

Strategic Time Management

Suleman Ahmer

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In the name of Allah, the most Merciful and the most Beneficent

Preface

This book and the Timelenders' Strategic Time Management Workshop have evolved over many years of reflection and teaching.

At the age of thirteen, I got fascinated with time at Abbottabad Public School, a boarding school modeled after the military where we were kept on our toes round the clock. The studies were timed and so were the games, the recreation (an hour of supervised television a week) and even eating. Success was doing more in less time. I learnt that with exercise I can get away with less sleep; cold water shortened shower time; simple food was quicker to eat; the best time for difficult assignments was 4:00 am; and sleeping late was simply a bad idea...

I was moved then by a verse by Kipling which has always remained with me:

If you can fill the unforgiving minute
with sixty seconds' worth of distance run --
Yours is the Earth and everything that's in it,
and -- which is more -- you'll be a Man, my son!

Hard pressed for time during my studies at the University of Nebraska, I began experimenting with time management techniques like to-do lists.

I started my career as a project manager for a multinational group in Chicago and later became the Director of the US operations and traveled extensively to Europe and Central Asia.

Faced with fast growth placing a huge demand on our officers' time, I decided to design a training. Having read and reflected for years, this was my chance to test my ideas.

The training proved effective and people from outside the company started requesting to join. In 1999 I conducted my first public training for thirty people.

I later founded Timerunners, a part-time affair. By the time I left the US for Pakistan, a few hundred people had been trained. I established Timelenders in Karachi in 2002.

Over 5,000 people belonging to over 50 nationalities have been trained. Our clients include local and multinational companies, not-for-profit organizations, government and the armed forces. We have trained in Kuwait, Pakistan, UAE and the US.

The training and the book has the input of thousands who have attended the workshops. They have taught me, enriched my learning and improved the content through their insightful comments to which I am grateful.

The definition of Strategic Time Management has constantly been revised. New ideas and modules have been added. The technical definitions of important and urgent have continually evolved and lately we have added the value/want and the important/like grids to help the participants understand what truly their worthwhile goals are.

Three modules have spun off from the main training: the **Strategic Visions Workshop** which helps us understand the technicalities of setting up a vision whether corporate or individual; **Sleep Management Workshop** and the **Where Do You Want to Go Workshop** which helps us look at the Islamic perspective of visions.

Lastly, my gratitude is to Allah (swt) for enabling me to put this book together and I pray that this book may be of benefit to you (Ameen).

Suleman Ahmer

CEO

Timelenders

September 10, 2007

Introductions

Name:

Company:

Designation:

How long have you been with the organization?

Jr. High School (Matric):

High School/F.Sc./F.A:

Graduation/Post graduation:

Hobbies:

Special mention:

Training Norms and Guidelines for the Participants

1.0 Timings: While following time schedules is very important in all aspects of our lives, it is all the more so at training workshops. This is because training is generally aimed at “behavior modification” and thus offers us an opportunity not only to gain knowledge about the theme at hand but also to realign our self-development habits.

1.1 The Strategic Visions/Strategic Time Management Workshops are very sequential and missing out on even a small section would necessarily entail later challenges; it would be difficult to reconnect with the group which would have moved forward and the learning deficit would not be easy to make up. Unless the participant’s absence is due to an unavoidable emergency, such absence would, at the very least, mean missing out on his or her responsibility to the sponsoring organization and also to herself or himself as a conscientious learner. Accordingly, we expect all participants to be on time at the beginning of every session of the workshop. Care must be taken to come back at the scheduled /agreed time(s) after the breaks. We shall not wait for any participant when starting or re-starting a session.

1.2 In the event of an unforeseen happening, if a participant happens to miss out on more than one and a half hours of the workshop, we shall not be able to award the certificate to her/him. We have, however, developed a fair mechanism to offset the learning deficit and enable delivery of the certificate to such participants. We encourage any participant who has missed out on one or more sessions of the workshop to come to us after the workshop hours (preferably during the workshop or otherwise after it ends) for a special one-on-one make-up session in which our trainer(s) shall happily go over the missed out sections in our own time. It would only be after this special session that we would award the certificate. We are sure that participants would agree with us on this policy which essentially comprises a rights and fairness issue (it is the right of all participants to be treated equally and it is fair that a distinction be made amongst those who attend the training fully and those who do not).

2.0 Mobile/cell phones: We believe that training is a full time assignment. Like all other organizational activities, training should be undertaken with full concentration and seriousness. A distinction should not be made between

office work which is generally considered to be “important” and “mere” training. The ringing of mobile phones disturbs the whole group and sets back the training process, often severely. Accordingly, we cannot make any allowance or compromise on mobile phone usage inside the training room. While we strongly urge participants to keep their cell phones turned off, if that is not possible, the sets may be kept in silent or vibration mode. Although emergency calls may be attended by walking out of the room, participants should appreciate that doing so not only deprives them of the required focus and continuity but also disturbs other participants. We have lately become very strict after receiving strong complaints from our participants in this regard. Thus, if any individual participant continues to move out of the room very frequently, he or she should expect a “behavior modification intervention.” We believe this is also a rights issue – as one participant’s attending to phone (even by walking out) deprives others of their right to focus. There are ample breaks in which calls can be made and taken. Sending or receiving short messages (sms) from/in the classroom is also counterproductive to the important task of training and hence not allowed.

3.0 Questions & Answers: We strongly request participants to ask questions. No question is irrelevant or trivial. We shall deal with these questions in the following five ways:

3.1 answer it immediately.

3.2 ask you to wait as the coming section(s) will cover the relevant topic which will then answer the question.

3.3 ask the individual to meet the trainers later for a one-on-one session (when the question is very specific to the questioner).

3.4 put all questions on hold for a specific time.

3.5 admit our lack of knowledge and try to find the answer which may be given at a subsequent time.

4.0 Workshop Language: Depending largely on the choice of the participants (and partially on the facility of the trainers), the training shall be conducted in English, Urdu or a mix of both the languages (as is often the case in most

Pakistani organizational settings). Sometimes we may have participants who are totally unfamiliar with Urdu and in such cases the training would be conducted in English. This shall be clarified at the outset of the training. During an all English session, we shall sometimes use Urdu (especially poetry) which we shall translate for our English speaking friends.

5.0 Design of the folder: The folder which has been provided to all participants for use in the workshop has been specially designed and includes the following features:

5.1 Sheets of punched paper have been provided; it is strongly recommend that these sheets be used for note-taking and be subsequently inserted into the folder so that all the notes and handouts are in one place.

5.2 All of our workshops undergo continuous changes. Accordingly, when a major section is re-written or developed anew old participants would be informed via email; they may then download the material from our website, print it and place it in this manual.

6.0 Getting the most out of this workshop:

6.1 The brain performs different functions in the body. Comprehension and expression of ideas are two distinct functions of the brain and amongst these two functions expression of an idea is higher in complexity. Whenever the brain is given a cue that an idea will have to be expressed together with being understood and comprehended, the brain sequences the information differently and comprehension is automatically increased. Also, the person is more attentive knowing that this information has to be reproduced.

The best way to get the most out of this workshop would be to make an intention of passing on the knowledge gained to at least one person, preferably who is close to the officer – and as soon as possible. Please also keep in mind that as a part of participants' homework individuals will be asked to deliver condensed versions of the sections of this workshop to someone who is close to them. Generally participants would be asked to share the experience (of sharing the knowledge) the next day. This training delivery does not have to be very elaborate; only a few minutes of instruction would also suffice.

Participants have permission to reproduce all our training materials including the multi-media presentations; they are free to use it to train others and also to

make further copies. Of course, it remains their moral obligation to acknowledge the source.

- 6.2 When someone is spoken to, the listener is usually doing three things:
- a. The act of hearing, which is a mechanical action.
 - b. Comprehension, in which the listener is making sense of what is being heard by comparing it with all the relevant data that is available in the brain.
 - c. Judgment, in which the listener decides on the authenticity of the information received and the usefulness or the lack of it (for example the information may be correct but the listener may decide that it is not relevant to him/her or that it has limited or no use).

Since (b) and (c) cannot happen without (a), we can easily declare that (a) is a pre-requisite. Similarly it is clear that the better the comprehension, the better the judgment.

One of the most common errors that normal listeners make is trying to do both comprehension and judgment at the same time. So as individuals try to comprehend information while it is still in the process of arriving and as they comprehend it, they are also in the judging mode, many a times they arrive at a judgment before the complete information has arrived. Since the judgment has been made, the mind then tunes off to later pieces of information which could have resulted in a different judgment had those were also factored in. In general, this is called premature judgment.

Also, judgment takes away brain resources which were better suited for comprehension at that time, thus impairing our comprehension.

Premature judgment is one of the major reasons behind a lot of unnecessary conflict and misunderstanding.

Here are a few steps that we propose – and which participants would find valuable in getting the best out of this workshop:

1. Suspend judgment till all the information has been received. If some information is not clear, then a question should be asked to fill in the information gap.

2. If there is a lot of information (anything that goes on for more than five minutes), please take notes so that not only the important points but their sequencing is preserved.

3. Once the information has been gained, participants should calmly analyze the information and then proceed to make a judgment. Also, judgment can be delayed to a later, quieter time.

Our workshop is interspaced with breaks, group exercises, simple stories and anecdotes which provide ample time for judgment of critical ideas.

7.0 Reference manual vs. textbook: Please do note that this is a reference manual; during the workshop we shall be going back and forth in the manual. We apologize for any inconvenience that this may cause. Our workshops are dynamically structured which means that the sequence of questions and the flow of the discussions is based on the nature of the group; as we will keep restructuring the workshop flow, there is the need to move back and forth. We assure the participants that the little trouble that they would face will be well worth the payback in terms of clarity in developing concepts and improving understanding of the subject matter.

8.0 Quizzes: Quizzes might be given at various times during the workshop. The purpose is not to embarrass any one or more participants but to make sure that the whole group understands what is being presented. If any one or more participants do not pass a quiz, they need not get worried. It happens. In that case, we will ask the not-so-successful participants to give us two hours of their time after the workshop so that we may go over their questions and concerns. Any participant who fails the quiz, shall have her or his certificate withheld until the extra time which has been sought is made available by the individual trainee(s) to go through the concepts in which they had difficulty.

9.0 Guests:

9.1 The guests will be allowed to sit for a maximum of one half day (either the first half or the second half) during the workshop. The guests are not entitled for lunch. However, they can pay and join us at lunch. If someone wants to sit for more time, he/she will be charged the full fee of the workshop.

9.2 If the participants are planning to bring guests with them, they must inform the Marketing Team or the Event Manager at least one day in advance.

9.3 Guests will not be allowed to participate in discussions or ask questions. They can quietly sit in the back. They must also observe all the training norms especially regarding mobile phones.

10.0 General Instructions:

10.1 **Pre-workshop questionnaire:** Please fill out the pre-workshop questionnaires if not already done by this time.

10.2 **Names for certificates:** Please fill out the sheet which will be circulated for ascertaining the correct and full names to be written on the certificates. Please fill this sheet whether you are a new participant or are repeating the complete workshop. Please do not fill it out if you are a guest.

10.3 **Highlighters:** These have been provided for use during the workshop and shall be collected at the end of the day.

10.4 **Blank sheets:** Please use the blank sheets for taking notes – but remember to be environmentally friendly by using as little paper as possible.

10.5 **Name on the manual:** Participants are requested to please write their names on the manuals and keep them securely at all times.

10.6 **Valuables:** All valuables like mobile phones must be kept on the person of the participants – and especially so when leaving the training room, especially when going for lunch and breaks. The organizers are unable to assume any responsibility for loss of misplaced or lost valuables.

10.7 **Comfortable atmosphere and regulating temperature:** It is important that the participants feel comfortable. Therefore, they are requested to please inform the Workshop Coordinator immediately if the air-conditioning or the heating is either too high or too low. We highly recommend that participants bring a coat or jacket with them to the training to counter cold.

- 10.8 **Soft copies:** Soft copies of selected slides of the workshop presentation are available on Timelenders' website (www.timelenders.com).
- 10.9 **Assistance:** Participants should contact the Workshop Coordinator for any assistance.

The learning objectives of the Strategic Time Management Workshop

By the end of the workshop you should have learnt the following concepts in details

1. Technical definition of Strategic Time Management (STM)
2. The importance of technical meanings of words
3. The concept of Pony
4. The concept of Decision Making Routines (DMRs)
5. Uniformity of DMRs
6. The link between 'Determination' and 'Promises'
7. How to increase determination
8. The universal consequences of breaking promises
9. Prioritization
10. The Eisenhower Grid as a basis of prioritization
11. Identifying and handling different Quadrant activities
12. Different stress zones
13. Handling interruptions through filters
14. Internal vs. External Q1s
15. The art of never being late
16. The concept of the Time Restricted Q2 (TRQ2) and Time Restricted Q1 (TRQ1) activities
17. Managing promises through the GK book and to-do lists
18. Keeping appointments through the Daily Scheduler

You would have been introduced to the following concepts briefly

1. The concept of the vision
2. The importance of planning
3. Leadership and its role in Strategic Time Management
4. Future readings for visions
5. Suggested trainings for visions
6. Future readings for leadership
7. Suggested trainings for leadership

You would have been introduced to the following terms:

1. Vision
2. Important

3. Urgent
4. Worthwhile Goals
5. Explicit Goals
6. Implicit Goals
7. Buffer
8. Q1, Q2, Q3 and Q4 activities
9. The stress, Eustress and Apathy Zone

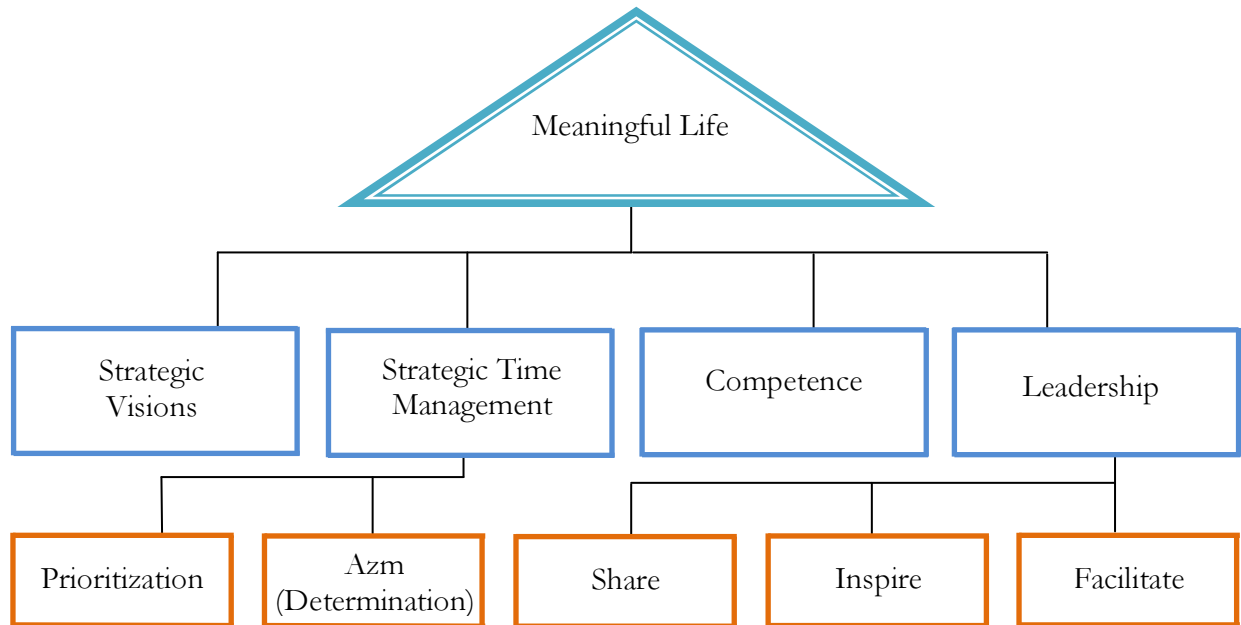
You would have at least done the following:

1. Done an exercise demonstrating that different people have different perceptions of the same words.
2. At least two quizzes from the course material
3. Completed the value/want grid
4. Completed the important/like grid
5. An exercise to identify different Time Quadrant activities
6. Started to fill out the GK book
7. Partially worked on all the five to-do lists
8. Charted some of your assignments on the Daily Scheduler
9. Shared some of the concepts with someone outside the course
10. Done a time estimation exercise in 'the art of never being late'.

