

The Urgent/Important Matrix: A Tool for Managing Your Time

Are you struggling to see the big picture and how your daily activities fit in? Do you feel scattered and unsure of how to focus your energy? Are you wondering why, with the same 24 hours a day as everyone else, you just can't seem to get anything done? Use this tool to help you gain clarity and jump start your personal productivity.

Step 1: Listing your Activities

Think about all the things you spend time on. This might include the routine things you do on a daily or weekly basis, any special projects you might be working on at the moment, the time you spend communicating with and supporting others, and even the time you spend socializing or relaxing during your work day. List as many of these activities as you can think of below.

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Once you have identified your daily activities, the next step is to prioritize them according to their importance and urgency.

Importance Relates to the long-term impact of the cumulative work on your business and/or your goals and objectives (a measure of priority).

Urgency Refers to the expediency of a task or activity, regardless of its importance (a measure of time sensitivity).

All of our activities can be placed in one of four categories:

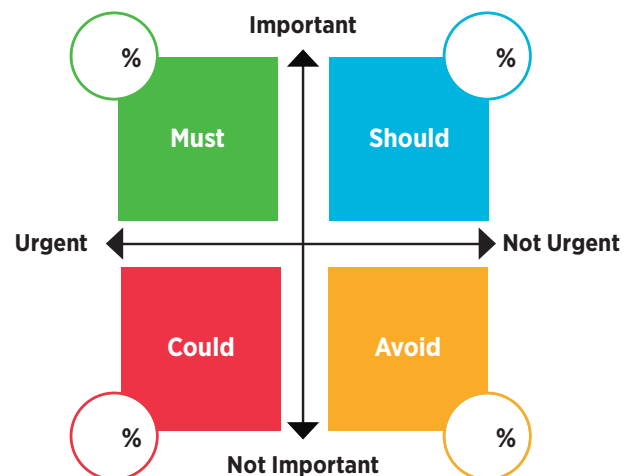
Must These are important and urgent tasks that require your immediate attention. These could be deadline-driven tasks, demanding problems, or crisis management issues.

Should These are important but not urgent tasks; there is no extreme time-sensitivity at this point but the activity itself is high value, high payoff in the long term. These include tasks such as preparation and planning, professional development, self-care, routine administration, and deadline-avoiding activities (i.e. working on a proposal well in advance of the due date).

Could These are not important, but are time sensitive; if done, they need to be done in short order. These include requests and minor interruptions from colleagues, some phone calls and meetings, responding to some e-mail messages, etc. Although these tasks may feel non-optional, they have relatively little long-term benefit for you, or anyone else.

Avoid These are neither important nor urgent tasks. These are really your time-wasters and include such things as scrolling social media, "busy work," and unimportant e-mails. Note that socializing and breaks ARE generally valuable uses of your time with high long-term benefit—but it's important to put your time towards activities that genuinely help you recharge and connect with others.

