



Personal Productivity, priority and time management

Individuals can prioritize tasks effectively, focus on high-impact activities, manage time efficiently, and reduce stress by ensuring that efforts are directed towards tasks that truly matter.

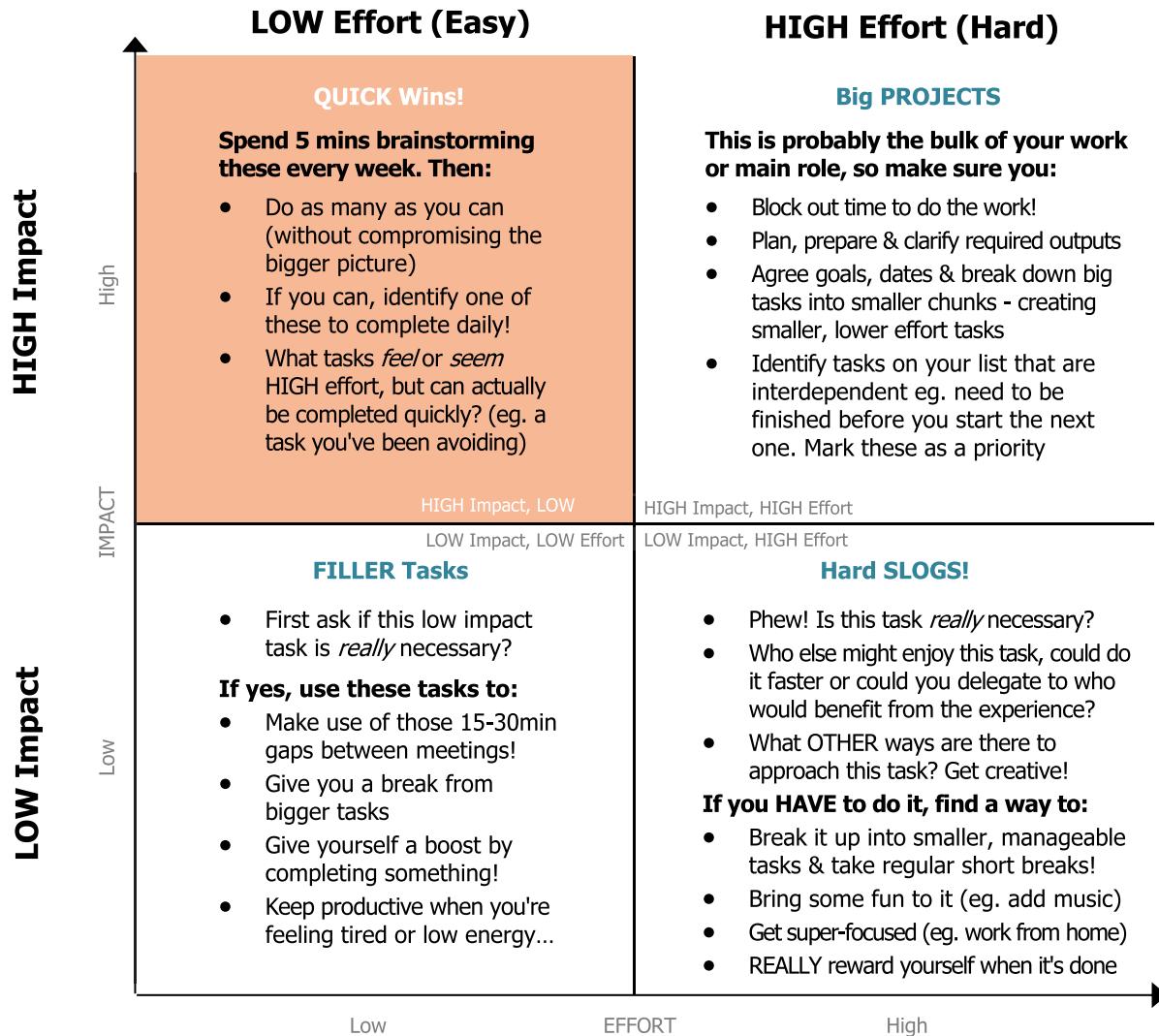
TABLE OF CONTENTS

Action Priority Matrix	03
Big Rocks Exercise	05
Delegation Identifier	08
Interruptions Blaster	10
Urgent-Important Matrix Template	14

Action Priority Matrix

Would you like to be more productive with the time you have? Achieve more with less effort? What about some help through delegating time-consuming tasks? Use this simple matrix to help you prioritize your time better.