A Meaningful Life

1. Would you like to look back at your life at the time of your death and exclaim:
'It was worth it!'
 - Yes
 - No
 - I don't care

1. Suppose you are mentioned after your death in a gathering of a group of people with knowledge and wisdom. What would you like them to say about you?
 - This person's (your) life was really worth it
 - This person's life was not worthwhile

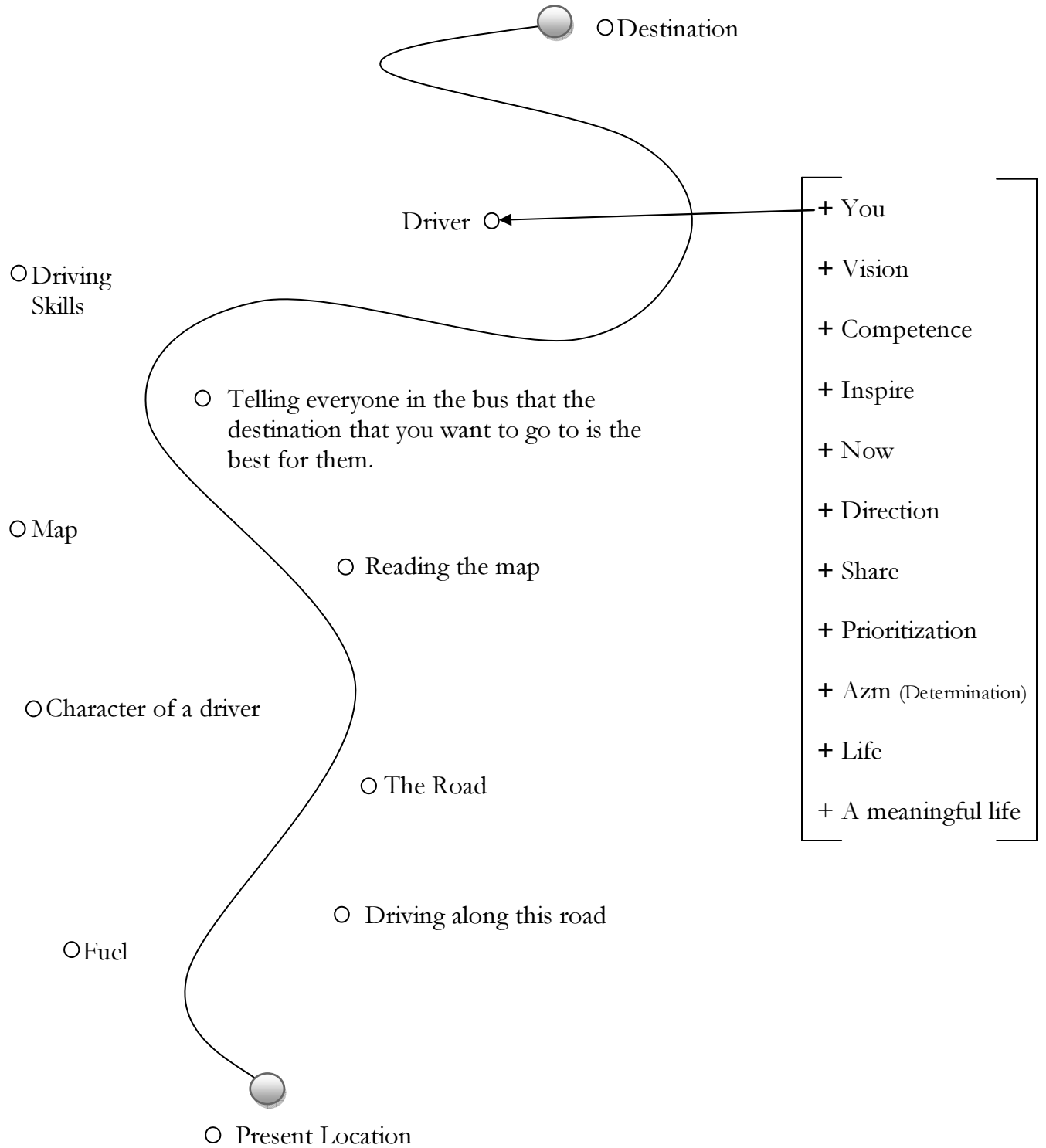


The Elements of Meaningful Life

Meaningful life has the following four elements:

1. **Strategic Visions:** A long term sound vision in our life. A sound vision is defined as a vision which has clarity and correctness.
2. **Strategic Time Management:** Strategic Time Management is defined as our ability to prioritize our lives in light of a long term vision and then to accomplish these priorities with Azm (determination).
3. **Competence:** Competence is the knowledge, skills and abilities (KSAs) that are required for our visions. For example, our vision of scaling Mount Everest requires a minimum set of knowledge, skills and abilities.
4. **Leadership:** Leadership is defined as the ability to share our vision with others and to inspire and facilitate others in pursuing the shared vision. The key element behind the ability to inspire others to pursue the shared vision is a character worthy of that vision.

Metaphor: A bus filled with people going to a destination.



The definition of a ‘Meaningful Life’:

A meaningful life is a life that a sound ideology defines as meaningful.

Worksheet: Meaning of the word Important

Important:

Worksheet: The challenges and possible solutions to the discrepancies in the meanings

Challenges

1.

2.

3.

Solutions

1.

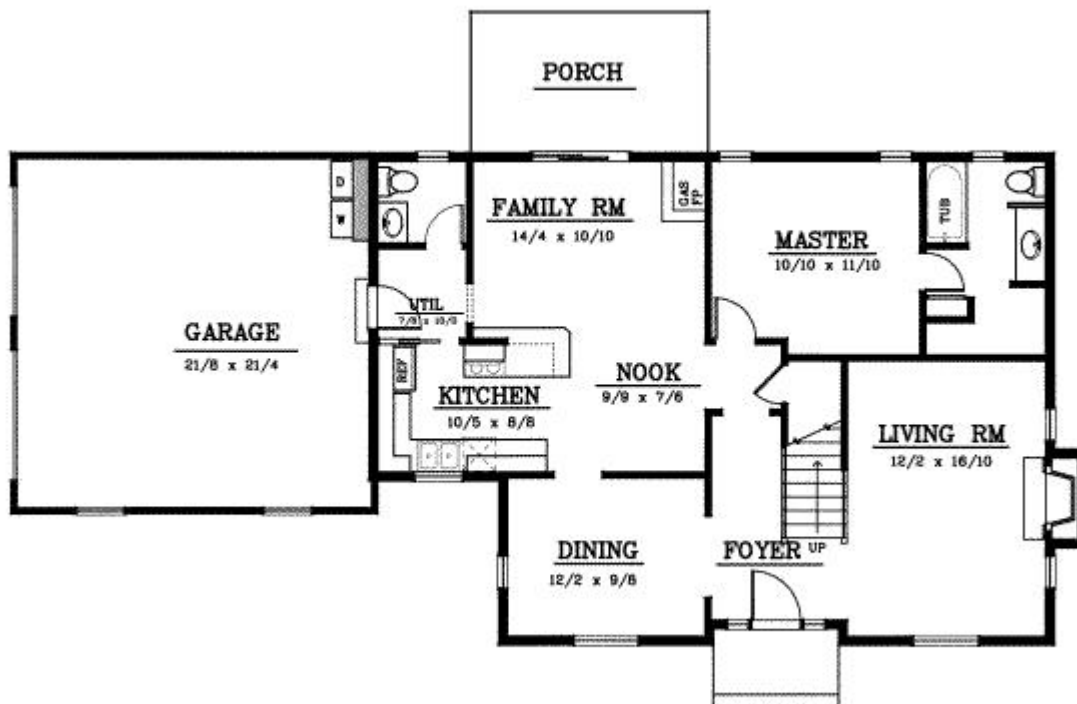
2.

3.

Chapter 2: Planning

Steps that we take before building a house:

- We look at our requirements
- We view our budget
- We decide on our location
- We hire an architect





“We can safely conclude that it is unwise to start building a house without a vision and a plan.”

Just as it is unwise to start building your house without a plan, it is unwise to start your day, your week, your month, your year and your life without a vision and a plan.

We at Timelenders suggest that before we start our day we should invest

- At least 45 minutes to envision and plan our day
- At least 4 hours to envision and plan our week
- At least 8 hours to envision and plan our month
- And at least 3 days to envision and plan our year

Chapter 3: Leadership

I define Leadership as:

The ability to share our vision with others and the ability to inspire others to pursue the shared vision. The ability to share our vision with others can be summarized as the ability to influence and the key element behind the ability to inspire others to pursue the shared vision is a character worthy of the vision.

According to the above definition, leadership is a basic survival skill and begins from day one when an infant exercises his innate ability to convince his caregivers of giving him what he wants, whether it is nursing or changing his diapers. As the child grows, this skill progressively improves through education and various learning experiences.

As we continue in life we find ourselves in a continual process of sharing our visions with others whether it is at our work, our home or our social circle. When an adolescent tries to convince us to accept his vision of the very near future of having entertainment through a particular video game, he is exercising his leadership skills.

When we convince our children to aspire for a particular choice of an academic field, then we set out to encourage them to continue and provide them with means, we are practicing our skills of leadership.

Leadership, like swimming, is a skill. And just as some people swim better than others, some are better leaders than others. Just like one can improve his swimming, leadership can also be improved and enhanced.

I believe that leadership can be enhanced and improved through:

- Study: there is a wealth of written material on the subject. We can also learn by reading the biographies of great leaders.
- Associating with leaders: by associating with people with heightened leadership skills, we learn through example.
- Practice

As stated above, there is a wealth of knowledge available on leadership in the written form. Please see Appendix B.

Chapter 4: Time Quadrants

Webster dictionary defines 'Priority' as 'the fact or condition of being prior; precedence in time, order, importance, etc.' And prioritization is defined as 'to arrange (items) in order of priority'.

As discussed in Chapter 1, words have different shades of meanings for people. For many, prioritization means arranging items in terms of importance while for others, prioritization means arranging items in terms of time; referring to the fact as to which item will be done prior to others.

In this book and workshop, we will use the term priority and prioritization to mean precedence in time and I would further add the decision of doing and not doing something as a part of prioritization; I would like to broadly define prioritization as to what is to be done first, what is to be done next and what is to be not done at all.

At almost every step in our life we are faced with choices whether it is with what to dress in the morning, what to have for breakfast, what means of transport to take to work to more complex decision making in choosing careers, life partners and deciding who to side with in conflicts.

For difficult choices, we first attempt to decide whether they can be done together and if yes, then this is the course we take but for choices where it has to be one or the other, we are forced to decide. It is like a fork in a road; one has to take either the right or the left side of the fork to continue the journey.

In others words, we are faced with the task of deciding about what should be done or not done and from things that we decide should be done, we are required to prioritize; should we take care of our emails first and then work on the report or should we take care of the report and then look after our pending emails? Should we have dinner after arriving at home and then talk to our son about poor grades or should we talk to him first and then have dinner. From simple situations to far more complex problems, the need to prioritize is always there.

Most of the prioritizations that we take are habit Decision Making Routines (DMRs)¹, along with underlying thought DMRs, both of which are developed over a life time of experiences and education. Unless we face something very complex and new and

¹ If not discussed till now, shall be discussed in detail in this workshop

our brain is forced to work consciously, our response is automatic relying upon thousands of prioritization Habit DMRs working in tandem.

As discussed in the section on DMRs, it is very possible that some of the DMRs that we carry are inefficient or incorrect. The person who carries the most effective and correct DMRs stands a better chance of success in life than a person who carries ineffective, inefficient and incorrect DMRs.

Let us take an example of three individuals having different thought and habit DMRs. Based on these DMRs let us look at how they react to Nadir who approaches them to point out a mistake that they have made:

Rashid, on being corrected becomes alert to the advice. He carefully notes what Nadir has said, looks deeply at the mistake that he has made and the context in which the mistake took place. He not only takes this correction graciously but also deeply feels indebted to Nadir. He then thanks Nadir from the depth of his heart and requests him to correct him again if he were to make other mistakes. Genuinely correcting someone is a disconcerting act but after this exchange Nadir feels relaxed and validated.

Ali, on being corrected becomes defensive. Before giving the advice proper thought, he requests for more information and argues that Nadir might not have seen or heard accurately. Later on he grudgingly acknowledges his mistake and thanks Nadir ceremoniously. Nadir's level of discomfort has been raised after the exchange.

Basim, on being corrected feels insulted and is enraged. "Who gave you the right to correct me?" He snarls and continues, "We all have shortcomings and I am aware of mine. I don't need others to point them to me. It would be much better if you keep your eyes on your own mistakes rather than finding faults with others!" Nadir feels deeply hurt.

For Rashid, Ali and Basim, the reactions portrayed above are a result of many simple and complex DMRs working together. Who do you think has more chances of success in life? Who do you think has the least chance of success?

We would all agree that Rashid has the most chances of success. By encouraging constructive criticism he can better himself in many aspects of his life.

In other words we can say that Rashid has better and more effective DMRs than both Ali and Basim. This could be a result of a better learning and education in life, excellent mentors or instructional life experiences which have created mature and powerful DMRs.

In face of choices, when we are forced to decide and prioritize, our related set of DMRs become active and how wise is our prioritization depends upon the maturity, correctness and effectiveness of the DMRs that we have.

In the following section, we shall be introducing a simple yet very powerful and elegant set of DMRs called the Time Quadrant System (TQS). The TQS can be learnt and with practice internalized as our own set of DMRs.

Dwight Eisenhower², the former president of the US, is quoted to have said that *‘Things which are important are seldom urgent and things which are urgent are seldom important.’* This invaluable fact that Eisenhower highlighted about Important and Urgent has led to a grid called the Eisenhower Grid.

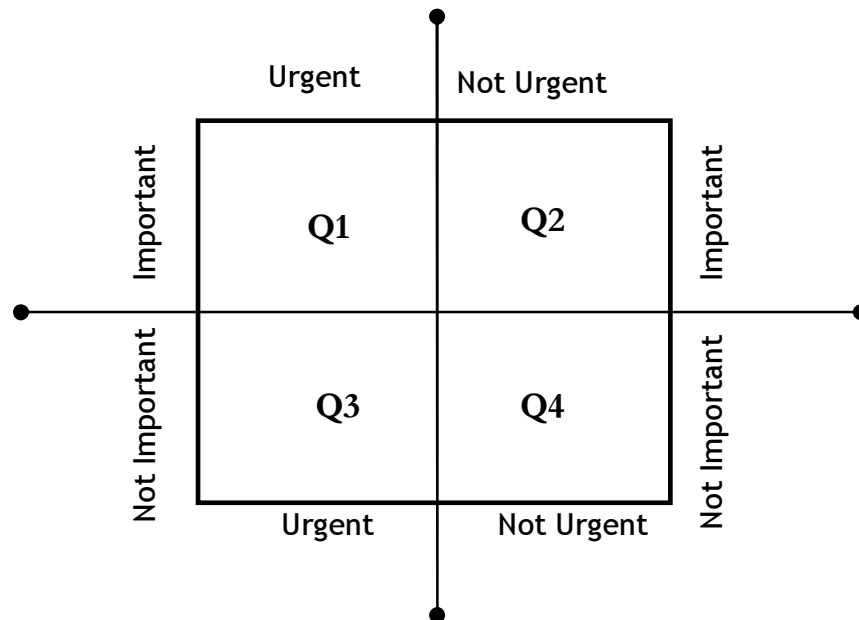
| | Important | Urgent |
|----------|-----------|--------|
| Option 1 | ✓ | ✓ |
| Option 2 | ✓ | X |
| Option 3 | X | ✓ |
| Option 4 | X | X |

This grid points out that things which are important can be urgent or non urgent and things which are urgent can be both important and not important.

Stephen Covey in his landmark book *‘The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People’* depicted this concept in the form of Time Quadrants³:

² Born on October 14, 1890 and was president of the US from 1953 to 1961.

³ Covey has not given the reference of Eisenhower, it is our assumption that he has picked it from Eisenhower as Covey writes that the material for the Seven Habits came out of his studying success literature of the last 200 years. Covey politely declined to respond or be interviewed on this issue.



American Heritage dictionary gives the mathematical technical definition of Quadrant as ‘any of the four areas into which a plane is divided by the reference axes in a Cartesian coordinate system.’ Generally Quadrant is defined as one fourth of a circle.

For ease, the four options that come out of the Eisenhower Grid now translate into the four Quadrants as shown by Covey in which Quadrant 1, or Q1 are activities which are important and urgent, Q2 are activities which are important and not urgent, Q3 are activities which are not important but urgent and Q4 are activities which are not important and not urgent.

As said earlier, the Time Quadrant System is a very powerful set of DMRs, which can be learnt and internalized. As we proceed in developing the Time Quadrant System, you will find many of the concepts and DMRs that you are using validated while you would also discover that some DMRs that you have need to be reviewed and refined. We shall develop the Time Quadrant System in three stages:

First, we shall learn to identify all of our activities according to the Quadrants as to what activities in our life are Q1s, Q2s, Q3s and Q4s.

