

## Covey's Four Quadrants for time management

The Covey time management grid is an effective method of organising your priorities. It differentiates between activities that are important and those that are urgent.

- **Important** activities have an outcome that leads to the achievement of your goals, whether these are professional or personal.
- **Urgent** activities demand immediate attention, and are often associated with the achievement of someone else's goals.

Inevitably, there is a tendency to focus on things that are urgent – and often the urgent things are also important.

Stephen Covey's approach to time management is to create time to focus on important things *before* they become urgent. Sometimes this just means doing things earlier. The real skill is to commit time to processes that enable you to do things more quickly or more easily, or ensure that they get done automatically. Examples would be clearing your desk and doing the filing, creating a daily to-do list (and a discipline to use it) or investing in new software.

Covey uses a metaphor of filling a bucket with rocks, pebbles and sand to represent activities of declining importance. Very often if you commit specific times for the important activities you will also find time to fit in the less important ones.

Here is a variation of his story.

### Stephen Covey's bucket

A philosophy professor stood before his class and had some items in front of him. When the class began, wordlessly he picked up a large empty mayonnaise jar and proceeded to fill it with rocks, rocks about 2" in diameter. He then asked the students if the jar was full? They agreed that it was.

So the professor then picked up a box of pebbles and poured them into the jar. He shook the jar lightly. The pebbles, of course, rolled into the open areas between the rocks. He then asked the students again if the jar was full. They agreed it was. The students laughed.

The professor picked up a box of sand and poured it into the jar. Of course, the sand filled up everything else.

"Now," said the professor, "I want you to recognise that this is your life. The rocks are the important things - your family, your partner, your health, your children - things that if everything else were lost and only they remained, your life would still be full. The pebbles are the other things that matter like your job, your house, your car. The sand is everything else, the small stuff. If you put the sand into the jar first, there is no room for the pebbles or the rocks. The same goes for your life. If you spend all your time and energy on the small stuff, you will never have room for the things that are important to you. Pay attention to the things that are critical to your happiness. Play with your children. Take time to get medical checkups. Take your work, clean the house, give a dinner party and fix the disposal. Take care of the rocks first - the things that really matter. Set your priorities. The rest is just sand."



But then...

A student then took the jar, which the other students and the professor agreed was full, and proceeded to pour in a glass of beer. Of course the beer filled the remaining spaces within the jar making the jar truly full.

The moral of this tale is:- no matter how full your life is, there is always room for BEER!

## The time management matrix – activities

	Urgent	Not Urgent
I m p o r t a n t	<p><b>I</b> ACTIVITIES</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Crises</li> <li>• Pressing problems</li> <li>• Deadline-driven projects</li> </ul>	<p><b>II</b> ACTIVITIES</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prevention, capability improvement</li> <li>• Relationship building</li> <li>• Recognising new opportunities</li> <li>• Planning, recreation</li> </ul>
N o t  I m p o r t a n t	<p><b>III</b> ACTIVITIES</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interruptions, some callers</li> <li>• Some mail, some reports</li> <li>• Some meetings</li> <li>• Proximate, pressing matters</li> <li>• Popular activities</li> </ul>	<p><b>IV</b> ACTIVITIES</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Trivia, busy work</li> <li>• Some mail</li> <li>• Some phone calls</li> <li>• Time wasters</li> <li>• Pleasant activities</li> </ul>

Based on *7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, Stephen Covey

## The time management matrix – results

	Urgent	Not Urgent
I m p o r t a n t	<p><b>I</b></p> <p><b>RESULTS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stress</li> <li>• Burn-out</li> <li>• Crisis management</li> <li>• Always putting out fires</li> </ul>	<p><b>II</b></p> <p><b>RESULTS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Vision, perspective</b></li> <li>• <b>Balance</b></li> <li>• <b>Discipline</b></li> <li>• <b>Control</b></li> <li>• <b>Few crises</b></li> </ul>
N o t  I m p o r t a n t	<p><b>III</b></p> <p><b>RESULTS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Short term focus</li> <li>• Crisis management</li> <li>• Reputation - chameleon character</li> <li>• See goals and plans as worthless</li> <li>• Feel victimised, out of control</li> <li>• Shallow or broken relationships</li> </ul>	<p><b>IV</b></p> <p><b>RESULTS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Total irresponsibility</li> <li>• Fired from jobs</li> <li>• Dependent on others or institutions for basics</li> </ul>

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## The time management matrix – planning form

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