

Covey's approach is often summarized, overly simplified, and deprived of its substance by a presentation of Covey's famous Time Management Matrix (shown below). It takes only seconds to understand the matrix in which you can categorize activities and tasks in four quadrants based on their importance and urgency. But Covey's postulates on time management are much deeper.

Time Management Matrix

| | Urgent | Not Urgent |
|----------------------|---------------|-------------------|
| Important | I | II |
| Not Important | III | IV |

Covey states that most of us know what is important in our lives (and jobs) but the problem is that "it doesn't get translated into the fabric of our daily lives". We make plans and then we turn around and start activities that bear no relations to the plan. If only we could get things under control, we could focus on the plan but things just keep happening that prevent us from doing this. This can be a tremendous source of frustration and stress.

Most of us have a natural attraction to focus on the urgent instead of the important. If this is repeated everyday, chances are that we suffer from urgency addiction. As Charles Hummel wrote in his book *Tyranny of the Urgent*...

The important task rarely must be done today, or even this week. (...) The urgent task calls for instant action (...) The momentary appeal of these tasks seems irresistible and important, and they devour our energy. But in the light of time's perspective prominence fades; with a sense of loss we recall the vital task we pushed aside. We realize we've become slaves to the tyranny of the urgent.

One course of action suggested by Covey to try to break this cycle is to move from daily to weekly planning:

Daily planning provides us with a limited view. It's so "close up" that we're often kept focused on what's right in front of us. Urgency and efficiency take the place of importance and effectiveness. Weekly organizing, on the other hand, provides a broader context to what we do. (...) The activities of the day begin to take on more appropriate dimensions when viewed in the context of the week.

A week is a unit of time long enough for most of us to plan at least one important activity for each of the important things in our lives or jobs. A day is just too short to make all that is important fit. The major flaw of planning from day to day is the natural attraction to focus on the urgent of the day and postpone everything else. Today's urgency provides an excuse (a lame one) for not addressing more important, challenging and difficult issues that require hard work and creativity.

Imagine for a moment a person obsessed with keeping his in-basket empty or near empty (let's call him Jack). Jack gives priority to the tasks that he can get rid of quickly, into his out-basket and off his desk as soon as possible, regardless of their importance. Jack wastes what could be his most productive hours of the day (morning hours because this is when he is rested) on urgent