Secondly, we shall learn the different handling strategies for each of the four Quadrants.

Thirdly, we shall see that the four Quadrants have a specific relationship with each other leading to a model of intervention which can be applied to complex situations. Our research shows that Eisenhower was the first one to introduce the important and urgent grid but the concept found wide popularity due to the phenomenal success of Covey's 'The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People'.

I started teaching Time Quadrants in 1997. It started off from teaching colleagues at work and then moved on to weekend courses in Chicago.

The first challenge that I started to face was that whenever I would teach quadrants, there would be a lot of disagreement amongst the class on which activity falls in which quadrant. I was perplexed and disturbed with this recurring pattern. One day I asked the class to define the words important and urgent and to my amazement found that people defined these words differently. I had found the reason for the disagreement!

I found that not only did people have different meanings in their minds for these words but also the meanings of important and urgent were overlapping. Following are the responses from a group of people⁴ when they were asked to define 'important' during one of our trainings:

1. Top priority work which produces best results.
2. Most urgent
3. Essential
4. Something which should be taken seriously without specifying time
5. Highlighted
6. Something which has an impact
7. Cannot be ignored
8. Something that results in high value
9. Something of extreme value for this life and hereafter
10. Must be done or achieved
11. Needs to be done immediately

Looking at the responses it is evident that there are shades of differences in how people define important. For example, something of extreme value for this life (entry number 9) may not have to be done immediately (entry number 11).

⁴ Strategic Time Management Training, May 2003, Karachi Marriot Hotel

Similarly, when the same group was asked to list their understanding of the word ‘urgent’, the following list emerged:

1. Most important at that moment.
2. Something to be implemented immediately.
3. Timely action is required.
4. To be settled immediately.
5. Something which has immediate impact.
6. To be done immediately.
7. Immediate action.
8. Top priority.
9. To be done immediately to remain on track.

By looking at the above list, not only the shades of difference become apparent but also by comparing it to the definitions of important, we clearly see that in people’s minds the meanings of urgent and important overlap. This is a pattern which repeats over and over again whenever we do trainings.

It became apparent to me that to continue teaching this, I would have to articulate some definition of these words which we could agree upon or in other words standardize the meanings. So since teaching the material especially from 1999 onwards, the definitions of ‘Important’ and ‘Urgent’ have evolved and we shall be presenting them to you in the upcoming sections.

Curiously, Covey has not defined these words. This could be due to his allowing people to have their own version of the meanings or could have been an academic oversight⁵.

Important

“Anything that takes us towards our ‘worthwhile goals’ is termed as ‘Important’ and anything that takes us away from our ‘worthwhile goals’ or doesn’t take us towards our ‘worthwhile goals’ is called ‘Not Important’.”

Please note that ‘time’ is not at all an element of this definition.

I define a ‘worthwhile goal’ as a thing that adds value to our life in this world or

⁵ As stated earlier in the footnote, Covey declined to answer or be interviewed on this matter also as to why he didn’t define the words ‘Important’ and ‘Urgent’.

hereafter and we want to achieve it. The goal could be either short term, like having a glass of water; or long term like higher education, marriage of children etc.

Goals can be implicit or explicit. Explicit goals are very visible and are usually short term, for example getting to the dentist to get an oral surgery done. Implicit goals tend to be invisible and are usually long term goals, for example having good health and a sound, deep relationship with our children.

The best example of something that is Important could be exercise. Since exercise takes us closer to our goal of having better health, it is an Important activity.

Please note that importance is person specific i.e. the importance of an activity will be determined by the goal of the person carrying it out. Hence, the same activity can be Important for one person and Not Important for another person.

Value - Want GRID - Sample Sheet

| Value | Want | Doing | Grid Lines | Examples |
|-------|------|-------|------------|--|
| ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | 1 | Gym, book reading |
| | | X | 2 | Tennis, teaching horse riding to kids |
| ✓ | X | ✓ | 3 | Swimming, taking families for shopping |
| | | X | 4 | Eating higher quantities of vegetables, Tahajjud |
| X | ✓ | ✓ | 5 | Pepsi, speeding |
| | | X | 6 | Sightseeing, banana split |
| X | X | ✓ | 7 | Living with pollution |
| | | X | 8 | Over eating |

Value - Want GRID - Exercise Sheet

| Value | Want | Doing | Grid Lines | Examples |
|-------|------|-------|------------|----------|
| ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | 1 | |
| | | X | 2 | |
| ✓ | X | ✓ | 3 | |
| | | X | 4 | |
| X | ✓ | ✓ | 5 | |
| | | X | 6 | |
| X | X | ✓ | 7 | |
| | | X | 8 | |

Value - Want GRID - Exercise Sheet

| Value | Want | Doing | Grid Lines | Examples |
|-------|------|-------|------------|----------|
| ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | 1 | |
| | | X | 2 | |
| ✓ | X | ✓ | 3 | |
| | | X | 4 | |
| X | ✓ | ✓ | 5 | |
| | | X | 6 | |
| X | X | ✓ | 7 | |
| | | X | 8 | |

Important - Like GRID - Sample Sheet**Worthwhile Goal: Book Reading**

| Important | Like | Doing | Grid Lines | Examples |
|-----------|------|-------|------------|-------------------------------------|
| ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | 1 | Going to the library |
| | | X | 2 | Buying expensive books |
| ✓ | X | ✓ | 3 | Driving to the library |
| | | X | 4 | Searching for books |
| X | ✓ | ✓ | 5 | TV |
| | | X | 6 | Time with friends |
| X | X | ✓ | 7 | Getting stuck in traffic on the way |
| | | X | 8 | Getting distracted while reading |

Important - Like GRID - Sample Sheet**Worthwhile Goal: Prayer***

| Important | Like | Doing | Grid Lines | Examples |
|-----------|------|-------|------------|---|
| ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | 1 | Going to the Mosque |
| | | X | 2 | Getting inside the Mosque on time |
| ✓ | X | ✓ | 3 | Washing for prayers with cold water during winter |
| | | X | 4 | Being ready for prayer before the prayer time |
| X | ✓ | ✓ | 5 | Working on my computer |
| | | X | 6 | Answering the mobile |
| X | X | ✓ | 7 | Not being able to hear the Azan(Call for prayer) |
| | | X | 8 | Sleeping during prayer times |

*Example by Mohammad S. Helmy, a participant of Etisalat workshop, Feb 16, 2009

Important - Like GRID - Exercise Sheet

Worthwhile Goal:

| Important | Like | Doing | Grid Lines | Examples |
|-----------|------|-------|------------|----------|
| ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | 1 | |
| | | X | 2 | |
| ✓ | X | ✓ | 3 | |
| | | X | 4 | |
| X | ✓ | ✓ | 5 | |
| | | X | 6 | |
| X | X | ✓ | 7 | |
| | | X | 8 | |

Important - Like GRID - Exercise Sheet**Worthwhile Goal:**

| Important | Like | Doing | Grid Lines | Examples |
|-----------|------|-------|------------|----------|
| ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | 1 | |
| | | X | 2 | |
| ✓ | X | ✓ | 3 | |
| | | X | 4 | |
| X | ✓ | ✓ | 5 | |
| | | X | 6 | |
| X | X | ✓ | 7 | |
| | | X | 8 | |

Urgent

Just as we saw the need for having a technical definition of the word ‘Important’, we need a technical definition for the word ‘urgent’ as people have different perceptions of this word also. For some, ‘urgent’ is synonymous for high priority where as for others, priority and importance overlap. As explained earlier, Stephen Covey has not articulated a technical definition of this word in his book ‘The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People’.

The following definition has evolved over many years of teaching:

“Urgent is defined as anything which if not done in the present, most probably cannot be done later.”

Present can be defined as now or within a stipulated span of time. For example if a phone is ringing then answering this call is urgent because if it is not answered within a few seconds, it can not be answered later. Hence according to the technical definition, answering this call is urgent. In this case, the present would be defined as a few seconds.

Another example would be to apply brakes to avoid an accident; this activity is urgent because if the brakes are not applied ‘now’ then you can’t apply them later to avoid this particular accident. Here the present is defined as ‘now’.

Please bear in mind that both ‘Important’ and ‘Urgent’ are mutually independent! It is precisely because of this that we are able to get a grid with four options. The biggest challenge that we face in teaching the Time Quadrants is to help people end the overlap of priority and value in the word ‘urgent’.

Please do keep in mind that the above definition that I have articulated is not the dictionary meaning of the word urgent but rather a technical definition for developing the Time Quadrants system or the Time Matrix.

Here are the two steps for determining whether an activity is urgent:

1. Clearly define the activity in unambiguous terms. For example, there is a difference between:

‘answering calls’ and ‘answering a particular call’

‘watching cars passing by’ and ‘watching a particular car coming from the opposite side of the road’

‘going to sales’ or ‘going to a particular sale which is ending today’

2. Once the activity is defined, please ask a question in the passive voice: ‘If this activity is not done now, can this activity be most probably done later if I am alive?’ If the answer is no, then this activity is urgent otherwise not urgent.

Please apply this question to each of the activities listed below and figure out whether the activity is urgent or not^[1].

| | Activity | Urgent |
|---|---|--------|
| 1 | Sleeping | X |
| 2 | Watching a live cricket match | ✓ |
| 3 | Gossip | X |
| 4 | Exercise | |
| 5 | Seeing a particular car coming from the opposite side while driving from one city to another on a divided highway | |
| 6 | Seeking forgiveness from your spouse | |
| 7 | Hugging your child | |
| 8 | Going to a sale which is ending today | |
| 9 | Seeking forgiveness from God | |

You would have noticed as you determined the urgency/non urgency of activities listed above that urgent is activity/time dependent and person independent whereas importance is person dependent and time independent and hence the logic of asking the test question in passive voice to determine urgency.

^[1] Please see Appendix C for the answers

Once the urgency is determined^[2], we can now move on to determining importance and hence the classification of the quadrant in which the activity falls into. Please complete the rest of the grid given below^[3]:

| | Activity | Urgent | Important | Quadrants |
|---|---|--------|-----------|-----------|
| 1 | Sleeping | X | ✓ | Q2 |
| 2 | Watching a live cricket match | ✓ | ✓ | Q1 |
| 3 | Watching a live cricket match | ✓ | X | Q3 |
| 4 | Gossip | X | X | Q4 |
| 3 | Exercise | | | |
| 4 | Seeing a particular car coming from the opposite side while driving from one city to another on a divided highway | | | |
| 5 | Seeking forgiveness from your spouse | | | |
| 6 | Hugging your child | | | |
| 7 | Going to a sale which is ending today | | | |
| 8 | Seeking forgiveness from God | | | |

Our prioritization DMRs get corrupted when we are not able to distinguish between urgent and important or in our understanding the meanings of the two overlap; in this case the question that we usually confront is:

‘How can an activity that is urgent be not important?’

Marketers understand the tendency of people to confuse urgency and importance and hence focus their sales pitch on urgency to increase sales. This is done by emphasizing that the sale is about to end or that the business is going out of business and the inventory is being liquidated. Apart from the assumption inventory will be sold at throw away price, there is the subtle inclusion of urgency: a business only closes once and if this opportunity is not availed now, it would not be possible to

^[2] To determine the quadrant in which an activity falls, we can either determine the urgency first and then determine importance or vice versa; the critical thing is that we need to make these determinations independent of one another.

^[3] Please see Appendix C for the answers

avail it later. This noise that is created in our minds regarding urgency distracts us from the most critical question:

Is it important for me to buy this item?

Remember, every valuable thing is not important. All that glistens is not gold and all that is gold is not important. Only those things are important which take us to our worthwhile goals!

One participant of our workshop, now a friend, told me that once he bought a new pair of shoes on a sale in Dubai only to discover that he has exactly the same pair of shoes at home bought a few months ago! Welcome to the world where urgency and importance overlap.

This brings me to a juncture where I would like to point out a very destructive international and timeless *pony*:

‘If something is not urgent then it means that it is not necessary to do it now!’

Because of this *pony* which lurks in our subconscious mind^[4], we keep postponing activities which are Q2s. For example, regular exercise is not urgent but it is necessary that it is done today; seeking forgiveness from God is not urgent but it is necessary that it is done now!

I believe that if we can take care of this *pony*, we can create a revolution in our lives. Later in the workshop, we shall learn how to institutionalize not delaying our Q2s through the Daily Scheduler and the concept of TRQ1.

Quadrant 1 or Q1 activities: Activities that are both ‘Important’ and ‘Urgent’

These are activities that are Important and Urgent at the same time. An example would be to respond to someone having a heart attack. This response takes us towards the goal of saving that person’s life (Important) and this response cannot

^[4] This can very well lead to a state of self-deception or more dangerously to a negative ‘game’. In transactional analysis, game is a self deceptive routine that we unconsciously follow in our behavior to defend a position that we have taken. I would encourage you to see ‘Games People Play’ by Dr. Eric Berne, Penguin Books, 1968.

wait (Urgent). In brief we call this a Q1 activity or just Q1.

Please do keep in mind that quadrants define and classify our actions only. External situations do not fall in quadrants. For example, the heart attack is not a Q1 activity rather the response to the heart attack is a Q1 activity. An external situation which forces us into a Q1 activity is called a 'Q1 situation'. So the heart attack is a Q1 situation as it creates a Q1 activity for us.

Quadrant 2 or Q2 activities: Activities which are 'Important' but 'Not Urgent'

Example of this quadrant would be exercising and brushing of teeth. Both of these activities are Important but they can be delayed. Not brushing our teeth today does not mean that we cannot brush them later in the day or the next day.

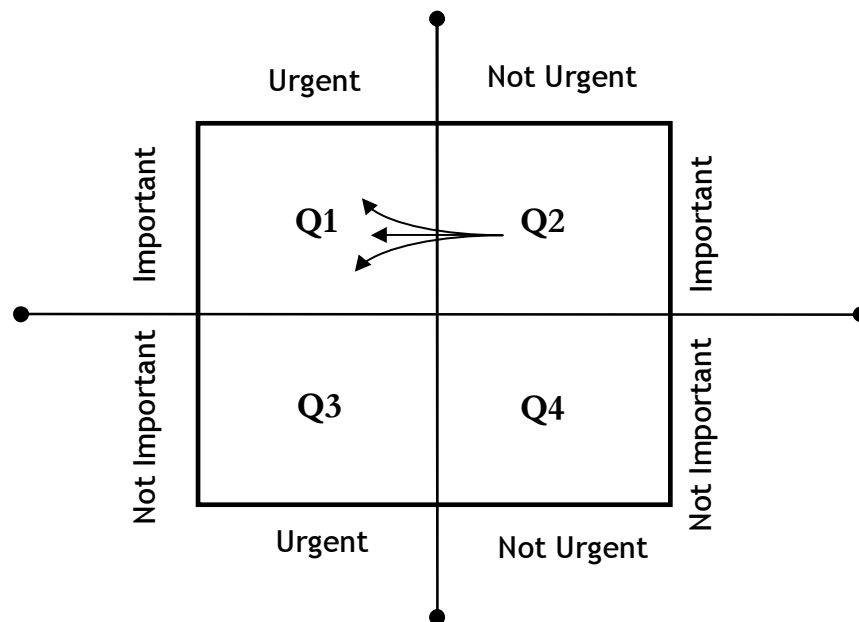
The Relation between Q1 and Q2

Looking at Q2 activities let's ask a question: If a Q2 activity is postponed for too long, which quadrant would it move into?

A little reflection will yield the answer: Q1!

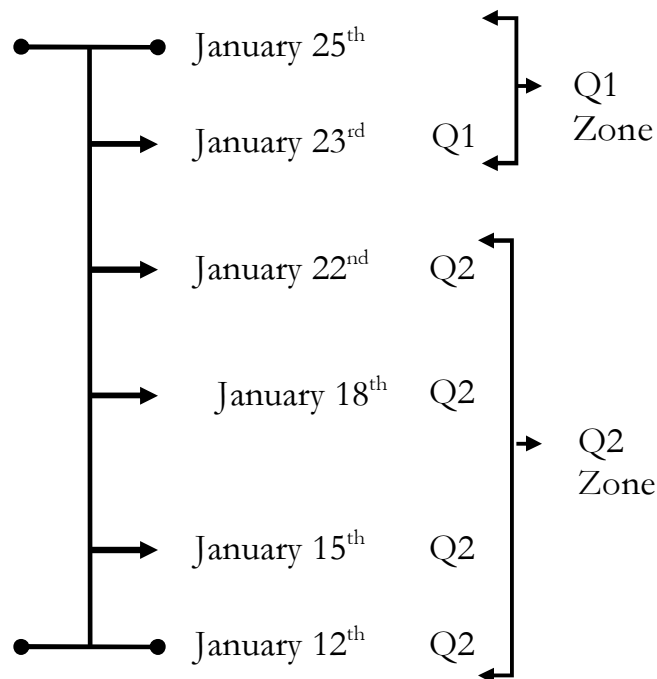
Regular car maintenance is a classical Q2 activity. If this activity is indefinitely postponed, a number of problems can arise. For example, the car can break down in the middle of the road resulting in multiple Q1 situations. Now moving the car out of the road is a Q1, fixing the engine is a Q1, making alternate arrangements to reach your destination is a Q1 and so on. So we see that neglect of one simple Q2 has resulted in not only one Q1 but multiple Q1s.