THE CONCEPT: Time is best spent in the shaded quadrant – **LOW Effort and HIGH Impact tasks**. Read below and then use the empty template over the page to divide up your own task-list and boost your productivity.



What have you learned so far that you would like to make a note of? _____

Now it's time to put YOUR tasks into the relevant categories on the chart overleaf – so you can really make use of this new time management technique.

INSTRUCTIONS: So, while you may need to spend the majority of your time on big projects or tasks, it's worth spending a few moments to identify your quick wins and maximize productivity. Use this empty template below to divide up your own task-list and see what you learn:

1. First list out your tasks for the week and then add them into the appropriate quadrants below.
2. Next ask, are there any deadlines you have to meet this week? Is there anything you absolutely MUST get done? **Highlight these** and see which quadrant they are in.



3. Finally, look at your chart and consider where you spend most of your time. What % of time do you spend in each quadrant? How would you like to **spend your time differently**? What actions could you **implement** in the next week?

1st Key Observation/Learning _____	Action 1 _____
2nd Key Observation/Learning _____	Action 2 _____
3rd Key Observation/Learning _____	Action 3 _____

Why not put your completed chart somewhere obvious - so you can refer to it as the week progresses?

Big Rocks Exercise

THE STORY:

A teacher is addressing his class. He fills a jug with big rocks and asks the class if it's full. The class responds with a "Yes". So, he adds pebbles to the jug. He asks again if the jug is full, and again the class responds, "Yes". He says, "No" and now adds sand to the jug.

The sand and the pebbles represent the small daily tasks we fill our lives with. If we don't fit our big rocks in first, our lives will fill with only sand and pebbles. BUT if we start with our big rocks, we create room for what's important in life - and the sand and pebbles can only fill the spaces *in between*.

INSTRUCTIONS: This exercise helps you align how you spend your time with your "real" priorities, your "Big Rocks". Answer the questions below, then turn over to fill in your big rocks. Finally, complete the last page to see what changes you'll make from what you have learned.

1. Where or on what do you **currently spend most of your time?** (Make a list of whatever jumps into your mind)

i.

ii.

iii.

iv.

v.

2. What is the **SINGLE biggest thing that ZAPS your time** at present?
('negative' or unwanted time-zappers)

3. **What NEEDS to change?**

4. Take a few moments to consider what's TRULY important to you in life right now.

What are your Top 3 Priorities in life? (Make a list of whatever pops into your mind)

i.

ii.

iii.

5. **What one thing is MOST IMPORTANT to you right now?**

Please turn over to identify and prioritise your rocks.

Identify & Prioritise Your Rocks!

- i. Using the story we started with as your guide, write your KEY priorities/activities on the biggest rocks below.

