

Introduction

The relentless immediacy and urgency of our always-on-continuously-connected way of working have reached its use-by date. Good humans within organisations running from one thing to another with no respite many becoming increasingly stressed, demoralised, and unproductive.

Causes

There are two key causes:

Methods

Insufficient planning and prioritising across all levels of the organisation. This leads to a lack of focus and clear direction.

The default becomes do everything immediately and proliferate new work rather than eliminate all but the few, major focus areas that will drive strategic success. This is amplified with insufficient resourcing. Good people start burning out.

Mindsets

As humans, we prefer immediate work rather than the longer-term major work that drives progress towards our main goals. We are overly optimistic about what we can achieve and get a buzz from helping others, so we say yes instead of no. And our addiction to technology has our concentration down to a slither.

Paying attention to methods and mindsets helps calm the chaos that comes from continually working with urgency.

Principles

- Urgency is created, so it can be calmed
- The less you feed it the quicker it eases
- Recognising it is the first step to minimising it.

Prevention

Knowing how to treat urgency and applying the treatment early, like any disease, is the most effective way to prevent it from reoccurring. One model that has stood the test of time is the [Eisenhower Urgent and Important Matrix](#).

Designed by General Dwight D. Eisenhower when serving in the United States Army during World War Two, its underpinning logic is difficult to deny - *‘the urgent are not important, and the important are never urgent’*.

Like any model, its success is in its disciplined application until it is second nature. This can be tricky when you’re stuck in the urgent with no time to think and so essential for the same reason.

Practice

This modification of Eisenhower’s model can be used to help review and reset with a focus on identifying and minimising the urgent and maximising the important.

URGENT MATRIX

		URGENT	NOT URGENT	
IMPORTANT	QUADRANT 1 Prioritise –genuine emergencies <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Everything feels urgent Pause, think, push out to Q 2 Example: your house is on fire, your child is sick.	10 – 15%	QUADRANT 2 Progress – major value-adding work <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Very little feels urgent Regular prioritising and planning Example: strategic projects, commercial opportunities	60 – 80%
	NOT IMPORTANT	QUADRANT 3 Process – work that drives efficiencies <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lots of minor activity Do what supports Q2 Example: billing, compliance, one-on-one meetings	10 – 15%	QUADRANT 4 Pay attention – to warning signs <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Disengaged, worried, unproductive Re-set and refresh Example: seek help, time off, career coaching

In the absence of judgement and without overthinking try this exercise:

- What ways of thinking and working in the above matrix resonate?
- Reviewing your long list what sits in each quadrant currently?
- Where might you rebalance?
- What help might you need?

When urgency has become an emergency go hard

1. Stop
2. Review everything you need to get done
3. Pick the most important ONE. Do that

Monitor and maintain

1. Repeat steps 1-3 daily until you have at least eight hours of clear space in your weekly calendar and protect that (this is your renewal time)
2. Learn to say NO before YES
3. Know that doing your best is more than enough.

Taking swift action on the wrong side of busy acts like a vaccine. It materially slows down the spread, reducing harmful effects and calming chaos. Calm creates clarity. Clarity is where creativity emerges. Creativity solves problems.

It also gets you ahead of the curve, and well on your way to the right side of busy.

Further reading

For further reading, please [click here](#).