Hence we conclude that failure to perform Q2s in a particular time frame will result in having the Q2s make a transition into Q1s and most of the time when this transition takes place, multiple Q1s are generated.



Let us take another example: Suppose you are to write a report that is due on the morning of January 25th. The report will take 2 days to write. If you were to start writing the report on January 12th, it would be a Q2 activity. Similarly, if you were to start writing on January 15th, it will still be a Q2 activity. In short, if you were to start the report anytime before the morning of January 23rd, it will remain a Q2 activity. On or after the morning of January 23rd it will become a Q1 activity, as it cannot be delayed any further. In other words, we can say that there are two distinct zones: the Q2 zone and the Q1 zone.

A report is due on January 25th that will take 2 days to complete.



We can easily see that if given the choice to do the report, it would be a wiser choice to start the report in the Q2 zone rather than in the Q1 zone. It is also apparent that generally—barring some exceptions that we shall discuss later—the stress level would be higher in the Q1 zone as compared to the Q2 zone. Again, most of the time higher stress levels correspond to lower quality of work.

In general terms we can say that comparatively Q1 is a high stress, low quality zone as compared to Q2 which is a low stress, high quality zone.

There is an argument that some people only work in Q1 zone and hence for them Q1 is a higher quality zone. The answer to this is that such people sometimes face lower intrinsic motivation and hence do not start their work in the Q2 zone. They wait for the job to assume a crisis proportion by entering into the Q1 zone. At this time they feel the urge to start as they do not have any option left.

This is a bad habit. Not only are such people forced to work under higher stress levels but also do not have any margins for eventualities or unforeseen circumstances. Also, we would still maintain that if these people were to do their work in the Q2 zone, their quality of work will be higher in Q2 as compared to Q1.

Like I have said earlier, there are exceptions to this simple rule which depend on the nature of the job as well as on the way a person perceives and handles stress.

Daniel Goleman in his book '*Working with Emotional Intelligence* (Bantam Books: 1998)' writes:

“The single most striking finding from brain studies of people under stress—like giving a talk in front of a critical audience—shows the emotional brain at work in ways that undermine the workings of the brain’s executive center, the prefrontal lobes, located just behind the forehead.

The prefrontal area is the site of the “working memory”, the capacity to pay attention and keep in mind whatever information is salient. Working memory is vital for comprehension and understanding, planning and decision-making, reasoning and learning.

When the mind is calm, working memory functions at its best. But when there is an emergency, the brain shifts into a self protective mode, stealing resources from working memory and shunting them to other brain sites in order to keep the senses hyper-alert—a mental stance tailored for survival.”

Hence stress primes us for ‘fight or flight’ and gives us that extra strength to ward off physical danger. So if the activity at hand requires that extra dose of adrenaline, stress is good, for example, saving oneself from drowning or running away from a mad dog. But for other activities which involve thinking and analyzing there is a clear case against stress as illustrated by the above passage.

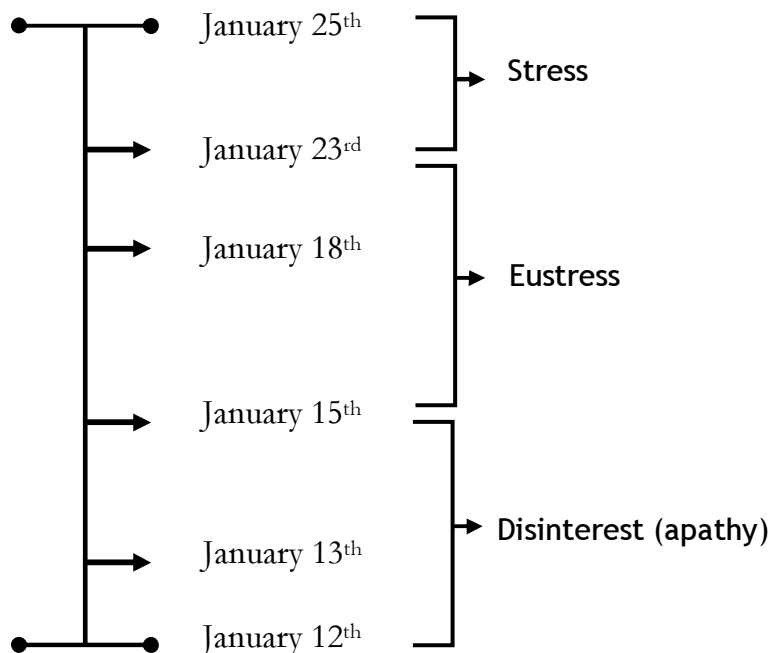
Daniel Goleman further discusses the research that clearly indicates that moderate amount of stress is good as it creates interest and pushes us to start our work and become interested in it. Psychologists call it ‘Good Stress’ or Eustress. Eustress also corresponds to different chemicals that are being secreted in our brain as opposed to bad stress or just stress. These chemicals are called catecholamines and when secreted result in our brain feeling engaged and interested.

When a person moves beyond Eustress to stress, another chemical called cortisol comes into action which puts the brain into the emergency mode and reduces its power to think and analyze.

Now let us steer this discussion towards our quadrants. So what do Q1 and Q2 zones

correspond to?

Whenever there is a task at hand, a person will move from disinterest (apathy) to interest and motivation (Eustress) to Stress.



For different people, the frontiers of these zones will differ. For someone who is doing something which has a high intrinsic value, the Eustress zone will start early.

Similarly for someone with stronger nerves, working closer to a deadline will not trigger higher levels of cortisol hence the person will not move into stress.

Where Q1 and Q2 zones give a general idea of high and low stress areas based on outside elements in terms of deadlines, the more accurate high and low stress areas are internal. Eustress and stress zones of a person are unique to him or her alone.

Each of us with a little self-observation can conclude where we stand.

Stress is also triggered by emotions such as anger, rage, frustration, anxiety, worries etc. We can safely say that when we work in the Q1 zone, triggers for stress definitely

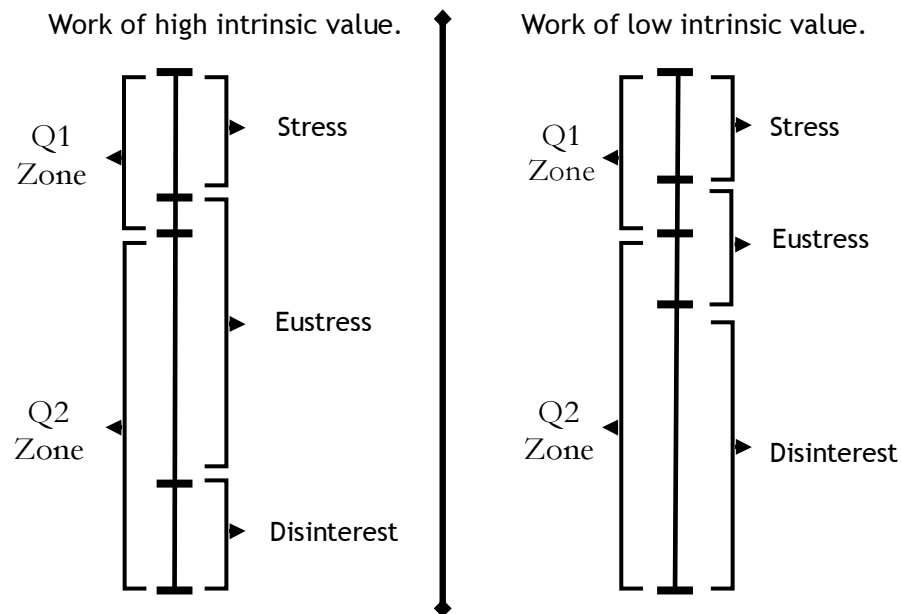
exist like worry and anxiety (whether stress results or not will vary from person to person).

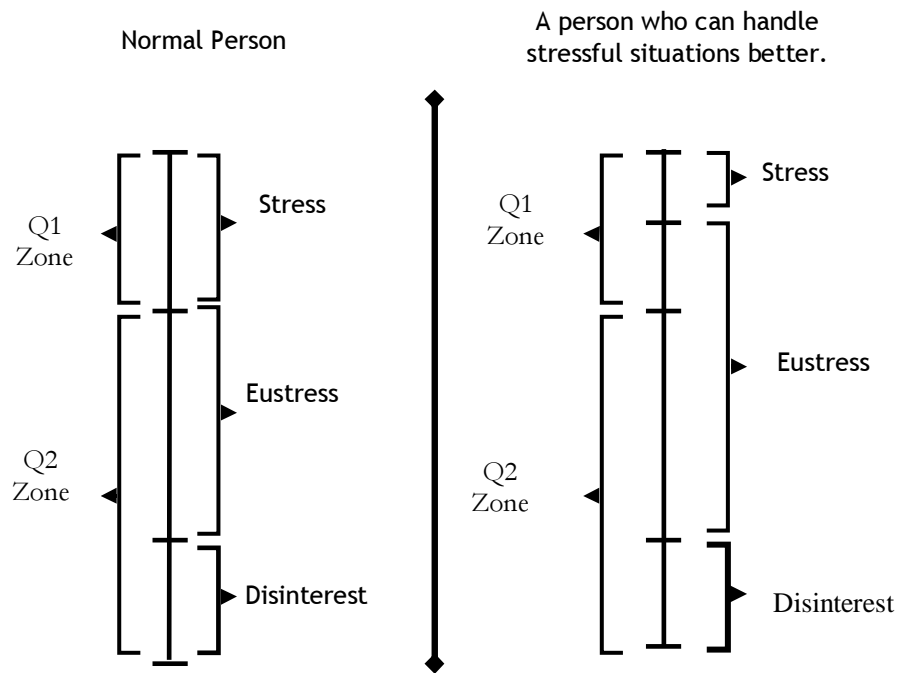
Suppose you are going on a long trip. Your car is new and you have a spare tire in the trunk. You know that you can get a flat tire but the thought that you have a spare tire will keep you reassured. For a moment consider if you do not have a spare tire. You have the same car and the same driving conditions, but in the back of the mind you harbor worries and anxiety. A question will keep troubling you at the back of your mind: what if I get a flat tire?

Similarly, when we work in Q1 zone, we are working without any buffers. Subconsciously, just like the case of driving without a spare tire, small questions keep troubling us: what if I fall ill? What if the electricity fails or the printer breaks down?

These triggers can very easily push us beyond Eustress to stress, even if it is at a low level.

I am sure that there could be people who have conditioned themselves to an extent that they need to have the Q1 zone to push them into Eustress. They have conditioned themselves to work in Q1 without getting stressed. But I am sure you would agree that such people are the exception rather than the norm.





After the discussion of stress, we can now say that the safe route is to try to avoid Q1 zone as much as possible. Having the understanding of how to classify activities into different quadrants will help us to identify and avoid the Q1 zone.

Suppose you have a meeting with a person at 4:00 pm. The drive time is 30 minutes. If you were to leave at 3:30 pm, you would be in the Q1 zone. According to the Murphy's Law⁶ 'If something can go wrong, it will' and a small delay in traffic will cause you to miss your deadline.

A better way would be to calculate some of the delays that can be anticipated and build that into a margin with which to start. In the above example there could be a 10 minutes traffic delay and a 5 minute wait at a railroad crossing. In this case you should keep a 15 minute margin. If you were to start off at 3:15 pm, you would be in the Q2 zone.

With this let me introduce the definition of a Buffer:

⁶ Murphy is a fictional character to whom certain laws are attributed. Murphy's laws are very commonly referred to in engineering.

Buffer

“This is the margin of time incorporated into an activity, which accounts for delays that can be anticipated.”

Hence the 15 minute margin in the above example is a buffer.

Q4 activities: Activities which are ‘Not Important’ and ‘Not Urgent’

One of the most common examples that people give of a Q4 activity is window-shopping. Gossip and chit-chat are also favorite examples.

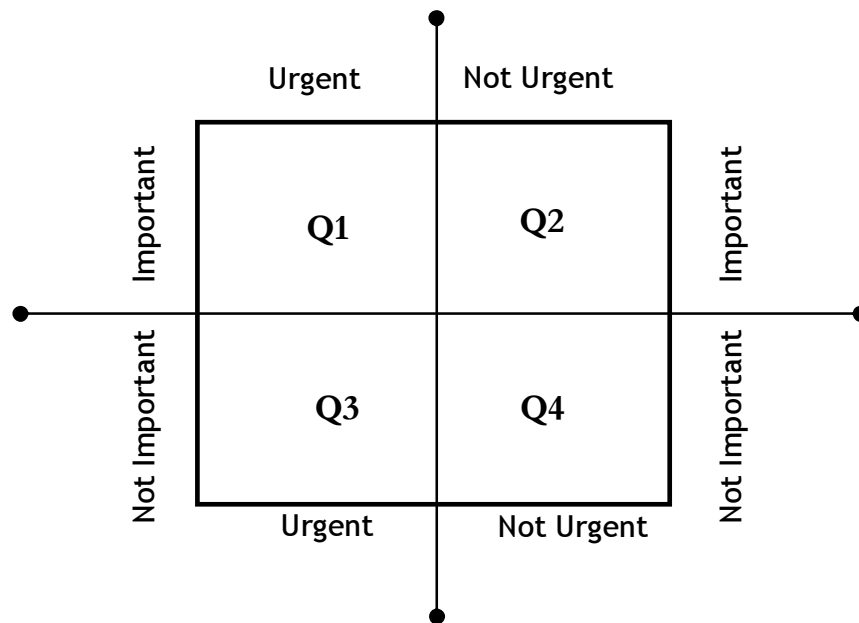
When thinking of Q4 activities, it is very important to understand that people will have different understandings of Q4 activities. Something that is Q4 for one may be Q2 for another. The reason is simple: people have different goals in life and hence their understanding of importance will differ.

Q3 activities: Activities which are ‘Not Important’ yet ‘Urgent’

This quadrant proves the trickiest to identify. The reason is that it puts to test our ability to clearly focus on the technical definitions of Important and Urgent and separate them from how we use these words in our day-to-day affairs.

Now let us take the example of picking up of a ringing phone when one is in another department. The best way to analyze any example is to start by the method of elimination. First let us analyze this example by way of urgency—I suggest that we start off by urgency first because the urgency of activities becomes readily apparent whereas importance takes some time and reflection to determine.

Since the phone is ringing, its picking up can’t be delayed hence it is clear that picking up of this phone is an Urgent activity. Since it is Urgent, it could either be Q1 or Q3 and can’t be Q2 or Q4. Please see the diagram below:



Now, let us determine whether picking up of this phone is Important or not. Since I am in another department, the phone can't be for me and thus picking it up will not take me towards any goal or objective. Thus the picking up of this phone is Not Important. Since it is Not Important, it can't be Q1 and thus we are left with only one choice that is Q3.

From the same logic picking up of a wrong telephone call is a Q3 activity.

At this point some people voice a confusion that since when the phone was ringing we didn't know whether it was an Important or Not Important call. How can picking up of such a call ever be Q3?

The answer is that not having prior information of an event will not change the reality of the event. Similarly, getting information later about the event will not change the reality of the event either. Coming to know that a phone call was Not Important later will not change the reality when the phone was ringing: picking it up at that moment was not an Important activity.

Another thought then comes to mind is that if we were to find out later that our picking up of the phone call was a Q3 event then what was the benefit as the action has been done? The answer is that now this information can be used later to design better filters to avoid the mistake in the future. We shall discuss more about Q3 and its filters later.

Please take a few moments and carefully see the examples listed as Q3 activities and see if you can understand why they are Q3 activities.

What to do when having difficulty determining which quadrant an activity falls into?

Sometimes, one faces the problem when he becomes double minded. For example, the walk in the garden with one's family? Is it a Q4 or a Q2? Similarly, whether smoking for someone is a Q4 or a Q3?

In such confusion, it is Important to play safe. When confused, Urgent takes precedence over Not Urgent and Important takes precedence over Not Important unless proven otherwise. So, translating into quadrants, if confused whether something is Q1 or Q2, consider it Q1 until unless proven otherwise. Similarly, if one is confused between Q1 or Q3, consider it Q1 until proven otherwise.

