

Time for “Upper Right Quadrant” Initiatives

26 April 2012/ft

In order to eke out time for the “important, non-urgent” tasks in Stephen Covey’s upper right quadrant, we will need to use all of our collective skills to improve our efficiency. Here are some starter ideas that we generated on April 19, 2012

E-mail

- turn off for extended periods, or set auto-check for long period (e.g. 1 hour)
- terseness: keep messages short: 3 line rule, absolute maximum 3 paragraph
- don’t use “reply to all”
- review before sending: is it necessary? insert sender last
- establish parameters for e-mail among project team
 - proper use of cc: vs to:
 - creative use of subject lines

Staying on task

- screen timer counts down from 30 minutes. Focus on one subject for at least that long.
- use calendar reminders: create an “appointment” for the task, and when the reminder pops up, snooze it for ten or fifteen minutes so that it reminds you to get back on task. Keep reminding until you’ve finished or have worked for an hour or more on the task.
- move with your laptop to a meeting room or a café
- headphones or muffs

Clearing the decks in meetings

- WAIT - Why Am I Talking?
- create closure: debrief with a colleague after a meeting
- end each meeting with synopsis of next steps and assigned tasks
- avoid back-to-back meetings to create space for debrief, consolidation, etc.

Maintain sanity

(see previous list on reverse side)

Important, non-urgent work

- create culture (or policy) for setting aside time for important/ non-urgent items
- create “accountability partners” with regular scheduled check-ins
- block out a recurring time in the calendar for this type of work, at least 2 hours per week

Find more efficient ways to work

- use media creatively:
 - break e-mail thread with a phone call
 - reply to endless voice mail with a brief e-mail message
 - walk to someone in a nearby building for a stand-up face-to-face check-in
- put a maximum limit on the number of meetings per day
- where appropriate, leave a meeting after your agenda items (but warn others in advance)
- impose the “maximum 90 minute without a break” rule for meetings, feel free to call for a break