

## COVEY'S TIME MANAGEMENT QUADRANT

Stephen Covey is one of the most successful self-help authors of all time. In this article we review his time management model,<sup>1</sup> and consider some of his ideas about how it ought to be used.

Covey argues that, as a field of management study, time management has gone through four stages:

1. identifying tasks and recognising demands on our time
2. using calendars and appointment books to schedule and plan for the future
3. planning ahead and prioritising activities; applying personal values to the process of prioritisation
4. focusing on activities that are not urgent but are important

People who adhere to the fourth generation of time management focus on effectiveness and results, rather than efficiency and methods. They realise and prioritise the importance of relationships.

Covey recognises that we often have different roles and needs within our lives, such as family, work, community, time for ourselves, and recreation or other activities. Covey's time management model is based on the assumption that we should manage time around what is **important**, not what is **urgent**, and that this should be carried out and planned across the different roles.

The idea is that all activities can be distinguished using two categories: **importance** and **urgency**. He uses a four-box matrix to convey this. Urgency is represented on the horizontal axis, and activities can be placed either in the 'low' or 'high' box. Importance is represented on the vertical axis in the same way.

Covey recommends listing relevant activities and then placing them in the appropriate quadrant. Any High Urgency/High Importance projects (or crises) you have listed should be minimised, as should urgent but unimportant tasks.

Covey believes that the key to success is concentrating on **highly important**, but **non-urgent** issues, across all the identified roles. These, he argues, are the most important in terms of self-development, but are also the ones that are most commonly ignored.

By looking at the whole picture you have the opportunity to balance work and other priorities in your life. These tasks include writing a personal mission statement, long-range planning and preparation. If you succeed in doing this, you can expect the following benefits:

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<sup>1</sup> Stephen R Covey, *Seven Habits of Highly Successful People* (Simon & Schuster, 1999).

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- **coherence** – in your planner include values and personal mission
- **balance** – the planner should include, and help you to focus on, how to establish a healthy work–life balance
- **focus** – the planner should encourage focus on important life as well as work issues
- **flexibility** – the planning tool is your servant not your master
- **people dimension** – this tool, Covey argues, will help to improve your relationships with others

Covey also outlines a number of complementary activities:

- Write a personal mission statement based on personal, family and professional values.
- Define all your roles, both professional and personal.
- Select the two or three most important goals every week. Tie short-term goals to longer-term goals.
- Focus on activities that will achieve the greatest results.
- Portability – you should be able to carry and access your priority list or calendar wherever you are.

	<b>URGENCY</b>		
	High		Low
<b>IMPORTANCE</b>	<b>1</b> Urgent <b>and</b> important Do it now	<b>2</b> Important <b>not</b> urgent Decide when to do it	
	<b>4</b> Urgent <b>not</b> important Delegate it	<b>3</b> <b>Not</b> important <b>not</b> urgent Dump it	
	Low		

Urgency is time related, importance is value related, but most people respond to urgency rather than importance. Whilst they can coincide, they are not the same and a key point with time management is to deal with important tasks before they become urgent, as it is easier to do the important tasks well when they are not urgent.