An example is of the ringing of the fire alarm. We know that it can be a false fire alarm (Q3 situation) or a real one (Q1 situation). Once we hear the alarm and knowing whether it is a Q1 situation or Q3 situation, we consider it a Q1 situation and run outside the building. We should return to the building only after we are sure that it was a Q3 situation.

Similarly, when the phone rings, we pick it up because we don't know whether it is a Q1 situation or a Q3 situation. With the availability of CLI (Caller ID), we don't pick up the calls that we know for sure are Not Important. Hence we say that CLI is a filter.

General Handling of the Quadrants

Now that we have learnt to identify different activities in our life according to quadrants, let us look at the general ways to handle all the quadrants' activities.

Handling Q1s

Whenever we are faced with a Q1 situation, we are left with no option but to react. The general rule for handling Q1s is to 'Just do them!'

The time when we can decide or choose is when we are faced with two or more than two Q1 situations at the same time. At such a time, we should do the Q1 activity

which is more Important than the other. Another way to look at it is to do the Q1 through which we shall avoid the bigger loss. An example would be of a person driving on a road where on one side is a sheer drop to the sea and the other side is the face of the mountain. In the event of loss of control of his vehicle, he is faced with either hitting the face of the mountain or falling into the sea. What would he choose? Of course, letting his car rub against the face of the mountain to stop.

Sometimes we are faced with a Q1 and a Marginal Q2 which is about to become Q1 (or multiples Q1s) and this Q1 (or Q1s) will be larger in magnitude than the first Q1. In this case we should sacrifice doing the Q1 and do the Marginal Q2 activity.

Our life ends up becoming a mess when we are swamped by Q1s. In management we call it 'Management by Crisis' where all we are doing in the day is putting out fires. One of the biggest reasons for this is when we avoid doing things in the Q2 zone and allow these Q2s to become Marginal Q2s and ultimately Q1s.

Handling Q2s

As discussed in detail, generally Q2 zone is the low stress, high quality zone. We should work to focus our life in this zone. A general rule of the thumb is that the success of a person is directly proportional to the number of hours he/she spends in the Q2 zone in a day.

With careful planning, keeping the bigger picture in mind and self discipline, a person can systematically increase the proportion of his/her time in the Q2 zone. It also means to have the understanding and desire to avoid getting into the Q1 zone as much as possible.

Handling Q4s

All of us can come up with a list of Q4 activities that we sometimes engage in. When coming up with this list it is Important to ensure that indeed these are quadrant 4 activities. If we are not sure, we should play safe and put them in Q3 or Q2.

Once identified, you will see that Q4s are nothing but time wasters. These activities do not add any value to your life. The strategy to handle Q4s is simple: Just drop them from your life.

Please do keep in mind that just as it is important to know what is Important to you; it is equally important to know what is Not Important to you so that it can be

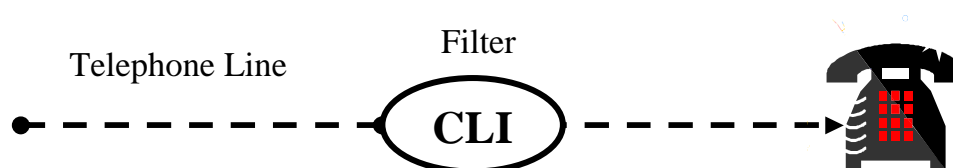
avoided. A person makes a grave mistake when he feels that spending a little time doing Q4 activities will not have any impact on his life. If we look at the quadrants, we can easily see that all the four quadrants are interconnected. For example, the moment we drop Q4s from our life, the time that is freed up is now available for Q2 activities. Having more time available for Q2 activities will have a profound impact as it will move us into a lower stress zone and will also cut down on the Q1s which result due to the neglect of Q2 activities.

“I suddenly have a lot of time now!” is a comment of a person who decided to drop his Q4 activities.”

Handling Q3s

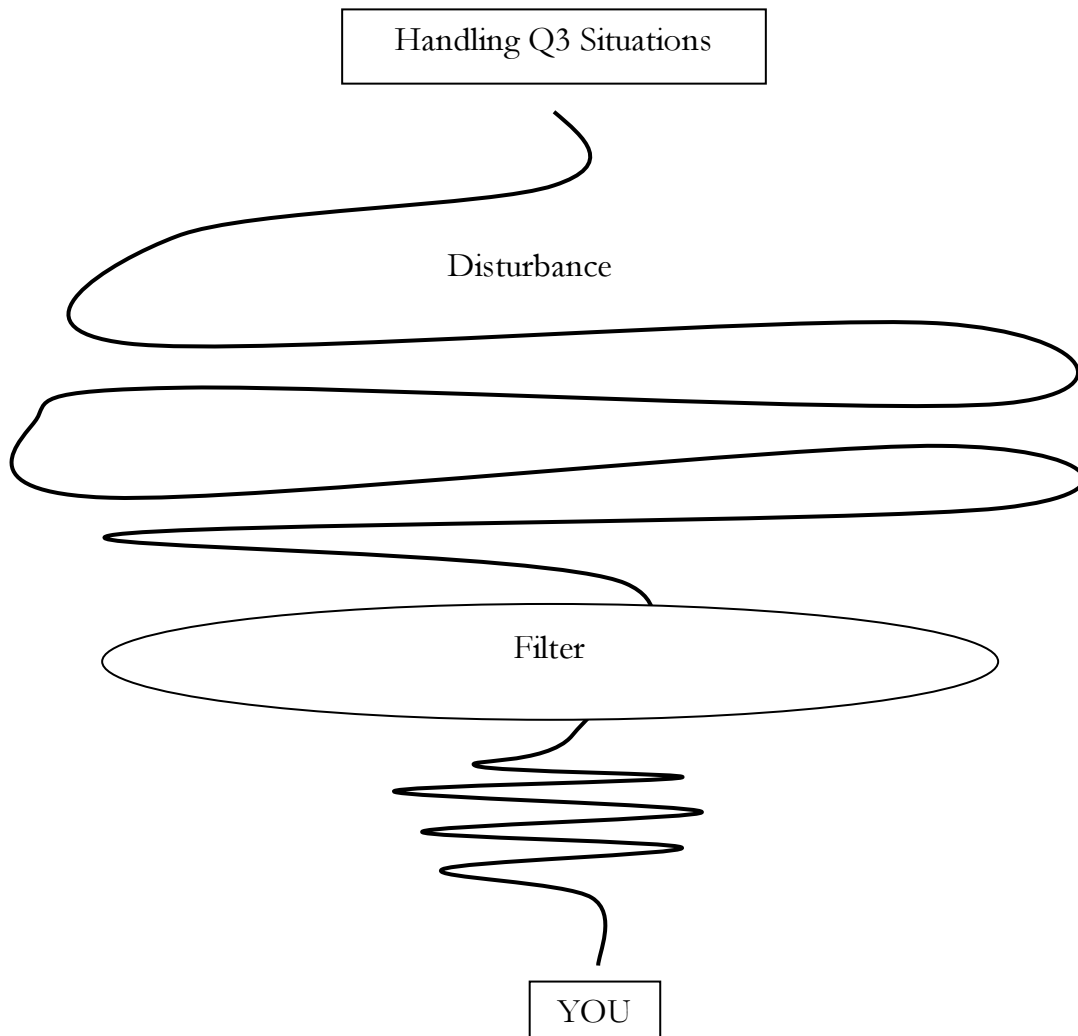
Just like Q4s, Q3s are also Not Important and hence waste our time and don't add any value to our life. However, unlike Q4s, which can be dropped directly and are in our control, Q3s are mostly interruptions that act on us from the outside. The only way to reduce them is to create filters to pre-empt them. Filters might not help us in completely removing the Q3 activity but they will surely help us in reducing the disturbance.

Receiving a wrong phone call is a Q3 activity. The filter to avoid doing this is to have a CLI (Caller ID) system. For calls that you can immediately identify as Not Important, you can choose not to receive them. But please do keep in mind that there would be a few numbers that you would not be able to identify and in this case you will have to pick up the phone to determine whether they are Q1 or Q3.



Another example of a Q3 activity is of friends dropping in at work without notice just to chit-chat. Responding to these friends is a Q3 activity. The filter that can be developed in this case would be to determine how many friends are in this habit of dropping in to chat. Suppose they are 10 in number. The Filter would be to talk to

them and ask them to visit you during some specified time like 3:00 pm to 5:00 pm on Tuesday and 5:00 to 7:00 pm on Thursday. Please tell them that when they visit you at an odd time, you are not able to give them the attention that they deserve and if they were to visit you at the above-specified time, you would be able to give them proper attention.



Now during these periods you would schedule a Q2 activity for yourself like reading an important business book that you have been thinking of reading for some time.

Now if your friends were to show up in this time you would be able to put the book aside without any trouble because it was a Q2 activity (Important and Not Urgent). If none of your friends show up at this time, you would not be perturbed as you are engaged in a Q2 activity. Many a times people get restless and disturbed when they

are waiting for someone because they are engaged in Q4 activities and in the back of their minds they know that their time is being wasted as they wait.

Talking to the friends and setting up timings for them and then scheduling Q2 activities for yourself while waiting for them, would all be considered a filter.

It could be pointed out that in spite of this explanation; there still would be people who would not show up at the scheduled time. At this point we have to see the trade off: suppose out of 10 friends, 7 start to show up at the scheduled time. We can see that 70% of the problem has been solved and we have to now cope with only 30% of the problem.

One of our participants complained that his wife calls him during work and most of these calls prove to be Q3s. The strategy to deal with this would be to try to see a pattern when his wife is most likely to call. Chances are that there would be a pattern: maybe she is likely to call after the kids are done with breakfast and washing up in the morning. Similarly, another probable time is in the mid afternoon when she is done with lunch and taking care of the dishes. One strategy would be to pre-empt the call of the wife by calling her before she calls him. Since the husband will initiate the call, he would do it at his leisure and now the wife will not have the need to call at a time when he is engaged in a Q1 activity.

The above example is a simple one and may not work for all. The idea is to illustrate the concept of setting up a filter to handle our Q3 activities.

In Pakistan, a challenge is the late arrival of guests in marriage functions. If the dinner is announced at 9:00 pm, some people will come as late as 11:00 pm. On the marriage of one of our friends, all the guests had arrived by 9:15 pm.

The secret was in designing an elegant filter: my friend invited some of the elders of his family three weeks prior to the event at his home for dinner and announced that the food will be served at 9:00 o'clock. Like always, people were late but he served the food at the promised time. The rest is simple. The news spread quickly within the family that the food was served at the promised time and hence the expectations of the people were that food would also be served at the promised time in the upcoming event.

In conclusion, please list all of your Q3 activities that you come across in your life and design a filter for each one of them. For some the filters would be as simple as

just fighting the urge of picking up the phone when it is ringing while you are in another department.

Similarly, in companies whole departments can brainstorm together to see what constitute as Q3s on a group or departmental levels. The members of the department can then creatively come up with filters to tackle the situation.

Internal and External Q1s

Q1s are of two types; Internal and External Q1s. Q1 situations, which arise because:

- ¬ we have ignored a Q2 activity
- ¬ we have delayed a Q2 activity
- ¬ we have not found and done a possible Q2 activity.

The breakdown of the car in the middle of the road because its regular maintenance was ignored or delayed would be called an Internal Q1.

External Q1s are those Q1 situations, which are not internal Q1s.

Careful thought will disclose that most of the Q1 situations that people have in their lives are Internal Q1s. This ratio between Internal and External Q1 will vary from person to person. Usually people report that 70% to 95% of Q1s in their lives are Internal Q1s.

One of the tragedies which results in extreme mismanagement of time is when a person is not able to distinguish between External and Internal Q1s. Such a person will generally tend to have a victim mentality and will have feelings of helplessness and loss of control.

A person who understands that most of his Q1s are Internal will try to work to avoid them by focusing on the Q2s, the neglect of which has resulted in the ensuing Q1s.

What to do when swamped by Q1s!

All of us come across situations when we are swamped by Q1s. These are usually trying circumstances when we are putting out fires constantly throughout the day and are basically being driven by crises.

To illustrate the strategy to deal with this situation, let me recount a true story that happened with one of the participants of our workshop in Chicago. A young college student by the name of Ms. Hammad approached me during the workshop and said that the workshop was of no use to her as we are talking about planning for our time. She was facing a never ending cycle of Q1s and didn't have time for planning which is a Q2 activity.

I told her to dedicate half an hour a day for Q2 activities and whether it makes sense or not to continue dedicating this time. The rest of the time she was free to dedicate to her Q1 activities. I told her that in the course of a few days she would feel a little relief and when she does, she can increase her time for Q2 activities to 1 hour and similarly after a few days she can increase it to one and a half hours and so on.

She called back after a few weeks with an excited voice and disclosed the good news that she has come out of her cycle of Q1s!

A little bit of analyses can lead us to understand what happened. Usually when we are swamped with Q1s we tend to get into the habit of only tackling them and end up ignoring Q2s which become Marginal and then move into the Q1 zone. Not only do these create stressful situations for us but in the process they also multiply. When Ms. Hammad started to tackle some of the Q2s before they became Q1, she basically chocked the source of Q1s into her life and systematically came out of her predicament.

Chapter 5: The Art of Never Being Late

We have briefly seen it before when we presented the definition of the buffer and Marginal Q2. The idea is simple: whenever we plan on visiting someone or undertaking a project, we should calculate the buffer and start off in the beginning of the buffer.

When we start with a buffer, we must always plan for the eventuality of what to do if all goes well. Suppose, we are going to meet someone in his office and we have kept a buffer of 15 minutes. If all goes well, we shall get there 15 minutes before the meeting. Unless we have prior permission, we should not disturb the person before time. Knowing the possibility of having 15 minutes of unused buffer time, we should plan ahead to have a Q2 activity which we can immediately insert in this time. This could be a book that we can carry with us, a list of phone calls that we can make on our mobile phone etc.

It is best to calculate in the beginning of the day the total number and duration of buffers that we shall be using during the day and to plan Q2 activities for them.

If buffers are properly calculated and used, we would never be late for our meetings and our assignments will always be on time. The only exception would be when we will face External Q1s and as discussed earlier, they are rare.

Worksheet: The art of never being late

Determine the point of departure, point of arrival and the estimated time that it takes you from the point of departure to the point of arrival.

Journey (Home to office, home to the workshop location, etc.):

Point of departure (Drawing room, dining room, etc.):

Point of arrival (Office desk, seminar room, etc.):

Estimated time (A):

Worksheet: Example of step breakdown between point of departure and arrival

Point of departure: Drawing room

Point of arrival: Office workstation

| | Breakdown of steps | Time estimation |
|---|--|-----------------|
| 1 | Drawing room till the ground floor of the building | 1.5 min. |
| 2 | Ground floor to the car in the parking lot | 1.0 min. |
| 3 | Drive to the company's location | 12.0 min. |
| 4 | Searching for parking and parking the car | 4.0 min. |
| 5 | From the parking to the office building | 1.25 min. |
| 6 | Ground floor to the office workstation | 2.0 min. |
| | Total | 21.75 min. |

Worksheet: Breakdown of steps between point of arrival and departure and time estimation of each step

Point of departure:

Point of arrival:

