

THE IMPORTANT AND URGENT QUADRANT EXPLAINED

Many people like to use an ABC123 categorisation when it comes to tasks and time management. I find that method cumbersome and you end up with items in too many categories $3 \times 3 = 9$. Too many! Also, that system doesn't really help you manage your time because it doesn't adequately cater to the major questions surrounding each task on your list. I use the Important and Urgent Quadrant as developed by President Eisenhower and promoted by Stephen R. Covey to decide which tasks take priority and why they take priority, whether or not to delegate, and when to action or delegate each task.

Table 1 Important and Urgent Quadrant

Important	Urgent		Not Urgent	
	I.U - It needs to be done It needs to be done now I need to do it Phone calls Meetings you need to attend A family member has an emergency. All important and urgent matters		I.N -Important projects that need to be done. These tasks if ignored or procrastinated can move into the IU quadrant. Delegate what can be delegated, do what only you can do.	
Not Important	Urgent		Dump	
	U.NI - Delegate It needs doing, but you don't have to do it. Delegate to a trusted staff member Some phone calls Some email Social media updates		NI.NU Time wasters Reading advertising email. Busy work that gets nothing important accomplished. Answering telemarketers phone calls If it comes back to bite you, re-categorise it because it' didn't belong here in the first place.	

Tasks can and will move between quadrants. What is IN today could become IU tomorrow. If you procrastinate, or someone you have delegated a task to procrastinates, or something rises to their IU quadrant, then your task becomes your priority again, and must be allocated to the correct quadrant.

Table 2 How to Categorise

When a task is assigned to you or comes up as part of your job, ask these questions.						
Is it Urgent?	Yes	Can I delegate?	Yes	U.NI – Urgent, but Not Important. DDD = Delegate, Deadline & Diarise . Delegate it to someone who can and will do it, give them a deadline and Diarise it for follow-up later that day to ensure it is done. If not, it will become IU on YOUR list – You are busy enough already. You don't want it to come back and bite you.		
			No	I.U – Important and Urgent. D = Do it because you need to do it. You need to do it now. It can't be delegated. The goal is to finish things before they arrive here and to keep this list short.		
	No	Is it Important?	Yes	Can I delegate?	Yes	I.N – Important but Not Urgent = DDD = Delegate, Deadline, Diarise. Delegate what you can with a Deadline & Diarise it for follow-up to ensure it is done by the deadline. Get regular progress reports. Ensure it does not go IU.
			No	No	I.N – Important but Not Urgent. DDDD = Deadline Diarise, Do Daily. Deadline and Diarise it for follow-up to ensure it is done by the deadline. Bite some off daily.? Do not procrastinate or it will turn IU.	
		No	Dump it. Get rid of it. Don't do it. It's a time-waster. Be careful not to eliminate anything that should be in another category. Be careful to correctly allocate things here if this is where they belong. Don't be tempted because it's fun.			

On the next page, write your to-do list down the left column and in no particular order. It doesn't matter. You are not going to prioritise anything until after you have completed your list. Once your list is done, transpose each item into the section of the quadrant it best fits using the above method of prioritising.

Worksheet

To Do List (Random order. It doesn't matter)		Urgent	Not Urgent
		Important	Do it
			Delegate what you can with a deadline. Get progress reports
	Not Important		Delegate it with a Deadline. Follow-up 

Remember: Tasks can move between quadrants. Keep an eye on Important but not urgent to ensure they don't slip into Important and urgent.