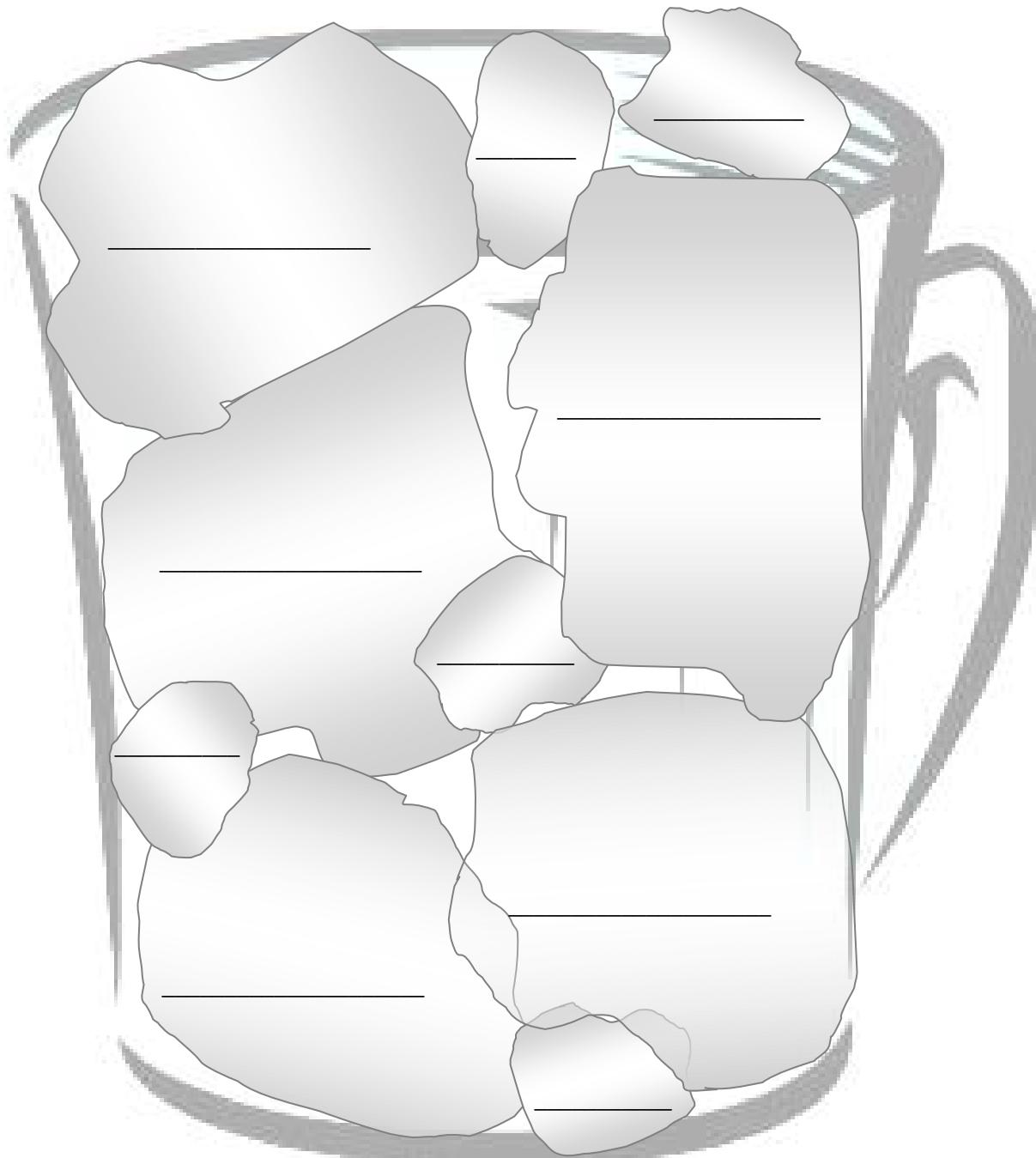
NOTE: Think carefully. What are your real "Big Rocks" in life right now? What's most important to you in life?

- ii. Now fill in the smaller rocks - your pebbles - with your next (lower) level priorities/activities.

- iii. Then, in the tiny gaps between the rocks, write your lowest priorities/activities.

- iv. Finally, prioritise your "Big Rocks" from 1 to 5.

NOTE: Use this tool regularly to prioritise your week or month - and to make sure you schedule your BIG ROCK items first!



NEXT: Decide what changes you will make...

Review your Learnings!

What changes will you make following what you have learned about yourself?

- How does where you currently spend your time compare to your "Big Rocks" - your REAL priorities?

- What does this tell you?

What Needs To Change?

- What *could* you be doing differently?

4. What is the EASIEST change/s you could make to prioritise your time better?

5. What are you WILLING to change to prioritise your time better?

6. Smash those Obstacles:

What could get in the way? If you were going to sabotage yourself how would you do it?

What Will You Commit To?

- What WILL you change or do differently? Take a look at the entire worksheet and identify 3 actions you will take to focus on your BIG ROCKS in life:

1st Action _____ By when _____

2nd Action _____ By when _____

3rd Action _____ By when _____

Now copy these out on *post-it notes* and stick them in your car, wallet, locker, fridge door, desk drawer or *any place where you will see them often*.

- I am committed to achieving these 3 actions:

Signed **Date**

What is the BIGGEST thing you learned about yourself from doing this exercise?

"How you spend your time is more important than how you spend your money. Money mistakes can be corrected, but time is gone forever." David Norris

Delegation Identifier

BACKGROUND: Get happier at work, by delegating what you don't enjoy, aren't very good at or simply don't have time to do! This coaching exercise helps you bring MORE of what you love, CUT OUT what you loathe - and get very clear on what to delegate in your business.

Part 1 - Observe

INSTRUCTIONS:

- Over the course of a week, make a note in the columns below whenever you feel great (doing something you LOVE), are miserable (doing something you LOATHE) as well as things you're simply NOT VERY GOOD AT and those you NEVER HAVE TIME FOR.
 - If something comes up several times, put a tally mark or number next to it - **make sure to count each separate instance**.
 - If something fits in more than one column - place it in the *most* appropriate column and draw an arrow into the other column/s.
 - The item can be anything from really small to really big. However, the more specific you are, the more useful this exercise will be eg. you may enjoy doing some parts of a task, but not all, so be clear - and specific!

