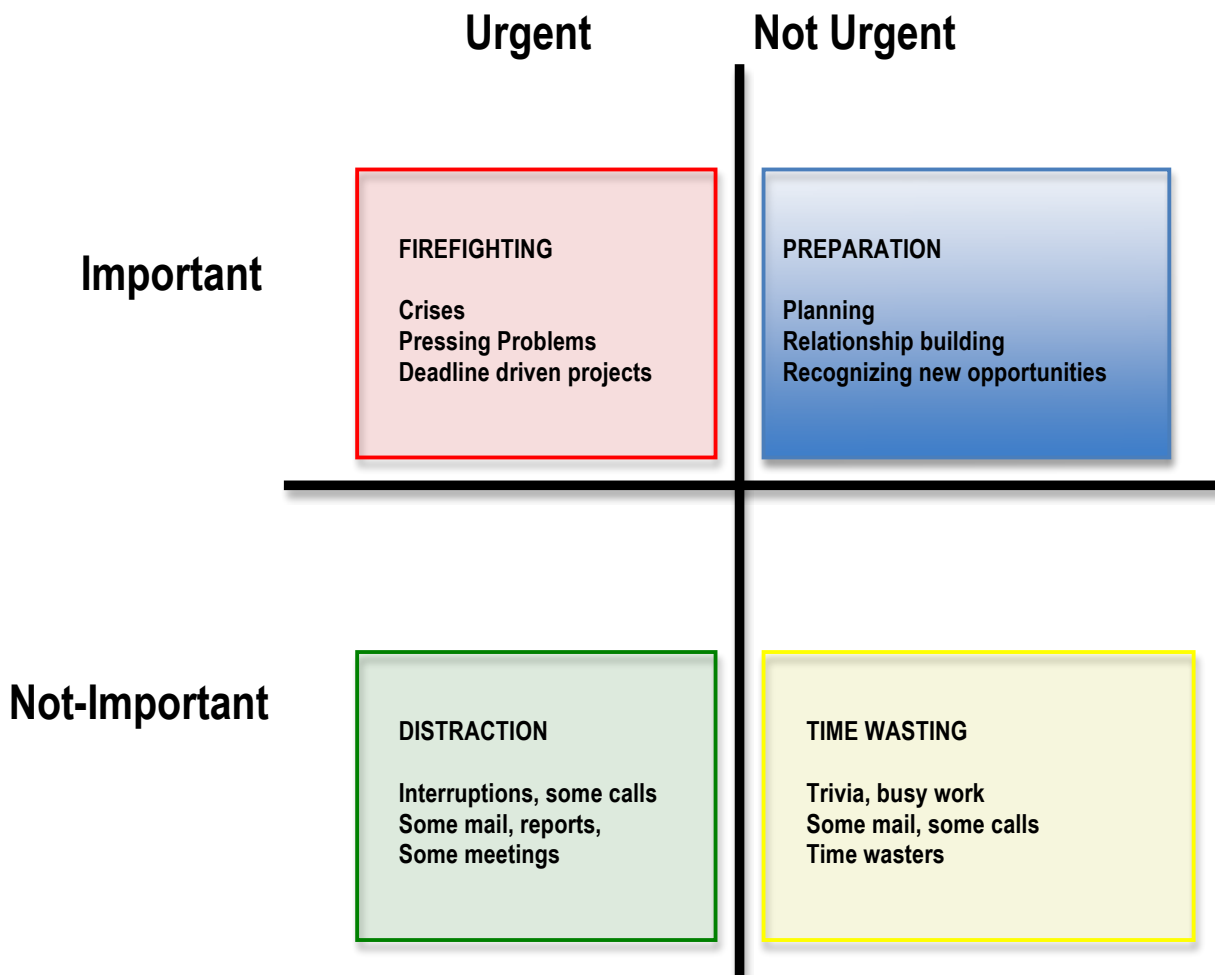


Managing Competing Priorities with Covey's Quadrants

Every day, hundreds of competing issues require our time and energy. Our "to-do" plans, neatly prioritized, go up in smoke. We go home exhausted and yet often with the nagging feeling that we didn't do what we really wanted or needed to. How to cope?

Consider Covey's Four Quadrants, which says that **the things we do in life can be organized into 4 quadrants:**



Quadrant 1 represents things that are both urgent and important. We've called this "firefighting". The activities need to be dealt with immediately, and they're important. They are in short a crisis that must be addressed imminently to avert disaster. Hence, they are given priority #1.

Quadrant 2 represents things that are important, but not urgent. This is about quality time, or preparation. The activities here are important, but often get overlooked because they are not in crisis mode. In fact, the more time you spend in Quadrant 2, the less time you will spend in the crisis management and the more time you have available to do the things you want to do. Quadrant II's represent our strategic vision for the future of what we should do but may not need to do today.

Quadrant 3 items are distractions. They must be dealt with right now, but frankly, are not important. For example, when you answer an unwanted phone call, - you've had to interrupt whatever you were doing to answer it.

The final quadrant, **Quadrant 4**, contains things that are neither urgent nor important. Some meetings could fall into this category - they've been scheduled in advance, but if they achieve nothing, or you don't contribute to them, then they have simply wasted time. While everyone should regularly engage in "down time", this should be a deliberate choice and not time spent on wasted trivia.

Obviously, priority #1 is to address and manage Quadrant I issues. However, we need to analyze our Quadrant I issues to determine how they went from Quadrant II to Quadrant I. What our goal should be is to make such an analysis so that we can more easily keep items in Quadrant II before they become Quadrant I issues. If we live our lives constantly in Quadrant I, something may be wrong. In short, Quadrant I items are "reactive" in nature and Quadrant II items are "proactive" in nature. Similarly, if we have no Quadrant II items perhaps we are not sufficiently planning for the future and we should focus on defining Quadrant II items. If you are a business owner and can delegate effectively, you should try to move Quadrant III items over to a staff member to take care of it so that you can focus your priorities on Quadrant I and II items. Obviously, you must also recognize something as Quadrant IV so that you can properly ignore it and not give it Quadrant I and II priorities mistakenly.