Managing Disruptions and Distractions Matrix

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Description

In a world full of daily disruptions and distractions that impede us in getting our important things accomplished, there never seems to be enough time to get everything done. Disruptions and distractions cause detours at the most inconvenient time, forcing a response to shifting urgency levels changing minute by minute. Our daily work and personal life often clash. As an example, after arriving at work, a call from day care about a sick child shifts focus away from an important report. However, a call from a supervisor looking for the report shifts focus back. The stress level increases with every disruption and distraction.

Figure 1 shows a matrix to help list tasks to manage, prioritize, avoid, and eliminate. Referred to as the Eisenhower Box or Stephen Covey's Time Management Matrix, a version of this tool is often provided in time management training.

Additional quadrant descriptors in Figure 2 assist with providing action steps for developing a time management matrix.
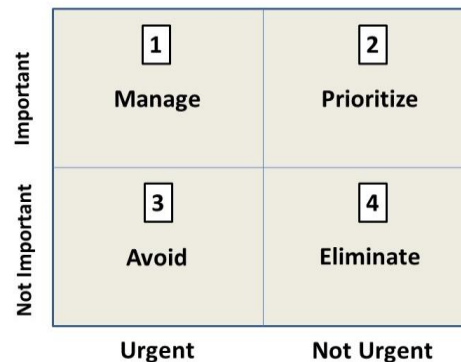

Figure 1

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Purpose/Goal for the Week

	Urgent	**Not Urgent**
Important	**1** Quadrant of Necessity Action—Manage: Crisis Response and Deadlines	**2** Quadrant of Quality and Leadership Action—Prioritize: Visioning, Prevention and Planning
Not Important	**3** Quadrant of Deception Action—Avoid: Other's Deadlines, Interruptions, Urgency Masquerading as Important	**4** Quadrant of Waste Action—Eliminate: Time Wasters, Gossip, Junk Mail (Oversubscribing to Newsletters), Some Social Media

Figure 2

When to Use

The Managing Disruptions and Distractions Matrix can be used in response to feelings of loss of control or lack of achievement in work or professional life tasks. It can help maneuver constant disruptions and distractions at home and at work. This tool can be used at the beginning of the week to chart a course to accomplishing what is important and urgent. Using this tool successfully requires development of both the ability to stick to making changes as well as the willingness to follow the guidelines created to avoid and eliminate distractions. Lost (non-value-added) time becomes value-added time when distractions are eliminated and avoided. At the end of the work week, this tool helps to evaluate success and identify additional improvements to increase value-added time.

Construction Steps

1. Identify the purpose or goal for the week. Write that statement at the top of the grid.
2. Brainstorm all necessary activities for the week, as well as potential disruptions and distractions.
3. Sort all of the activities, disruptions and distractions based on the four quadrants in Figure 2.
4. Manage and prioritize the items in Quadrants 1 and 2. They are the most important.
5. Analyze the items in Quadrants 3 and 4. Determine which items should be avoided and which should be eliminated. Investigate why they are happening (causes), their impact on personal and work life, and what current controls are in place to prevent them. If no prevention controls are in place, develop them. Saying "No" more often to requests in Quadrant 3 and 4 is a simple control to develop.
6. Implement the controls developed above.

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7. Track the results weekly to see if the controls are successful.

Example 1

Figure 3 is an abbreviated Managing Disruptions and Distractions Matrix from the perspective of a local public health division director of community health assessment and performance management.

Purpose/Goal for the Week: On-time completion of tasks related to community health assessment staff development, quality improvement planning, and finance.

	Urgent	Not Urgent
Important	**1** **Manage** • Submit revised budget at request of elected officials • Complete grant reports • Prepare meeting materials for community engagement meeting	**2** **Prioritize** • Develop a timeline and action plan for conducting the CHA • Convene and facilitate Health Alliance Meeting • Meet with staff to develop annual individual and team goals • Revise the QI Plan
Not Important	**3** **Avoid or Delegate** • Travel reimbursement forms • Unrelated committee work • Saying yes to all requests	**4** **Eliminate** • Responding to most recent email chime • Conversations in the hallway • Use of Facebook, Twitter or LinkedIn at work

Figure 3

Conclusion

This tool illuminates a challenge. The urgency and importance of all tasks is relative and factors both inside and outside of control. For example, saying "yes" to serving on a workgroup for community health assessment created several strategic opportunities that were much more like quadrant two, but saying yes to serving on a sub-committee of the Suicide Prevention Coalition did not meet the goal for the week. This tool can help question why an activity is on a list, rather than letting calendar invitations drive activity. Despite the ambiguity, taking the time to organize tasks using personal judgement can raise awareness about time wasters and improve satisfaction with time management.

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