Part 2 - Review and Take Action

1. Are you surprised by what's in your columns? **What do you first notice?**

.....

2. Take a closer look. What **common threads and patterns** do you notice?

.....

3. First, list some **ideas of how to INCREASE doing what you LOVE**. These are items NOT to delegate!

.....

.....

.....

4. Look at the Loathe/Not Good At/Never Have Time columns on Page 1. **What would you LOVE to delegate?**

.....

.....

.....

.....

5. Next, look at your list immediately above and:

- i) **Number in priority order** the Top 3-5 items you would **MOST like to delegate**.
- ii) Now **circle the 3-5 items** which are **EASIEST to delegate** - or get some help with.
- iii) Finally, **place a T against** the items which would **save you the most TIME**.

6. Review the list immediately above and **choose 3 items to delegate** or work towards delegating here:

1.

2.

3.

7. **Finally, what action will you take?** Identify one action for each item you've decided to delegate above.

1st Action _____ By when _____

2nd Action _____ By when _____

3rd Action _____ By when _____

Interruptions Blaster

Interruptions take time away from whatever you're working on. Sometimes this is a good thing - we need a break, but at its worst an interruption can throw us off and we can lose a creative thought, forget something critical or even lose a deal! This coaching exercise will help you understand the SOURCE of your interruptions, so you can take action to RESPOND purposefully and effectively in future, instead of simply reacting.

Part 1: Keeping an Interruptions Log

INSTRUCTIONS: Over the course of the next week or so, complete the table below whenever you get an interruption. You may have to do this afterwards - perhaps at the end of each day or when you have a break. Fill out ALL the columns and **print as many of these pages as you need** to record all your interruptions...

What is the Interruption? Name your interruption & briefly describe it	WHO IS the Interrupter? Remember, it could be you!	DATE & TIME Include day of the week	Approx. TIME SPENT on Interruption	WHO BENEFITED from the Interruption?	How IMPORTANT is the Interruption? Score out of 10 (where 10 is high)	An URGENT interruption?	NEXT TIME: Jot down any ideas that spring to mind
				 / 10	Y / N	
				 / 10	Y / N	
				 / 10	Y / N	
				 / 10	Y / N	
				 / 10	Y / N	
				 / 10	Y / N	
				 / 10	Y / N	

Part 2: Reviewing Your Interruptions Log

After a period of a week or two of observing your interruptions - and your response to them, let's do a quick review.

List below the 'themes' or recurring interruptions you notice right away:

1.
2.
3.

Take a closer look. What **common threads and patterns** do you begin to notice?

(This could be times of day, days of the week, WHO is interrupting, are they VALID interruptions or are they always urgent so you HAVE to stop what you're doing? Or perhaps you notice something else?)

1.
2.
3.
4.
5.

What else would you like to make a note of here?

.....
.....

Part 3: Taking Action to Ease Your Interruptions

When it comes to interruptions there is a never-ending realm of possible actions.

The KEY with ALL interruptions is to PAUSE before you take any action.

STOP, take a deep breath and evaluate the situation.

Ask yourself, "Is this interruption more important than what I'm currently doing?"

What you choose to do depends on many things including WHO the interrupter is, whether it's URGENT or not, whether the interrupter is a repeat offender, whether it benefits YOU or not, whether the interruption is valid, whether you are in a state of flow etc. And if you find you are actually welcoming interruptions AND not getting things done, you may need to have a deeper review around your motivation.

Finally, remember, **Say "Yes" to the person but "No" to the task - if necessary.**

Respect is essential - whether you are dealing with yourself or someone else.

Interruption Action Plan:

It's time to plan what to do with future interruptions. Below, list your common interruptions or interrupters and what you will do in future. Review your initial thoughts in your interruptions log where it says, "NEXT TIME I could" and check-out our Appendix for ideas and thought-starters.

Interruption/Interrupter	WHAT I WILL DO when this happens again:
1.	
2.	
3.	
4.	
5.	

Finally, let's look at bigger actions to reduce or avoid those interruptions altogether:

You may also need to set up some new processes for other people so they interrupt you less. For example if you're interrupted because a customer refund needs authorizing you could empower your employees to authorize the refund if it's less than \$50. Or you could schedule regular meetings with people and ask them to save their 'interruptions' for your meeting. Get creative!

List here any larger one-off actions to avoid future interruptions:

Action	By when I will complete this action:
1.	
2.	
3.	

