Urgent vs Important Matrix

The Urgent vs Important Matrix helps give you clarity about which tasks you should be focussing your time on. It does this by splitting tasks up into four categories rated in terms of urgency and importance. To use the matrix effectively it is vital to understand the difference between "important" and "urgent".

Important
Of much or great significance or consequence or value; entitled to more than ordinary consideration or notice.

Urgent
Compelling or requiring immediate action or attention; imperative; pressing; *an urgent matter.*

By categorising your tasks by urgency and importance you can plot them on the matrix and understand which tasks you should be focussing your time on.

Imperial College London

Urgent vs Important Matrix

Urgent but not important
Should be dealt with quickly
- *Trivial requests from others*
- *Ad-hoc distractions and interruptions*
- *Misunderstandings*
- *Accumulated unresolved queries*

Urgent and important
Need to be dealt with in depth
- *Emergencies, complaints, crisis*
- *Planned tasks or work now due*
- *Demands from customers or superiors*
- *Meetings and appointments*
- *Staff issues*
- *Problem resolution, fire fighting*

Not urgent or important
Do it, delegate it, dump it, defer it
- *Excessive breaks*
- *Chat and gossip*
- *Daydreaming*
- *Reading irrelevant material*
- *Unnecessary equipment adjusting*
- *Over-production*
- *Procrastination*

Not urgent but important
Core tasks of your job
- *Planning and preparing*
- *Networking and relationship building*
- *Thinking, creating, designing*
- *Systems and process development*
- *Anticipation and prevention*
- *Developing change, direction and strategy*

You should aim to be working in this box most of the time. You are operating at your best when you are most energised!

Urgent

Important

Imperial College London

Action Priority Matrix

The Action Matrix works in a similar way to the Priorities Matrix in that it is split up into quadrants. One axis measures tasks on a scale of 1 to 10 in terms of effort and the other in terms of impact. You can then plot your tasks and see where you should be spending your time.

High Impact – Low Effort

These are the most attractive projects, giving you a good return for relatively little effort.

Quick Wins

Major Projects

High Impact – High Effort

Those things which need advanced planning and research. Obviously, these things have high impact on the end result, but take much more time to accomplish.

Impact

Fill Ins

Thankless Tasks

Low Impact – High Effort

Avoid these for now. Not only do they give low returns, they crowd out time which would be better used elsewhere.

Low Impact – Low Effort

Ask yourself – why are you doing these?

Effort

NB you could use alternative measurements on the axis'. For example you could measure impact in terms of revenue and effort in terms of hours.

Imperial College London