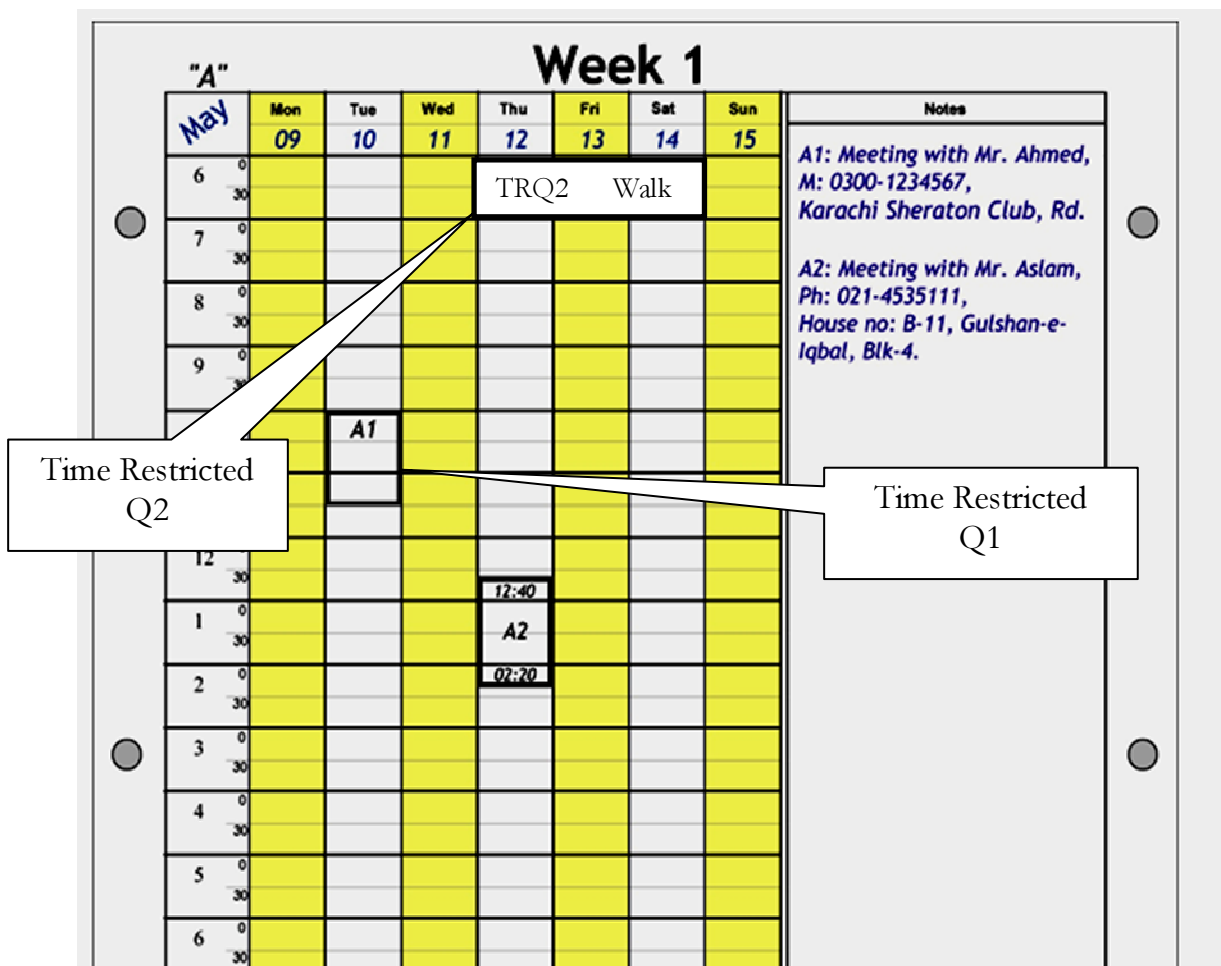
| | Breakdown of steps | Time estimation |
|----|--|-----------------|
| 1 | | |
| 2 | | |
| 3 | | |
| 4 | | |
| 5 | | |
| 6 | | |
| 7 | | |
| 8 | | |
| 9 | | |
| 10 | | |
| | Total estimated time (B) | |
| | Estimated time (A) | |
| | $\% \text{ off} = \frac{(\text{difference between A \& B}) \times 100}{A}$ | |

Chapter 6: Time Restricted Q1 activities (TRQ1s)

Q1 and Q2 activities bound by time are called TRQ1s and TRQ2s respectively. In other words, TRQ1s are appointments given to others while TRQ2s are appointments given to yourself.

The golden rule of success:

“The degree of success of a person is directly proportional to how well he can convert his Q2s into TRQ2s and then treat them as TRQ1s.”



Chapter 7: The Art of Guarding Commitments: The GK book and the to-do lists

'The palest ink is better than the sharpest memory.'

-A Chinese proverb

This chapter introduces a tool to guard *each and every* commitment and promise that we make. By guarding I mean that we should avoid breaking a commitment by not forgetting it and renegotiate it if we find that we would not be able to fulfill it. For example, if we were not able to return a book on Wednesday as promised, we should take an extension from that person hence effectively renegotiating our promise.

This tool is the system of the GK book and the to-do lists. This simple system is extremely powerful, giving you a fool proof method to remember and track your commitments, or in other words 'guard' them.

Recently I met a participant of our workshop who said that he had not broken a *single* commitment in the past year; this was true for both his professional and personal life. It was indeed heartwarming but was it a surprise? No. Anyone following the system outlined below can easily make such a claim. Inshallah, you could be that person!

The 'Gatekeeper of Tasks book' or simply the 'GK book'

The GK book is not the name of a physical entity rather the name of a concept that you should have the means to record each and every commitment that you make. In other words:

"You must not make a commitment unless you record it as you make it."

No time lag must occur between a commitment and its recording. Accountants are trained in recording transactions instantly because the moment there is a time lag, memory comes into play, introducing the chance of things being forgotten.

Our memory has not been designed to keep everything that we come across permanently. Keeping things permanently in our memory requires extra effort like memorization of the Quran. Our minds have been designed to forget, which is a

blessing. Imagine life if we were to vividly remember the death of a loved one years later!

This is the reason that Allah (swt) has commanded:

O ye who believe! When ye deal with each other, in transactions involving future obligations in a fixed period of time, reduce them to writing. Let a scribe write down faithfully as between the parties: let not the scribe refuse to write: as God Has taught him, so let him write. (2:282)⁷

Since commitments are made at all times, it is natural to demand that the GK book, the tool for recording commitments instantaneously, should be portable and with you at all times. If you are without your GK book, the rule is simple: do not make a commitment!

The GK book could be in any form: a simple pocket notebook, Palm Pilots or Pocket PCs. A piece of paper will also work but I strongly advise against as it could easily be lost. Nevertheless, it is still far better than memory: *a short pencil is better than a long memory (a Far Eastern Quote)*

Someone enquired if the people in the prophet's (sas) era kept notebooks. Arab society then was an oral culture with highly developed memories allowing the memorization of vast amount of information instantly. Stories abound of how the Arabs would memorize hundreds of verses of poetry when coming across them just once. Well, if you have a memory like that then your GK book is your mind but if you are like all of us average people, GK book is a must.

To initiate the system is to start carrying a GK Book and recording all commitments. This is the key function of the GK book.

An additional function of the GK book is to record all useful bits and pieces of information that come your way, giving you the confidence that all information recorded in the day would be in one, readily accessible place. This will help you fight the urge of putting pieces of information here and there. People waste time finding numbers scribbled on newspapers.

⁷ Translation of Abdullah Yusuf Ali.

The GK book, if it is a notebook, has a filing system as all information is being filed chronologically. For example, if you want a telephone number taken 5 days ago, you would search the entries that you had made approximately around that date which is inefficient. *The GK book is a good place to gather information, not store it.*

If carried faithfully, your GK book would have entries from both your professional and family life like:

1. Telephone numbers and addresses with accompanying notes.
2. General reminders like buying a battery for your watch or buying a stapler for your office
3. Daily or travel expenses.
4. Reminders regarding appointments with people.
5. Picking up milk for your home.
6. Grocery lists.
7. How much you jogged the other day.
8. The winning idea that came to you while you were stuck in the traffic jam.
9. An excellent proverb or a verse from poetry that you would like to refer to later.

When the GK Book starts getting filled, the next step is to take information from the GK book and file it in its proper place.

Filing of Information from the GK book

Mr. Abu Ahmed Akif, a friend, gave a beautiful example: When we bring groceries home, we never leave them in the basket: Eggs go off to the fridge; the meat is placed in the freezer; the biscuits in the cookie jar, etc. If there is an item which doesn't have a parking place, we find a place for it. Why? Because when the time comes to fetch an item, we would not have to rummage through the whole of the kitchen.

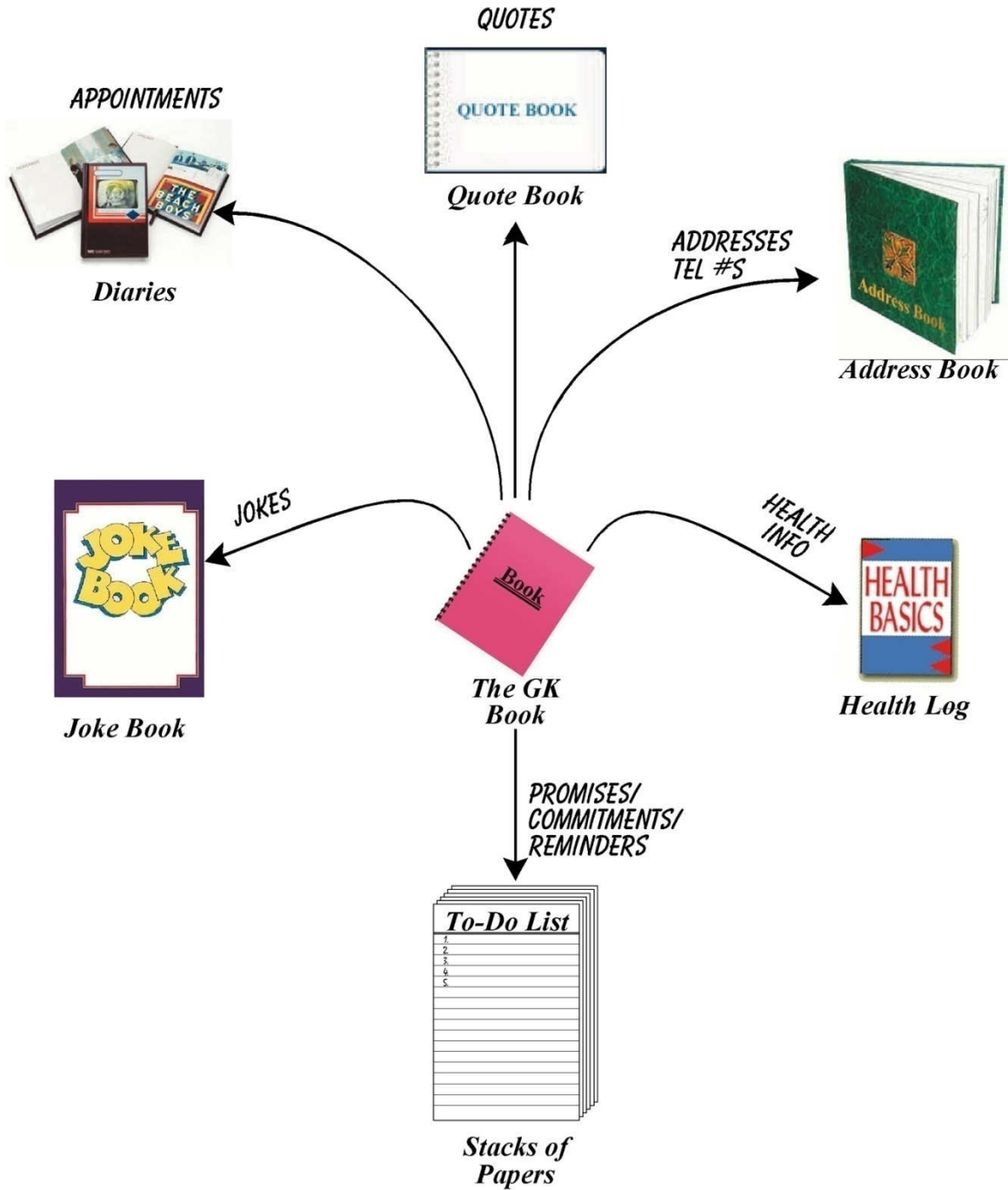
The same goes for the GK Book; all information that finds itself worthy of being in the GK book must have a place where it must transfer to. If a piece of information doesn't have a parking space, then you would have to make one.

- **Addresses and telephone numbers:** These must be put in address books, databases like outlook or other contact management software.

- **Appointments and Meetings:** These can go in our appointment diaries, the Daily Scheduler (DS, another tool that we shall introduce later) or electronic tools like outlook etc.
- **Financial information:** This would go into a financial log or an accounts book.
- **Health Information:** You may be logging how much you jog and this would enter into a health log.
- **Quotes:** These could be entered into a folder titled 'quotable quotes'.
- **Commitments, promises and reminders:** These would go into the to-do lists.

On extraction of the information, the pages of the GK book should be discarded. If you can't tear pages out, staple them together indicating that information has been taken out.

Filing of Information from the GK Book



The To-do Lists

To-do lists have been in use for time immemorial. It is commonly advised to start one's day by making a to-do list by thinking of all the things that we have to do in the day and jotting them down. One should start working on them after prioritizing them and cross the tasks as they are done.

The above is better than having no procedure at all. But there is a serious flaw. Can you guess?

The flaw is that you are making the list out of your memory except for the items which have been carried from the previous day. And again, once memory gets involved, there are chances of forgetting. No wonder, many a time our schedule is disturbed when we remember something in the middle of the day that we had forgotten to write earlier.

Let me introduce a simple but a very powerful procedure:

Step 1: Title five sheets of paper as below:

- Master to-do list (MTL)
- Current Year to-do list (CYL)
- Current Month to-do list (CML)
- Current Week to-do list (CWL)
- Today to-do list (TTL)

Step 2: Go through the entries in the GK book one by one, focusing on the commitments, reminders and promises that you have made to yourself all which are referred to as to-dos. If you have still not started maintaining the GK book, scan your memory for commitments that you have made and things that you need to do.

Ask yourself:

1. Is it (the to-do) to be done today? If yes, then log it in the TTL.
2. If it doesn't need to be done to-day but must be done by the end of the week, then log it in the CWL.

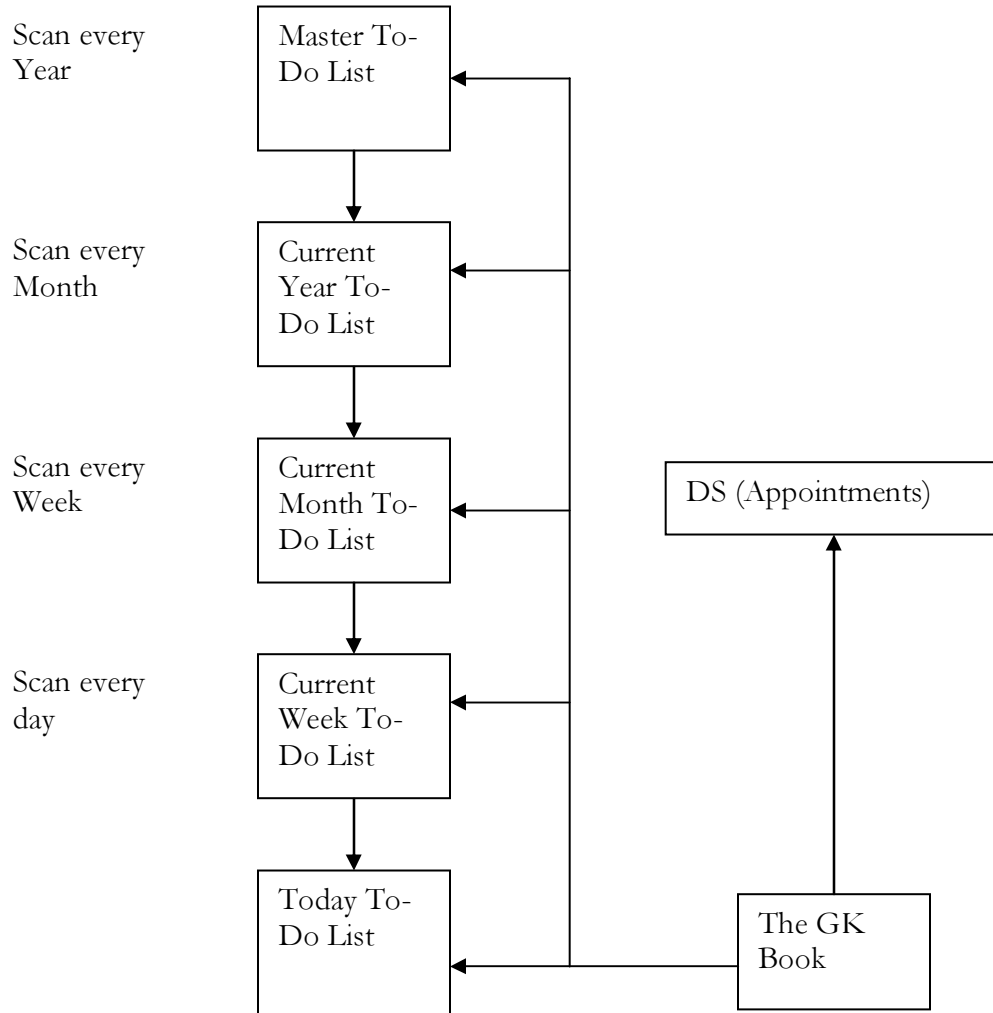
3. If it doesn't need to be done in this week but must be done by the end of the month, then log it in the CML.
4. If it doesn't need to be done in this month, but must be done by the end of the year, then log it in the CYL.
5. And lastly, if it has to be done but doesn't have to be done by the end of the year, then log it in the MTL.

The above five steps will get you started on your to-do lists which will grow by each passing day.

