



Importance Versus Urgent in Time Management Factsheet

Are you struggling with time management, and to fit all of your work-related tasks into your working day?

Are you finding yourself regularly taking work home from the office, and even working evenings and weekends to try and catch up?

With changing technology and the pressure to compete and succeed (especially in leadership, management, and higher scale roles) finding more time to allow you to switch off from work can be an uphill struggle.

What we Mean by Time (and Time Management)

In this context, the great Peter F Drucker captures it all;

“Efficiency is doing things right; effectiveness is doing the right things”

So, you really need to be interested in effectiveness, rather than being super-efficient!

There are so many books, articles and blogs written about effectiveness, and most focus on getting things done. However, they do not make you a step back and say:

“Why the heck am I doing this in the first place?”

Which is what you should be evaluating on a regular basis, and when completing any task!

Research by Franklin Covey (in The Five Choices) suggests that you spend 40% of your time on things that aren't important to you or your organisation.

So, if you ask yourself “what did I get done?” at the end of the day, this is a sign you could have a problem with time management and your overall effectiveness.

8 Steps to Find More Time by Being More Effective

When it comes to time management, there are 8 steps to help you find more time by being more effective, as follows:

1. Do what's important, not urgent
2. Don't Procrastinate – if you have tough job to do, don't put it off, get it done
3. Concentrate –time block when you will do it. Turn off your phone, emails and clear your desk. Shut your door and tell everyone you're busy.
4. Say 'NO' and Purposeful Abandonment – See our previous blog for more on this.
5. Rest – Take regular breaks throughout the day.
6. Celebrate Achievement – Give your emotional brain a treat, you'll teach it that achievement of tasks is good.
7. Get rid of it! Delegate, Devolve, empower, outsource, automate – pass on anything you can that does not need your personal attention
8. Find Your Productive Time Sweet Spot – we all work better at different times of the day and week. Think about when you are most effective and do your best work then.

Do What's Important, not Urgent

Stephen Covey in '7 Habits of Highly Effective People' wrote that;

"Effective leadership is putting first things first. Effective management is discipline, carrying it out"

He suggested that we divide our task into four quadrants based on the importance and urgency of the task.

Based on this model, we should act on the important tasks, and not react to those we or others deem as urgent, i.e. spend as much time as possible in quadrant two.

"Reflect-Review-Reset"

When creating our task lists we should use the strategy "Reflect-Review-Reset" to ensure that we grade the task appropriately based on its exact importance and urgency, rather than grading it based on the feelings and emotions of ourselves or others who influence us (e.g. client, suppliers, stakeholders, peers, etc).

- Is it really that urgent, or someone else just shouting?
- Have you clarified when it's due or are you assuming its urgent?

- Is it important to us / you?
- If it is a long-term important task, like a new strategy, what will be the potential future urgent tasks that would arise from not doing it?