

Urgent vs Important

Learn to distinguish "urgent" from "important".

URGENT - "requiring or compelling speedy action or attention" (NOW!) We react to urgent tasks.

IMPORTANT - "of great significance or value" (GIVES RESULTS)
Important tasks require more initiative and being proactive.

Sometimes urgent things are important and sometimes they aren't. You will never have enough time for everything, so you need to decide what is really important. **IMPORTANT** activities are those which help you to achieve your goals. Most of us have learned to respond to urgent requests at the expense of important tasks. Ignore important tasks at your peril - they will escalate and become urgent, at which point you have yet another crisis to deal with!

In Stephen Covey's book "The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People" he categorizes activities into four categories:

- 1) Urgent and Important
- 2) Not Urgent and Important
- 3) Urgent and Not Important
- 4) Not Urgent and Not Important

The highest payoffs and greatest opportunities are usually in category 2.

Stephen Covey asks: "What one thing could you do in your personal or professional life that, if you did it on a regular basis, would make a tremendous positive difference in your life?" Activities in category 2 have that kind of impact. Our effectiveness takes quantum leaps when we concentrate on category 2.

Do you find yourself responding to "urgent" items or requests more quickly than "important" ones? Start making important tasks seem more urgent by setting deadlines for them, and schedule the activities into your day. Make sure you take care of the important tasks, even if they are not urgent. When you do have to react to an "urgent request", spend some time thinking through your response. Solutions that are well thought out are usually better than impulsive reactions.

If you start spending 80% of your time working with "Not Urgent but Important" items, and only 20% of your time on the other 3 categories, your effectiveness will increase dramatically. Most people start with the quick, easy or enjoyable tasks on their task list. Think about starting with the most **IMPORTANT** tasks instead.

Remember, **IMPORTANT** activities are those which help you to achieve your goals.

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