SUMMARY: Interruptions can be frustrating or they can be stimulating - giving you a welcome break.

To handle interruptions more effectively you need to stop reacting on autopilot and instead take a deep breath, giving yourself a few short moments to evaluate how you are doing and then make the best decision for you.

Appendix

Ideas and Thought Starters for dealing with Interruptions

"In the moment" Strategies:

- **Say "No"** to the interrupter's request.
- **Delegate the interruption.** This could be delegating back to the interrupter, a team member or to someone you know would really enjoy - or even benefit from the experience of - dealing with the request.
- **Reschedule the interruption** or request for a time that suits for you. Try "I'm just in the middle of something/a tight deadline. Can I get back to you tomorrow?"
- Ask the other person to **schedule a meeting** with you **to discuss it**.
- **Prevent the interruption** (great for set periods of time where you really need to focus)
 - Put your answer machine on and/or switch the phone ringer off.
 - Close distractions like social networking sites, email programs and email 'pingers'.
 - Turn your personal cellphone off.
- **Ask your interrupter, "Is this urgent?"**
- **Share what you're doing** and ask if the interrupter's request is more important than what you're working on. *This is a good strategy if it's your boss who is regularly doing the interrupting.*
- **Ask the interrupter for 5 minutes** to make notes so you don't lose where you are.
- **Offer the interrupter a set period of your time** to work on the interruption, after which they must schedule another time with you.
- **Ask the interrupter to summarise the issue or request in an email** - including what they want you to do about it (you may even find they will go away and deal with the issue themselves once you do this!)
- **Buy yourself some time** and ask them to come back in 30 minutes/an hour.

Prevention and Reduction Strategies:

- **Ask that when people interrupt you they are specific** with a) what they want from you and b) when they need it by and if applicable c) their own suggestions and ideas around resolving the problem or issue.
- **Empower your team** or colleagues. Like the refund example on the previous page, think about your regular interruptions and where you could empower your team or colleagues to resolve the issue themselves.
- **Set up regular meetings** with your team or team members. Make issues and suggestions part of the agenda so that people know there is a time when they can bring things to you.
- **Have some sort of sign or signal that tells others you are not to be interrupted** unless it is urgent. This could be that your office door is closed, wearing some sort of hat (this is a real company policy!), you have your headphones on etc.
- Offer to **help the interrupter with a part of their issue** or request (but not the whole).
- **Ask friends to call you at specific times** of the day (eg. lunchtime) or in the evenings.
- Take a little extra time and **show them how to deal with their issue themselves**, so they won't need to interrupt you again for the same thing.

