

Quadrants of Time Management

Everything you do in life can be classified by its urgency (urgent or not urgent) and by its importance (important or not important). This creates the matrix illustrated below with four quadrants:



We often spend our lives focused on the urgent things instead of the important things. In business as in life it is extremely important to ask yourself: “Am I doing this because it is truly important or am I doing this because it is urgent?”

Important and urgent things should not be ignored: Crises and emergencies. However, the more time you can spend on the non-urgent but important things (prevention, planning, improvement) the less crises and emergencies you will experience.

Below is a more detailed explanation of each quadrant along with some examples:



QUADRANT 1 Crisis

Fire fighting mode: Crises, real hard deadlines for important projects, health and family emergencies, etc.

These are urgent and important things that you should not ignore. However, spending too much time in fire fighting mode will lead to stress and burnout. You will be caught in a never-ending cycle of crisis management.

The only way to reduce the time you spend in this quadrant is to be proactive (<https://czarto.com/2013/08/03/reactive-vs-proactive-language/>) and to spend more time on the important things BEFORE they become emergencies (see Quadrant 2 below).

EXAMPLE

Dealing with a heart attack is an urgent and important problem that cannot be ignored (but perhaps by living a healthier lifestyle such health emergencies can be reduced or avoided all together).



QUADRANT 2 Preparation

This is where you should spend most of your time.

Quadrant 2 is all about planning, prevention, capability improvement, relationship building, recognizing new opportunities, etc.

Spending time on these important things should lead to clear vision and a balanced life, discipline, control, and fewer and fewer crisis situations.

EXAMPLES

- Frequently buying flowers for your wife/girlfriend “just because.”
- Eating healthy and exercising to avoid future health issues.
- Preventative maintenance on your home or car.
- Reading, learning, and education.
- Forming bonds and strengthening relationships with your friends and family.
- Self renewal and spending time on things that inspire and uplift you.

NOT IMPORTANT

3

Phone Calls
Text messages
Emails
Walk-ins

URGENT

QUADRANT 3

Interruption

Many of us spend a big portion of our time in this Quadrant confusing the urgent things for the important things.

Interruptions, ringing phones, most emails, etc... Spending too much time on the unimportant urgent things leads to a very short-term focus with continual crisis management. Your plans and goals will seem increasingly useless since you are unlikely to have time to devote to them. Your relationships and reputation will suffer and you will feel victimized with no control over your life.

EXAMPLE

You have scheduled an important meeting with a coworker two weeks ahead of time. This person has very limited time and so you carve out a 30 minute window to deal with a very important matter. As you sit down and start the meeting, your phone rings.

The phone is screaming: "Pick me up! Pick me up! Pick me up!" Most people will answer the phone and sacrifice the very important meeting for the likely not important but urgent ringing phone.