The day that you start on the system, follow the TTL that you had generated, making a new list the next day. This new TTL will receive entries from three sources:

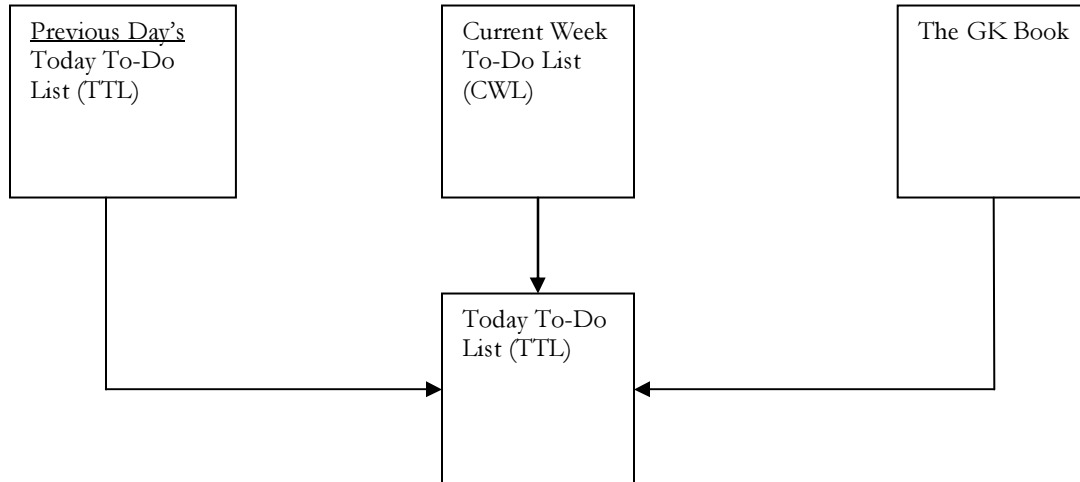
- a. The first set of entries would come through the five steps outlined above where you take your GK book and file its entries. If you are following the rules of the GK book then no commitment must be found in memory rather all commitments and promises would have been recorded and would be found in the GK book hence the GK book will contribute some entries to the TTL.
- b. The second set of entries would come from the previous day's TTL. Usually there would be items which you were not able to complete or tackle the previous day. You would look at those items and file them just as if they were entries in the GK book according to the five rules mentioned above. So the to-dos which need to be done today would be brought forward from the previous day's list.
- c. Lastly, you would scan you CWL and see which of the items from the list you would like to do today and bring them into the TTL.

Interaction of the GK Book with the To-Do Lists



According to the system, the CWL would be scanned every day of the week.

Compilation of the Today To-Do List



Please keep in mind that all of this scanning of to-do lists should be done at the time that you have dedicated to planning at a particular point in the day. Once the TTL has been constructed, you will not keep going back to any of the lists till the next day at the time of planning.

Your day will start with your TTL and your GK book. If a to-do comes in the middle of the day then you would ask yourself a question: does it have to be done today and if the answer is yes then you would put it down on the TTL otherwise it will go in the GK book. Please note again that during the day the other to-do lists must not be repeatedly opened as it would create too much hassle and inconvenience. Let the to-dos that don't have to be done today go to the GK and come on to the proper list the next day during your planning.

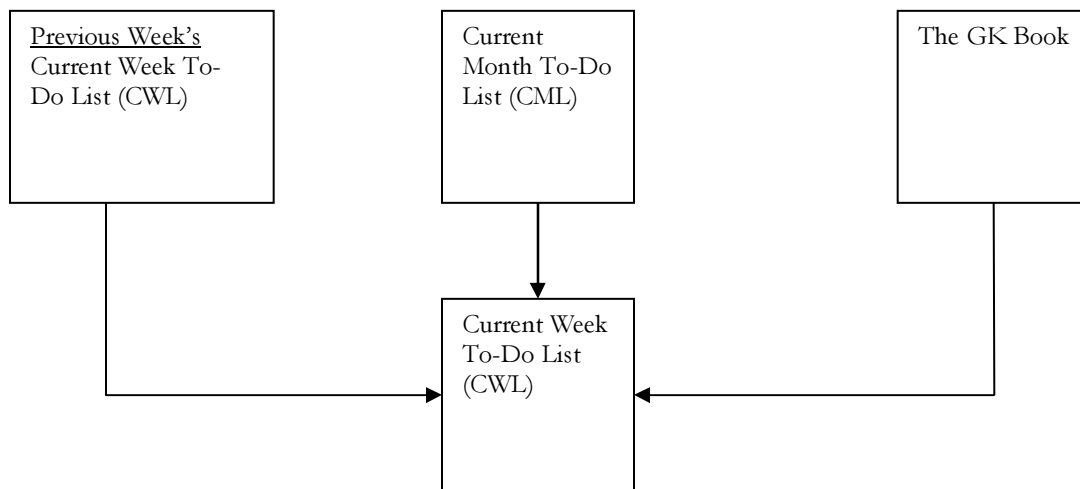
There are two very critical habits (Decision Making Routines (DMRs)) that you need to develop without which the system will fail:

#1: After each to-do has been done from the TTL, you must strike it off the list and at that time take a quick look at the whole TTL and select the next to-do that you would want to do.

#2: Whenever you change your physical location (home to work, work to client, client to project site etc.) you must take a quick look at the TTL. For example you had to make an international phone call that can only be made from the office and can't be made from the project site. If you left for the project site without looking at the TTL, you will be in trouble.

At the end of the week, we shall be making a new CWL by carrying forward items which have been left untouched from the previous week. Next we will scan the CML and pick items which need to be done this week. In this manner, the CML would be scanned 4 times a month.

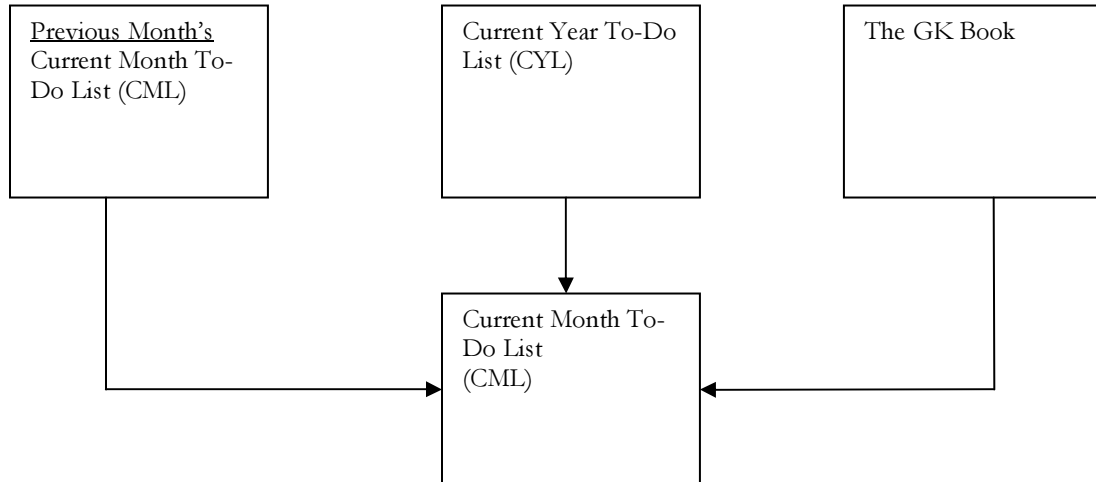
Compilation of the Current Week To-Do List



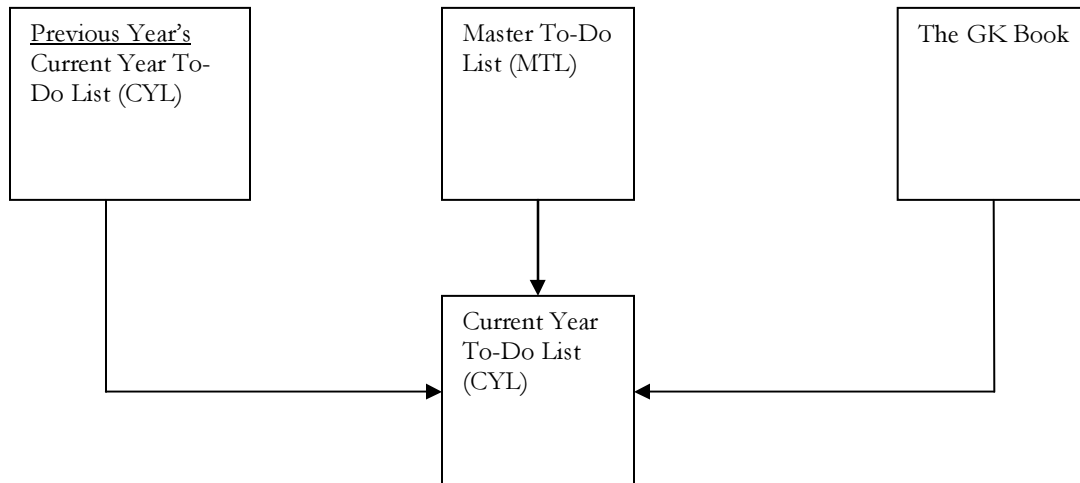
The same procedure is now repeated for making a new CML at the end of the month by scanning the CYL, and the CYL by scanning the MTL.

The CYL will thus be scanned 12 times in a year.

Compilation of the Current Month To-Do List



Compilation of the Current Year To-Do List



The above steps can be depicted in the form of the following formulas⁸:

⁸ This brilliant contribution was made by Jahanzeb Ahmed of Siemens when he attended our workshop in January 2004.

$$\begin{aligned} \text{TTL} &= \text{GK} + \text{TTL (previous day)} + \text{CWL scan} \\ \text{CWL} &= \text{GK} + \text{CWL (last week)} + \text{CML scan} \\ \text{CML} &= \text{GK} + \text{CML (last month)} + \text{CYL scan} \\ \text{CYL} &= \text{GK} + \text{CYL (last year)} + \text{MTL scan} \end{aligned}$$

You will notice that in the system the moment a commitment was made it was recorded into the GK book from where it was moved to one of the five lists and from where it came to our TTL by the process of being scanned. At no point in the above routine was memory involved and hence the chances of forgetting a commitment are zero. The elimination of the role of memory from the process is the most powerful aspect of the system.

It is important to note that the primary function of the above system (GK book and the to-do list) is to guard our commitments and not strategic planning or handling our long term goals or objectives. Many people use the to-do list to also handle their projects or goals. It can be done but this is not the primary function of the to-do lists. For example someone wanting to perform hajj can list the different steps required to complete his preparations and handle the steps through the to-do lists. For example he can list the different steps as:

1. Apply for a National ID card.
2. Apply for a passport.
3. Apply for a visa.
4. Get the proper training and knowledge of hajj.
5. Buy the equipment and gear for hajj.
6. Save money to buy the tickets and for payment of the boarding and lodging during hajj.

After having listed the steps, he could then log each step into the different lists (MTL to the TTL) and let the system take over from there.

I have seen the following challenges when I ask people to make the to-do lists:

1. People sometimes start to use the lists to handle the planning of their goals and projects and completely miss out on guarding commitments. This means that they have not realized the primary function of the to-do list.

2. People would attempt to make and manage to-do list without regularly carrying the GK book. If you are not regularly carrying the GK book and not faithfully recording *all* of your commitments in it, you are by-passing the system. The to-do lists will not be reflecting all your commitments and hence things will be falling through the cracks.
3. Some people follow the system for some days and then take a few days off. This will create extreme frustration and could lead people to doubt the whole concept. For the system to operate, you have to be following the system 100% of the time. Also, not following the system 100% may create a false sense of security. Commitments which otherwise you would have been carrying on your head would be missed by falsely assuming that the system will remind you of it.

If you were to miss a commitment while following the system, there would be only two reasons: either you are not following the system properly or you have intentionally ignored the commitment. There could be no other reason!

Now people can no longer tell their bosses that they forgot. The response from the boss would be, “How can you forget? Are you not on the system?” If the person admits that he is not on the system, then he would be asked to come on to the system.

There is a concern that through this system we are developing a dependence on a tool. Yes, we are developing a dependence which is both healthy and positive. Once wrist watches were not worn, but now life would be very difficult without such an important tool. Same is true for mobile phones. The GK book and the to-do lists are also a necessity in the fast paced life of today if one is determined to guard his commitments and promises.

Another concern is that the GK book would compromise our memories. The main function of our minds is not to memorize things rather to process information. When we try to carry too many things in our minds which could have easily been written down, we clutter it and compromise our ability to think and analyze information. If we want to enhance our memories, memorizing sections of the Quran would be a better idea.

One course participant said that after taking the course, his concentration in his prayers has increased and he is disturbed less by thoughts floating into his mind while

praying. The reason was that by recording all matters in his GK book he didn't need to carry all the clutter in his mind.

Here is a simple test to check whether you are using the system properly. Make a list of things that you did yesterday both in and out of work. Strike out activities which were generated during the course of the day yesterday. Take a look at the rest of the items; if they were present in your CWL or the previous day's to-do list, then you are on the system otherwise you need to ask yourself as to why these didn't appear on those lists.

As said earlier, GK book is a concept and not the name of a physical entity. Similar could be said of the to-do lists. I suggest that people start off on paper, understand the concepts and then move on to other forms of maintaining the to-do lists like databases. Microsoft outlook can do a marvelous job of maintaining your to-do list. Palm pilots also have such functions.

Handling daily or weekly reminders through the to-do lists

Since the CWL is scanned every day, you can easily use it for daily reminders. For example if you would like to remind yourself to charge your phone daily, put this reminder in your CWL and since you would be scanning it daily, you would be reminded. Similar could be done regarding weekly and monthly reminders.

Test Questions

Here are some questions related to the to-do lists that have appeared in the exams that we take. It would be nice to reflect upon them to see whether you are able to answer them.

1. In the section on to-do lists, how many to-do lists are there and how does the system work? How does the GK book interact with the to-do lists?
2. For the to-do lists, how many times in a month according to the system would you scan the CML? How many times in a week would you scan the CWL?

Today To - Do List (TTL)

Definition: *This list has all the to-dos which have to be done to-day.*

Examples:

- Fix the back door of the apartment
 - Call Anwar Hashim Saheb: 0334-2137684
 - Call Dr. Salman in Lahore: 042-5833983
 - Weekly report is due from Jamshaid and it has to be read and responded to.
 - Backup of computer
 - Locate my shoes for travel
 - Give waist coat for laundry
 - Pay Sui Gas bill
 - Make a folder of utility bills and file the previous bills
 - Take Rs. 5,000 advance from office and give it to mother
 - Call and invite Ahmed for the Valima of brother
 - Review the project report of Kaleem and give him a feedback
 - Pick up milk, diapers, AAA cells and Cough syrup for home
 - Congratulate neighbors on the marriage of their son.
 - Complete marketing report for Dubai office
 - Have UAE accounts reconciled
-

Current Week To - Do List (CWL)

Definition: *This list has all the to-dos that have to be done this week except which have to be done today.*

Examples:

- Reply to all of the pending emails
 - Get a back-up generator for the office
 - Rearrange office furniture
 - Get the DVD drive fixed
 - Get Anti-virus program
 - Submit the accounts of traveling
 - Call the major clients in Islamabad
 - Get eyeglasses fixed
 - Need to get a hair-cut
 - Need to get vaccination for the baby
 - Replace car tyres
 - Invite Dr. Abdul Bari for the vision retreat
-

Current Month To - Do List (CML)

Definition: *This list has all the to-dos that have to be done this month except the ones which have to be done this week.*

Examples:

- Get the car serviced
 - Pay the tuition fee of children
 - Get blood test done for father
 - Increase the brisk walk at one stretch to 5 kilometers
 - Finalize the manual for Time Management Training
 - Hire a driver for the office
 - Get the office AC serviced
 - Visit uncle
 - Call all the relatives in Lahore
 - Chalk out strategy for getting receivables within 15 days.
-

Current Year To - Do List (CYL)

Definition: *This list has all the to-dos which have to be done this year except for the ones which have to be done this month.*

Examples:

- Reading the Autobiography of Malcolm X
 - Taking the Strategic Negotiations Skills workshop
 - Taking children for summer vacations
 - Completing the HR policy manual for the office
 - Shifting to a new office space
 - Automating accounts in the office
 - Renovating the kitchen
 - Taking Rasheed for dinner
 - Go surfing with Shaikh Hashim
-

Master To - Do List (MTL)

Definition: *This list has all the to-dos which have to be done but not this year.*

Examples:

- Performing hajj
 - Reading the book 'Muqaddama' by Ibn-e-Khuldoon
 - Learning Arabic and Karate
 - Writing an article in the newspaper on Time Management
 - Visiting Malaysia
 - Buying a new car
 - Teaching swimming to the children
 - Signing up wife for the gymnasium
 - Doing Project Management training
 - Getting an MBA in Finance
-

Chapter 8: The Daily Scheduler

Introduction

The importance of promises, the grave consequences of not meeting them and the Islamic perspective together constitute the substance of keeping promises while the GK book and the to-do lists are the forms or tools behind managing and keeping promises.

