

Resource 5: Urgent or important?

In his book *First Things First* (2001), Stephen Covey introduced the following Urgency/Importance quadrants, in which he placed various types of working tasks into the following four categories:

<p>1. Urgent - Important</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Crises • Pressing problems • Deadline-driven projects, meetings, preparations 	<p>2. Not Urgent - Important</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preparation • Prevention • Values clarification • Planning • Relationship building • True re-creation • Empowerment
<p>3. Urgent - Not Important</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interruptions, some phone calls • Some mail, some reports • Some meetings • Many proximate, pressing matters • Many popular activities 	<p>4. Not Urgent - Not Important</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trivia, busywork • Junk mail • Some phone calls • Time wasters • 'Escape' activities

Here's how Covey describes the difference between urgent and important:

'... the two factors that define an activity are *urgent* and *important*. *Urgent* means it requires immediate attention. It's "Now!" Urgent things act on us. A ringing phone is urgent. Most people can't stand the thought of just allowing the phone to ring... Urgent matters are usually visible. They press on us; they insist on action.

Importance, on the other hand, has to do with results. If something is important, it contributes to your mission, your values, your high priority goals.' (*The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, p150)

In school, jobs can be urgent, or important, or both. Likewise, they can be unimportant, or not urgent or both. In fact, they can be any combination of urgent, not urgent, important and not important. For example, looking ahead to next term's planning is important, but if you're methodical it needn't become urgent (quadrant 2 above). Dealing with a distressed pupil is both urgent and important (quadrant 1).

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Experts say we should try to divide our time as follows:

- 15%-20% on quadrant 1 tasks
- 60%-75% on quadrant 2 tasks
- up to 5% in quadrant 3
- and as little as possible in quadrant 4