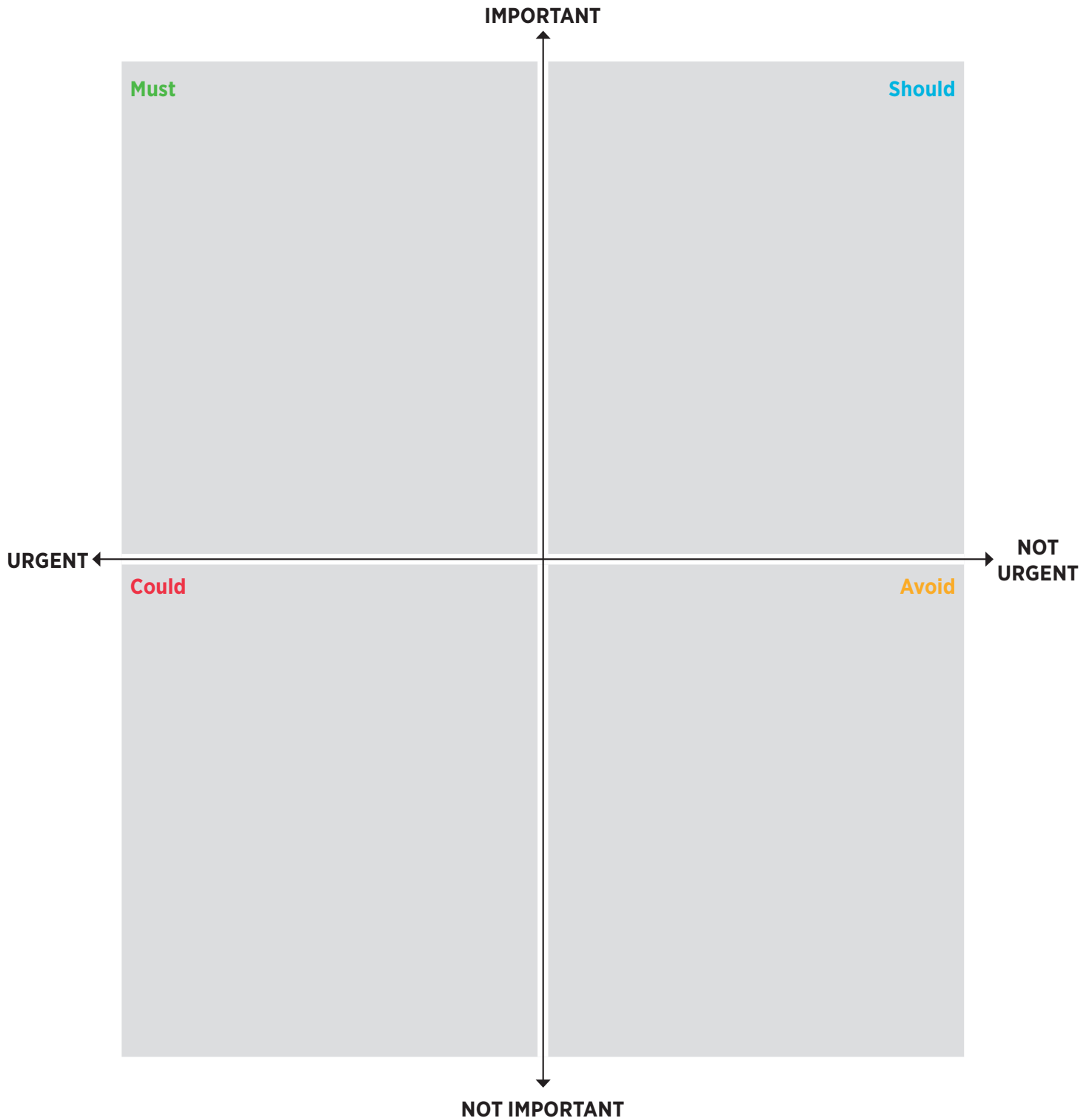
Consider your regular routine. Can you identify the percentage of your time you spend in each quadrant?



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Step 2: Prioritizing Your Activities

Group the activities you listed above into the 4 quadrants. Look at your results and identify your highest-value tasks. Consider what tasks you can delegate or avoid.



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Step 3: Organize Your Activities

Remember to start with the bigger picture when you decide where to put your time and energy. It is challenging to maintain a long-term focus when it comes to organizing your activities. Our environment changes rapidly, and often our priorities change with it. Try to frame your focus to monthly, weekly and daily. Make sure you plan to accomplish your most important tasks—even if they are not, in this moment, urgent.

Monthly	Weekly
<p>What do I need to achieve/ What does my team need to achieve?</p> <p>What can I do?</p> <p>What can I delegate?</p>	<p>Am I (is my team) on track this week? What needs to happen by the end of the week?</p> <p>What do I (or my team) need to prepare for next week?</p>
Daily	
<p>What are my priorities today?</p> <p>What might interrupt/interfere with my plans today? How can I best handle any interruptions to my plans?</p>	