



## Enhancing Work-Life Balance

Katelyn Andersen describes a decision-making tool for planning and accomplishing tasks and suggests ways to build your personal calendar with purpose.

The last year looked different in the various facets of each of our lives. The details of social engagements, school environments, sporting events, routine shopping trips, connections with loved ones changed. Initially, these changes may have felt awkward and unnatural because our habits, practices and routines were disrupted.

The reasons for making decisions changed due to the circumstances around us. These changes challenged our unconscious choices to become conscious decisions and impacted our executive functioning skills. The executive function is the management system of the brain involved in setting goals, planning and accomplishing tasks.

A tool, the 'Urgent-Important' Matrix, or the Eisenhower Matrix, can assist individuals in making decisions to support executive functioning. The Eisenhower Matrix was developed by President Dwight "Ike" Eisenhower, the 34th president of the United States. The Eisenhower Matrix was made popular by

Steven Covey's book, *Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, using the matrix to divide workload and priorities into actions of do, plan, delegate or eliminate based on the urgency and importance of the tasks at hand.

**Refer to the diagram, each of the quadrants are labeled and outlined as followed:**

- **Quadrant I:** Do; urgent and important - tasks needed to complete immediately. Examples include emergencies or tasks with clear deadlines and consequences.
- **Quadrant II:** Plan; important, but not urgent – tasks to schedule to do later. Tasks could include long-term projects and professional development.
- **Quadrant III:** Delegate; urgent, but not important – tasks to delegate to someone else. These tasks need to be completed but not specifically by you.
- **Quadrant IV:** Eliminate; neither urgent nor important – tasks to eliminate. These items are distractions or tasks that do not align with personal or family goals.

As our world transitions to summer and you take inventory of your current life: What parts do you enjoy? What parts do you miss and are important to you? What routines do you want to keep? Be purposeful in designing a schedule and align tasks with your personal and family core values. Here are a few facets to consider:

**Block out time yourself.**

As our lives resume with social engagements, activities and meetings, remember to block in time for personal time. Taking care of yourself is a Quadrant II task to prevent Quadrant I urgencies. Take the time to focus on personal interests and enjoyments. Refer to the *Lives & Landscapes*, 2020 Fall article, *Stress Management and Social Connection in a Pandemic* by Alison Brennan, PhD, for using and applying the self-care tool, *Healthy Mind Platter*. This tool incorporates sleep time,

physical time, connecting time, time in, down-time and playtime as part of everyday self-care.

**Build in transition times.**

This last year, many meetings and activities were virtual or cancelled completely. When meetings were virtual, transition time was deleted and filled with other activities. Allow for space in the calendar to attend to informal conversations and connections with others. If virtual meetings are in your future, a recent study from Stanford shares that exhaustion from video conference meetings do take a toll on individuals. Individuals are encouraged to take steps to mitigate fatigue by scheduling breaks between meetings, implement no-video meeting days and understand the factors related to fatigue.

**Consider the needs of others.**

Consider how family members might need to adjust to changes – pets, children and partners. Build in connection time for all family members to discuss the impacts of upcoming changes, which could include a child signing up for a seasonal sport team or a change in work hours. What aspects of your life could be delegated or deleted?

Could feeding or walking pets be delegated to younger members of the household?

**Routinize habits in life.**

Planning ahead as much as possible can help with the cognitive load of our executive functioning. Consider selecting clothes at the beginning of the week to alleviate the time it takes each morning. Create a meal plan for the week so meal times flow better. Write down chores and tasks on paper, also called brain dumping, to prevent over thinking and help free up the cognitive load.

Each individual and family will establish new habits and routines in the upcoming months. Take time frequently, possibly on a weekly basis, to communicate planned activities and priorities with family members and co-workers to help with accountability – for yourself and others. Revisit your long-term goals and plans frequently to adjust the workload for both home and work expectations.

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