not be done at all.

If we spend time going through all of our e-mails or through all of the US mail deliveries, including the “junk mail,” we would find a lot of wasted minutes.

Let’s now look at Q4 – “Not Important and Not Urgent”

If you look back on any given day and ask yourself, what did I do with the day, you can probably identify some activity or several activities that you were involved in that used your time, but the activity was **Not Important and was Not Urgent**. Watching television, reading the newspaper or some magazine, doing the work that you had delegated to someone else, re-reading our past notes or letters, sorting old files... You can usually identify some activities that we would look back on and say, “That was a waste of my time.” Yes, some activities that we engage in are designed to help us relax, recuperate and re-create so that we can face the Urgent and Important activities the next time they demand our attention. However, if we look back at a week and realize just how much time we have wasted, we may not want to let Q4 activities consume that much of our time in the future.

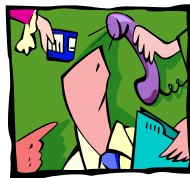


Our on-going vigilance of the use of our time requires us to constantly ask:

- What is the best use of my time right now?
- What is the right thing to do right now?

Steven Covey suggests that we start our workday with questions like:

- Which of these activities is most important?
- What can I safely postpone?
- What can I delegate?
- What can I do more quickly?
- How can I arrange my schedule to accomplish what is most critical?



Question the very nature of each activity:

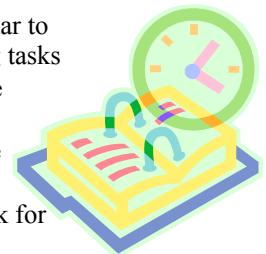
- How did this activity come about?
- Why am I doing it now?
- What are the underlining reasons for the activity?
- Does this activity contribute to the purpose of the organization?
- Is this the highest and best use of my capacities and our combined resources?

Some suggestions may help you find additional minutes in the day:

Steven Covey uses the analogy that if you fill a jar with big rocks, pebbles, sand and water you can keep adding things until it is full. If you put in the “big rocks” (significant tasks) first, then the pebbles (smaller tasks) can fill in around the big rocks. If you put in all the pebbles or sand or water first you will not be able to get in any of the big rocks.

Additional suggestions:

- Using Microsoft Outlook’s Calendar to generate “Reminders” for pending tasks
- Pledging to clear one’s desk by the end of each day
- Limiting personal calls to no more than 5-10 minutes each day
- Using a calendar next to one’s desk for project due dates
- Pledging to do what you say you are going to do



We hope that these tips will help you better manage the precious time you have in a day by categorizing your activities, and as a result, experience the fulfillment that your contribution is important and valuable.