Appointments are also promises and the GK Book and the to-do lists are not the effective way of handling them. For appointments I shall now introduce a tool that I call the Daily Scheduler or the DS.

The DS is just one ‘form’ of handling our appointments. There are many other tools that are available like planners, diaries and pocket palm pilots.

I strongly suggest that you understand the workings of the DS, compare it with other tools and then decide the one best for you.

Later in the book we shall see additional functions of the DS.

The Concept

The concept of the DS is:

“You should have the capacity to remember the time and duration of a meeting which was set months in advance”

The Physical aspects of the DS

The DS is shown on the next page¹. Please note:

Each page reflects a week. Each box reflects half an hour in the day.

Do you notice holes on both sides of the sheet? Can you guess why? When I ask this question in our workshops, I get some interesting answers including that there must have been a mistake!

¹ I designed the first crude DS sheet in the mid nineties. Mufti Muzammil Hussain in 2002 suggested coding the appointments and added the notes section. Mr. Zulfiqar Ahmed in 2004 made the boxes reflect half an hour instead of an hour.

In bounded diaries you can see the next page when you are on the left hand page. If you are on the right hand page, you would have to flip the page to see the next page. I wanted a design where the next page could always be seen while working on the current page: the solution that I came up with was a folder with a binder clip and pages with holes on both the sides. So when you are done with the left hand sheet, you would not start working on the next page rather you would open the clip and affix the next week's page on the left hand side so naturally the next week will open in front of you automatically.

| "A" | | Week 1 | | | | | | | Notes |
|-----|-----------|---------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|---|-------|
| May | Mon 09 | Tue 10 | Wed 11 | Thu 12 | Fri 13 | Sat 14 | Sun 15 | | |
| 6 | | | | | | | | <p>A1: Meeting with Mr. Ahmed, M: 0300-1234567, Karachi Sheraton Club, Rd.</p> <p>A2: Meeting with Mr. Aslam, Ph: 021-4535111, House no: B-11, Gulshan-e- Iqbal, Blk-4.</p> | |
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The Working of the DS

After giving dates to the days on the sheet, you would chart your appointments as follows:

Suppose you have a meeting with Mr. Ahmed on Tuesday from 10:00 am to 11:30 am. You would outline the three boxes as shown on the sheet.

Next, you would give a code to the box.

In the notes section, you would put the code and all the relevant summary of the meeting like the name of the person, a brief agenda and all the contact information of the person you are meeting.

In the event that you have a meeting with someone at a time other than at a half an hour mark, you would draw a box and put down the exact time inside the box.

Suppose your meeting with Mr. Aslam is from 12:40 pm to 2:20 pm, you will mark the appointment as shown on the sheet.

You can also color code the different boxes for easier reference.

Graphical Representation

‘A picture is worth a thousand words’. By charting your appointments you are giving a graphical or pictorial representation to your appointments hence making it easier to grasp and retain the information. Furthermore, you get a map of how your week looks like as the filled (or colored) boxes show time taken up and the available time is shown by empty spaces.

The Three Cardinal Rules of Using the DS

These three simple rules will give you exceptional control over your appointments:

Don’t give an appointment out to anyone without looking at your DS: It is easier said than done but is the most important rule. Whatever the pressure or the case, please avoid giving out an appointment without looking at your DS.

If someone requests a meeting and the DS is not with you, tell the person that you would get back to him later with a confirmation. Put down the request in your GK book and once you get to your DS, check it and confirm the meeting. Many a times you would be able to swear that the requested time is free but do keep in mind that memory is after all memory and you could have forgotten an appointment that you may have given some time before. So please play it safe.

Don’t start your day without looking at your DS: Please take a quick look at

your DS when you start your day. These few seconds can save you tons of problems.

Keep the active week on the left hand side: This function is possible due to the special design of the DS as explained above. This rule will ensure that your next week is open in front of you. Along with the second rule, this rule will ensure that you would have at least a week's notice before *every* appointment.

Let's see how these rules will play out with the help of the following example:

Suppose it is 10th of March and Mr. Ali asks you for an appointment on the fourth of May from 10:00 am to 11:00 am. On checking your DS you find that you are open on that time as nothing is marked. The logic is simple: had there been a meeting, it would have been marked.

You would give this person a confirmation, block that time, given it a code and put all the relevant information on the notes section which of course will include the contact numbers.

On the 25th of March, suppose Mr. Basheer asks you for an appointment on the 4th of May from 9:00 am to 11:30 am. Resisting the temptation to say yes and checking your DS discloses that there would be an appointment conflict.

You would request Mr. Basheer to consider an alternate time. Suppose, meeting Mr. Basheer is more Important than meeting Mr. Ali. In this case you would talk to Mr. Ali and seek to renegotiate your appointment with him. Having all of Mr. Ali's information in your DS sheet would ensure that you would not have to search for his numbers. The system thus ensures that no appointment conflicts happen.

A week before the appointment, the sheet prior to the appointment week will move on the left (as explained above) and the appointment will become immediately visible.

Since you are looking at your DS every day, there is no way that you would forget your appointment with Mr. Ali or with Mr. Basheer.

You can easily see that with these rules you can mark and handle your appointments

set months in advance.

Some Important frequently asked questions (FAQs)

Q1: What if we don't know how long the meeting would last, how can we mark the DS?

In this case you will have to estimate the time. Suppose, a little bit of research tells you that this meeting might take a minimum of 1 hour and a maximum of 3 hours. In this case you would have to mark 3 hours after the beginning time. If the meeting were to finish before 3 hours, you would utilize this time for a Q2 activity. During the daily planning time, you should anticipate this possibility and keep a Q2 activity lined up to be substituted immediately if time is freed up.

Q3: Do I have to code all of my appointments?

No. Sometimes the box of the appointment would be large enough to put down information in the box itself.

Q4: Why does the DS sheet starts from 6:00 am and goes to midnight?

Simply because putting 24 hours slots would take up too much space but if you need to mark hours late at night, you can customize your own sheets.

Q5: Should I carry my DS sheets or organizer with me at all times?

It depends upon your need and use. If your appointments are dynamic and you need to give appointments out frequently, carrying it with you would be a better idea otherwise it should be on your work desk at all times.

Q6: Is the DS organizer available in the market?

No. you can either photo copy the sheets and use a simple binder folder or can purchase a specially designed leather organizer from Timelenders. For details, price and shipping information please visit www.timelenders.com.

Q7: If my appointments are readjusted, how do I make that change in the DS?

For this purpose people use a pencil which can be erased. I use white eraser ink which is readily available.

Q8: Should I discard my DS sheets after they have been used?

I strongly suggest that you don't discard your sheets, you should file them. They would become a beautiful map of your life. If you were to ask me what I was doing on a particular day three years ago, I would be able to tell you. And remember that you may decide to write your autobiography one day and your DS sheets would be a priceless asset. One participant of our workshop once said that he has made up his mind that he would never write an autobiography. Another participant responded: "Well, you never know, someone might decide to write a biography on you and find the sheets useful!"

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Appendix A: About Suleman Ahmer

To further his work and research in Time Management, Suleman founded Timerunners, Inc. in Chicago in 1999 and Timelenders, Inc. in Boston and Karachi in 2002. He has trained thousands of individuals in Time Management in the United States, United Arab Emirates and Pakistan. He has trained over 60 companies and organizations including names such as Philips, Siemens, Pfizer, Nestle, Tapal Tea, Pakistan Navy and Higher Colleges of Technology, Abu Dhabi.

Suleman's interest in the power of missions and visions to transform organizations has resulted in consulting work with groups both in the US and Pakistan. He has consulted with groups such as Macter Pharmaceuticals, Shafi-ResoChem and Amreli Steels.

Before moving to Pakistan, Suleman was associated with a couple of Chicago based multinationals and has worked in North America, Europe and Asia and has traveled to over 25 countries. He was a member of the American Management Association and draws inspiration from his international management experience and his background in research.

Suleman is an Engineering graduate of the University of Nebraska and his research with the US Air Force in Solid State Physics culminated in published work.

Suleman is an award winning author and has two works: the essence of his travel experiences are captured in 'The Embattled Innocence' published in the US and his current focus is 'Strategic Time Management', which also serves as course material for the Time Management Workshop.

About Mr. Yameenuddin Ahmed *Training Facilitator*

Since his association with Timelenders in 2004, Yameen has taught Strategic Time Management to over one thousand individuals from all walks of life including multinationals and local companies like Central Depository Company, Children's Cancer Foundation, Dadex, GlaxoSmithKline, Pfizer and Shafi Reso-Chem. He has trained in Pakistan and the UAE.

At Timelenders, Yameen has worked extensively as a consultant on vision-based restructuring of a number of organizations. Yameen brings this vast practical experience to his workshops and trainings.

A commerce graduate, Yameen has worked extensively with a large manufacturing group in the areas of Finance, Marketing and Human Resource Development before joining Timelenders.

Yameen's unique and powerful teaching style has brought about radical changes in hundreds of lives. The following comments testify to his role of a teacher and a gifted mentor:

“One of the best workshops I have ever attended in my life. It has really put important things in life in the right perspective and has reinforced the value of limited time available and how to best utilize it ...”

Khalid Ali, CEO Security Leasing Corporation Ltd.

“It is really a wonderful program that made me realize the importance of time with reference to vision in life. I'm sure that these powerful contents and extraordinary delivery by the trainer will definitely bring a noticeable change in my life and I'll be able to be more organized, less stressed and will be getting better results of my efforts. I would like to thank and congratulate you for organizing such an effective workshop and would like to ask 'where have you guys been before'.”

Ashfaq Ahmed, Assistant Director, State Bank of Pakistan

Instructions for taking the quiz

1. The Quiz is based on Multiple Choice Questions (MCQ's). There are no essays.
2. Open Book, Open Notes, Closed neighbor (Discussions are not allowed).
3. You are being tested on concepts put forth in this Workshop.
4. Choose the best possible answer.
5. Use the process of elimination to arrive at the best possible answer.
6. Please understand the questions before attempting to answer.
7. Please ask for clarification if you do not understand a question.
8. There will be no Negative Marking.
9. Please put your name on the Quiz
10. A correct answer gets 1 Point. An incorrect answer gets 0 Point.

Quiz A on the Time Quadrants

Name: _____

1. During stress, the activity in the prefrontal lobes of the brain:
 - a. Increases
 - b. Decreases
 - c. Remains the same.

2. When there is Eustress, the chemicals that are released are:
 - a. Cortisol
 - b. Catecholamines
 - c. Insulin

3. If you reach your destination 10 minutes early, you should do a:
 - a. Q4 Activity
 - b. Q3 Activity
 - c. Q2 Activity
 - d. Make a pledge to not be 10 minutes early ever.

4. The best way to handle External Q1's is to:
 - a. To have a filter.
 - b. Have patience.
 - c. Pre-empt it.

5. If you are confused as to whether an activity is a Q2 or a Q4, we should consider it to be:
 - a. Q1
 - b. External Q1
 - c. Q4
 - d. Q2
 - e. Decide by tossing

6. General spending vs. saving can be:
 - a. The first is explicit while the second is implicit
 - b. The first could be explicit and implicit while the second is implicit
 - c. The first is explicit while the second could be implicit or explicit

- d. Both could be implicit and explicit according to the definition
 - e. None of the above
7. Something that adds value to our life but we don't want to achieve it is:
- a. A worthwhile goal
 - b. Is important
 - c. Is important but not urgent
 - d. Is not a worthwhile goal
 - e. Is an important worthwhile goal.
 - f. None of the above
8. If something which is very important conflicts with something which is very urgent, we should do:
- a. the one which is very important
 - b. the one which is very urgent
 - c. Should not do either one of them
 - d. First decide which quadrant the activity is in and then decide which is to be done.
9. Your child's teeth are going bad and he keeps asking you for candy. This action of the child is a:
- a. Q1 situation
 - b. Q2 activity
 - c. Q1 activity
 - d. Q3 situation
 - e. Q4 activity
10. Your friend had a heart attack and needs to be taken to the hospital, while at the same time you have to attend your sister's wedding.
- a. The first activity is a Q1 and the second is a Q2
 - b. The first activity is an External Q1 and the second is a Q3
 - c. Both are Q1's
 - d. Both are Q2's
11. Reading the daily newspaper, buying any piece of land that you don't need, gossiping; teaching children manners, going for vacations every year and occasionally paying charity are:

- a. All Q2's
- b. Some are Q2's and some are Q4's
- c. Some are Q1's and some are Q3's
- d. All of the above

12. Avoiding Q4's:

- a. Is a Q2 activity
- b. Can be a Q1 activity
- c. Is not possible
- d. Could be a Q2 or a Q1 activity

13. Developing a vision, thinking about one's purpose and setting goals:

- a. Is a Q2 activity
- b. Is a Q2 only if you are a philosopher, writer, thinker, company, etc.
- c. Is a Q1 activity
- d. Is a Q4 for some; Q2 for some

14. When Q2 activities are postponed indefinitely they become:

- a. Internal Q1s
- b. External Q1s
- c. Sometimes internal Q1s; sometimes external Q1s
- d. Sometimes Q2s; sometimes Q1s

Appendix B: Book List

Resources for Vision:

1. Jim Collins, *Built to Last* (HarperBusiness, an imprint of HarperCollins Publishers, 1994)
2. Malcolm Gladwell, *The Tipping Point* (Little, Brown and Company, March 2000)
3. Malcolm X, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* (The Random House Publishing Group, 1964)
4. Nelson Mandela, *Long Walk to Freedom* (Little, Brown and Company, 1994)
5. Paulo Coelho, *The Alchemist* (HarperCollins Publishers India, 2006)
6. Peter M. Senge, *The Fifth Discipline* (Doubleday, a division of Random House, Inc. 1990)
7. Stephen R. Covey, *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People* (Simon & Schuster UK Ltd, 1989)
8. Suleman Ahmer, *The Embattled Innocence* (Presslenders, 2009): Read Basheer: a friend's farewell, an essay in the book. You can order a copy of the book from our website or download a free version at www.timelenders.com

Resources for Leadership:

1. Jack Welch with Suzy Welch, *Winning* (Harper Collins, 2005): This book has wonderful practical advice on leadership from a corporate perspective.

2. Jim Collins, ***Good to Great*** (*Harper Collins, 2001*): This book provides a wonderful primer in the current context and I specially recommend it to demystify the whole notion of leadership as something very complicated and accessible to only a few.
3. Safiur Rahman Mubarakpuri, ***The Sealed Nectar: Biography of the Noble Prophet*** (sas) (*Darussalam, revised edition, 2002*)
4. Samuel Walton, ***Made in America: The Autobiography*** (*Doubleday, 1992*)
5. Stephen Covey, ***Principle Centered Leadership*** (*Simon & Schuster, 1992*): Another wonderful book which takes some of the basic concepts of leadership and provides simple logical templates and paradigms for application across one's personal and professional life.

Appendix C: Answers to the tables

| | Activity | Urgent |
|---|---|--------|
| 1 | Sleeping | X |
| 2 | Watching a live cricket match | ✓ |
| 3 | Gossip | X |
| 4 | Exercise | X |
| 5 | Seeing a particular car coming from the opposite side while driving from one city to another on a divided highway | ✓ |
| 6 | Seeking forgiveness from your spouse | X |
| 7 | Hugging your child | X |
| 8 | Going to a sale which is ending today | ✓ |
| 9 | Seeking forgiveness from God | X |

| | Activity | Urgent | Important | Quadrants |
|----|---|--------|-----------|-----------|
| 1 | Sleeping | X | ✓ | Q2 |
| 2 | Watching a live cricket match | ✓ | ✓ | Q1 |
| 3 | Watching a live cricket match | ✓ | X | Q3 |
| 4 | Gossip | X | X | Q4 |
| 5 | Exercise | X | ✓ | Q2 |
| 6 | Seeing a particular car coming from the opposite side while driving from one city to another on a divided highway | ✓ | ✓/X | Q1/Q3 |
| 7 | Seeking forgiveness from your spouse | X | ✓ | Q2 |
| 8 | Hugging your child | X | ✓ | Q2 |
| 9 | Going to a sale which is ending today | ✓ | ✓/X | Q1/Q3 |
| 10 | Seeking forgiveness from God | X | ✓ | Q2 |

Comments/Suggestions

Thanks for being with us at this workshop. We at Timelenders would appreciate your comments and suggestions regarding this workshop. This input would help us improve. Thanks!

Name: _____

Telephone: _____

Company: _____

Email: _____

| OFFICIAL | |
|-------------------|--|
| Type of Workshop: | |
| Company | |
| Dates | |
| Venue | |
| Trainer | |
| Event Mgr | |

Please use the back side if required.

Please suggest any other person(s) that you think would benefit or be interested in this workshop.

Name:

Date:

| S. No | Name | Relationship | Email / Phone |
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