4

Surfing the web
Social media
Wasting time

NOT IMPORTANT

NOT URGENT

QUADRANT 4

Waste

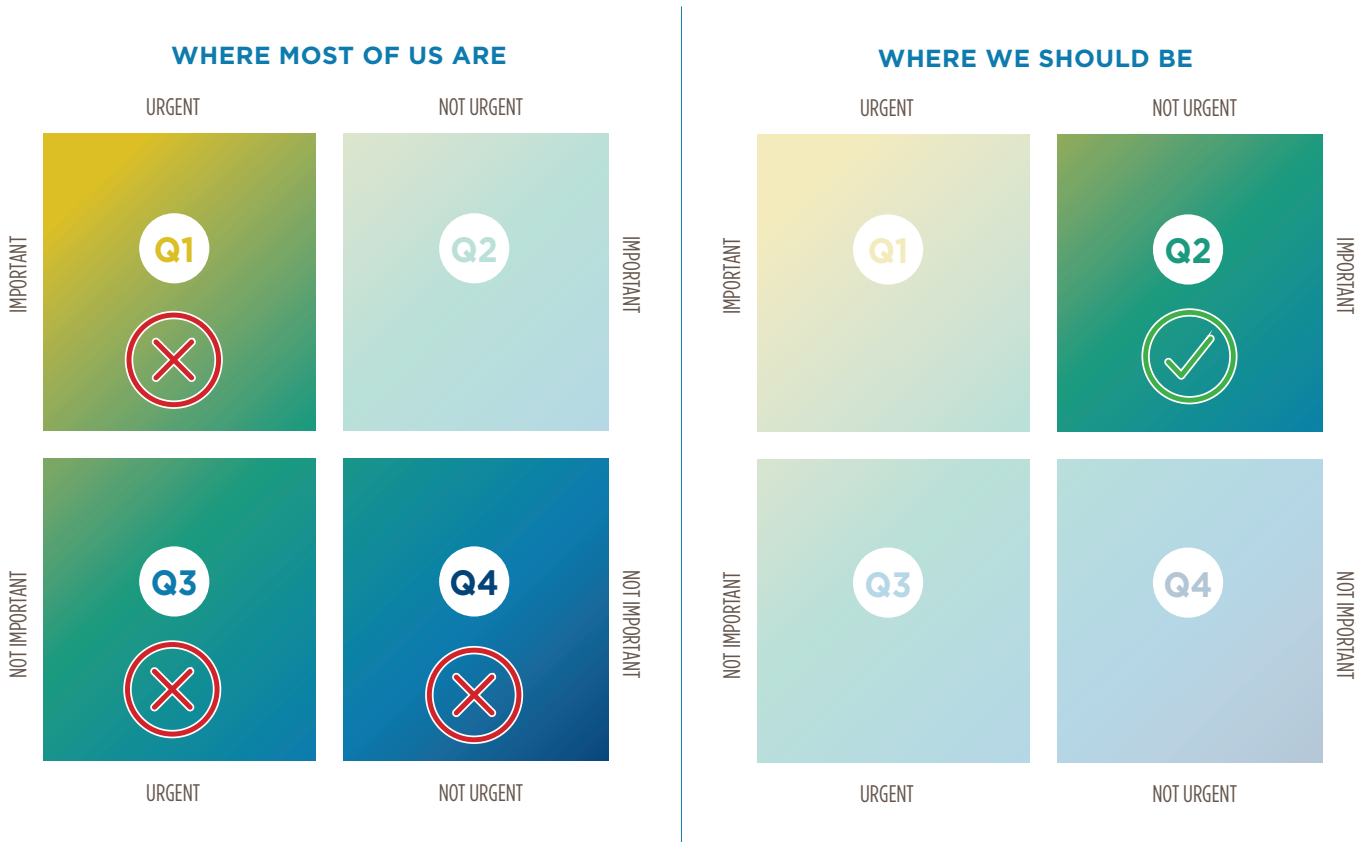
These are the time wasters in your life.

Spending too much time on non-urgent and not important things can lead to dependence on others for your basics, loss of jobs, irresponsibility, etc.

EXAMPLES

- Trivial busy work.
- Mindless web surfing.
- Watching too much TV.
- Lots of pleasant activities.

How do I use this to make my life better?



1 IDENTIFY QUADRANT 2 ACTIVITIES

- Write down all the Quadrant 1 and 3 activities you routinely do (all the urgent stuff)
- Write down how you can prevent these things from reoccurring or from becoming emergencies in the first place: These are your new Quadrant 2 activities.

2 FREE UP TIME FOR QUADRANT 2 ACTIVITIES

- Look at all the things in Quadrant 4 and STOP DOING THEM!
- Look at all the things in Quadrant 3 and stop doing them too. This is more difficult as it involves saying NO to people.
- You should now have time to spend on Quadrant 2

3 SCHEDULE TIME FOR QUADRANT 2

- Schedule time to do Quadrant 2 activities. (Put them in your calendar just like a meeting).
- DO THE THINGS YOU SCHEDULED!

4 REDUCE QUADRANT 1

- The beauty with spending more time in Quadrant 2 is that it should slowly chip away at all your Quadrant 1 activities.
- As you reduce your Quadrant 1 activities you have more time for Quadrant 2, creating a flywheel effect.

Simple, right? Not quite. The Question “What is important to me?” usually does not have a simple answer.

EXAMPLE 1

Going to a sporting event *(Hockey, baseball, football game, etc.)*

Which quadrant does this fall into? The answer is it depends on YOUR priorities and what is important to YOU. On the surface it looks clearly like a Q4 item—a time waster. Not urgent and certainly not important.

But, it could be a Q2 event (important) if you consider the event to be an opportunity to spend quality time building relationships with your parents, children, or friends.

EXAMPLE 2

Watching TV

Clearly another Q4 item: A time waster. Or is it? If watching TV is a stress reliever for you and serves as a way to wind down and chill out after a hectic day, it could very well be a Q2 activity. Just as long as you frame it correctly and consume it in the right way.

To be successful with this method you must have a very clear understanding of what is important to you, what your long term goals are, etc.

For more information about how to plan your week around this framework, see my blog post on How I Plan My Week (<https://czarto.com/2013/11/01/weeklyplanning/>).

RELATED ARTICLES

- The Eisenhower Box (<http://jamesclear.com/eisenhower-box>) by James Clear
- How I Plan My Week (<https://czarto.com/2013/11/01/weekly-planning/>)
- Reactive vs Proactive Language (<https://czarto.com/2013/08/03/reactive-vs-proactivelanguage/>)
- Stewardship Delegation (<https://czarto.com/2013/06/24/stewardship-delegation/>)