

# PRIORITISING – STEPHEN COVEY'S MATRIX

## 1) NAME AND DESCRIPTION OF THE TOOL

**Stephen Covey's matrix** is a model composed of four quadrants, each of which represents a category of priority in the tasks to be performed. In addition, each quadrant includes a series of activities that are managed in different ways.

## 2) OBJECTIVES OF THE TOOL

The following exercise aims to:

- Improve your productivity.
- Learn to give the right importance to each task.
- Learn to set clear objectives and learn the most efficient way to achieve them.

## 3) CONNECTION OF THE TOOL WITH THE ENEMY

Knowing how to prioritise goes hand in hand with time management. Prioritising tasks is not about making a list of activities and crossing them off as they are completed. It is knowing how to plan, make the most of and, of course, discard. Stephen Covey's method is a method that helps to ensure that time really is enough for everything and that, in addition, teaches us to identify what we should dedicate time to and what we should not.

## 4) RESOURCES & MATERIALS

To complete this exercise, you will only need the following materials:

- Piece of paper.
- Exercise templates (you can find it at the end of this document).
- Pencil or pen, although we recommend using a pencil so that you can make changes as you sort the tasks into the different quadrants.
- Eraser



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### 5) IMPLEMENTATION OF THE TOOL

First of all, you should be aware that knowing what you spend most of your time on during the day/week/month requires knowing this information for the chosen period of time. For this reason, the duration of the exercise will depend on the information you want to obtain, for example; if you want to know how much time you spend on each task/activity during a day, the exercise will have a duration of 1 day, if you want to know the time you spend during a week, the duration of the exercise will be one week (we recommend using this last option, as it gives us more information to be able to plan better) and so on.

In this way and in order to carry out the exercise in a correct way you must:

- **Step 1, duration: 1 day / 1 week / 1 month:** Write down the tasks or activities you do during the day. EVERYTHING you do during the day counts, i.e. e.g. a distraction and wasted time also count. It is also advisable to write down the duration of the tasks or activities (approximately). At the end of this document there is a list of general tasks and activities, in which you can write down how long you spend during the day/week/etc. on these activities. We take into account that the day has 24 hours, although we will subtract about 8 hours that, in general, are dedicated to sleep and we will also subtract 1 hour and a half that we will dedicate to eating. Therefore:
  - if we carry out the exercise for 1 day, the total amount of time spent on the activities we carry out will be approximately 14 - 15 hours.
  - If we carry out the exercise for 1 week, we will take into account the working days (Monday to Friday) and the total sum of time spent on the activities we carry out during the week will be approximately 70 - 75 hours.
- **Step 2, duration: approximately 20 minutes: (This step should be done at the end of the time we have set for our exercise, i.e. at the end of the day or at the end of the week).** Next, we are going to classify the activities we have carried out in the matrix. To do so, we will use the following classification criteria:
  - Quadrant 1 contains the tasks that are important and urgent. This includes tasks that are in line with your work purpose and require immediate attention. An example of this might be an urgent complaint from an important customer due to a critical problem that could mean losing the customer. It is important and it is urgent.
  - Quadrant 2 includes tasks that are important but not urgent. These are tasks that go with your purpose but do not require immediate attention. An example of this might be keeping yourself trained and up to date, or planning a team strategy. It is not an urgent task but it is important to get it done.
  - Quadrant 3 refers to those tasks that are not important but are urgent. They are actually urgent tasks for other people, but they do not fit your purpose. Many of these tasks appear to be in quadrant 1 but because they are not important they are not. Examples are calls, orders, which can be delegated or eliminated.
  - Finally in quadrant 4 are those tasks that are neither important nor urgent but which we continue to perform out of habit. These tasks are a waste of time. An example is when we distract ourselves by doing something that does not contribute anything to us or to others and therefore results in a waste of time.
- **Step 3, duration: approximately 20 minutes.** Add the total number of hours to the matrix (adding the time spent on the activities you have placed in the same quadrant). This will allow you to know which



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quadrant you spend the most time in, and you can draw the following conclusions:

- If it is quadrant 1, it will lead to increased stress and burnout. You will hardly have time to plan and anticipate problems, identify opportunities and look ahead. This lack of planning and anticipation will cause even more problems to arise, which will increase the number of tasks in quadrant 1. This generates a vicious circle that triggers more crises and stress.
- To avoid falling into this vicious circle, it is necessary to spend more time in quadrant 2: that which is important but not urgent. This will cause the tasks in quadrant 1 to decrease. But how can we get more time to devote to quadrant 2? For that we have to take time away from quadrants 3 and 4.
- Quadrant 4 is totally useless, these tasks must be eliminated. Everything in this quadrant does not require attention, because if it did, it would be placed in quadrant 2.
- Quadrant 3 is also of little value, except to other people. For that we must learn to say no, or to delegate tasks. By saying "no" to quadrants 3 and 4 we are saying yes to quadrant 2. And when this happens quadrant 1 becomes less and less.

### 6) WHAT TO LEARN

Through this exercise you will learn to differentiate between the importance and urgency of the tasks that you carry out in your daily life, so that you can organise them in a more efficient and optimal way for the development of both your personal and working life. In addition, you will learn that you do not have to carry the weight and responsibility of all the tasks, as you can delegate some of them to other people.

It is an exercise that can be applied to all levels of a person's life and a great solution to not only learn to prioritise tasks, but also to help manage the most valuable asset: the time.



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In this template you can write down the time you spend on each of the activities during the day/week... We have standardised a template with a duration of 1 week, so that it can be used for different durations, for 1 day, 1 week and 1 month (4 templates of 1 week would be needed for this duration).

As you can see, at the end of the grid there are blank spaces, so you can add activities that are not in the list.

Activity	Time spent on the activity (in hours)					Total Hours
	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	
Physical exercise						
Unplanned calls						
Distractions						
Recreate yourself						
Watch TV						
Study						
Work						
Interact with people						
Personal growth						



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	URGENT	NON – URGENT
IMPORTANT	<b>DO</b> <i>(Do it now)</i>	<b>DECIDE</b> <i>(Set aside time to do the tasks)</i>
NON – IMPORTANT	<b>DELEGATE</b> <i>(Who can do it for you?)</i>	<b>ELIMINATE</b> <i>(Delete this tasks completely)</i>





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