Urgent-Important Matrix Template

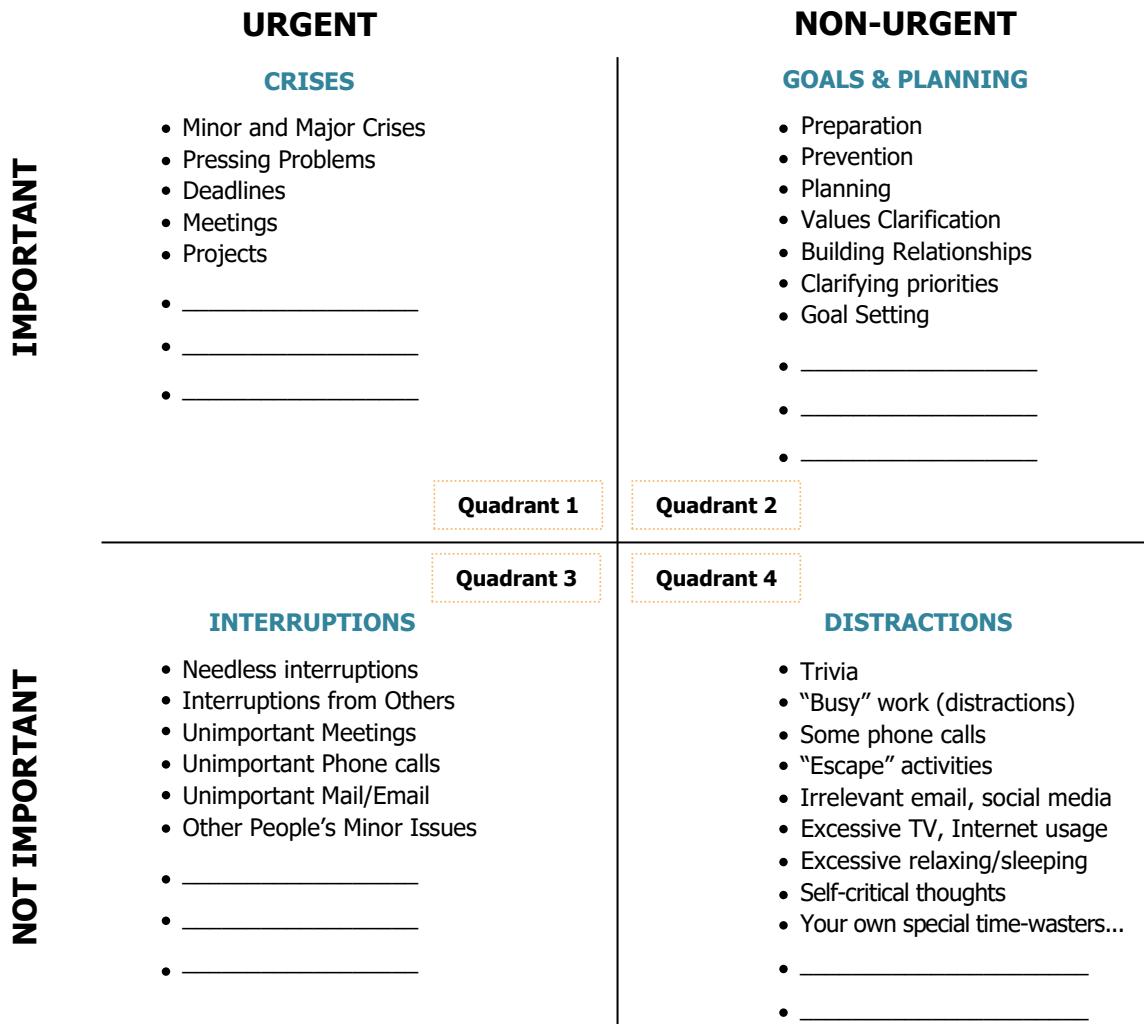
How do you manage your time? Are you constantly interrupted by others? Do you always seem to move from one crisis to another? This Urgent/Important Matrix Tool can help you understand where your time goes, and prioritise your time more effectively going forwards.

BACKGROUND: Former US President Eisenhower used the so-called "Eisenhower Principle" to organize his tasks. He is quoted as saying, "What is important is seldom urgent and what is urgent is seldom important."

Dr Stephen Covey brought these concepts to the mainstream, calling it "The Urgent/Important Matrix" in his famous book, The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People.

The aim here is to spend more time in Quadrant 2, **Important but Non-Urgent** tasks, and lessen time spent in Crises, Distractions and Interruptions. So, look at your chart and consider where you spend most of your time. Then consider:

1. **What % of time do you spend in each quadrant?** Write the number down in the quadrants below.
Note: Make sure this is a gut-feeling, your first instant response.
2. **List specific examples** that are relevant to YOU for each quadrant and add to the blank lines below.



Please turn over to review what you have learned and identify up to 3 actions to improve your time management.

REVIEW TIME:

3. So, which quadrant do you spend MOST time in? _____

4. How does that feel? _____

Q1 - Crises - If you're spending most of your time here, how are you dealing with stress?

Q2 - Goals & Planning - Congratulations! How could you make sure you stay in this quadrant?

Q3 - Interruptions - If you're spending most of your time here, you may need to find ways to say "No" to others.

Q4 - Distractions - If you're spending most of your time here, you may need to find ways to "No" to yourself.

5. So, what's getting in the way of you managing your time better? Be specific. _____

6. Where are you sabotaging yourself? _____

GET MOTIVATED:

7. How would your life be different if you managed your time more effectively? What's in it for you?
List all the benefits to you of managing your time better including at home, in relationships and the workplace!

8. What COULD you do differently? It's time to do some brainstorming - write all the ideas of things you could do.
Note: This is only a brainstorming exercise to identify possibilities, you will choose actions in the next section.

_____ _____ _____
_____ _____ _____

9. What is the KEY action that would support all the others? _____

COMMITMENT:

Now it's time to identify 1-3 specific actions you will commit to. Make sure this action is something you can implement right away - or in the next day or so. Note: Only pick actions you are 100% sure you will complete - and if necessary make the action smaller until you can commit one hundred percent!

Action 1 _____ **By When** _____

Action 2 _____ **By When** _____

Action 3 _____ **By When** _____

The biggest thing I have learned about myself today is: _____

I am committed to achieving these actions Signed _____ Date _____

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