

Acting on Purpose

FOCUS QUESTIONS

Have you ever noticed how much highly successful people accomplish? How do they make such effective use of their time?

Creators do more than dream. They have developed the skill of translating their desired outcomes into purposeful actions. They make a plan and then take one step after another... even when they don *feel* like it... until they achieve their objective. Goals and dreams set your destination, but only persistent, purposeful actions will get you there.

Thomas Edison did more than dream of inventing the light bulb; he performed more than 10,000 experiments before achieving his goal. Martin Luther King, Jr., did more than dream of justice and equality for people of all races; he spoke and organized and marched and wrote. College graduates did more than dream of their diplomas; they attended classes, read books, wrote essays, conferred with instructors, rewrote essays, formed study groups, did library research, asked questions, went to support labs, sought out tutors, and much, much more!

When we consider the accomplishments of successful people, we may forget that they weren't born successful. Most achieved their success through the persistent repetition of purposeful actions. Creators apply a powerful strategy for turning dreams into reality: **Do important actions first, preferably *before* they become urgent.**

HARNESS THE POWER OF QUADRANT II

The significance of **importance** and **urgency** in choosing our actions is illustrated in the chart of the Quadrant II Time Management System® (from Stephen Covey's book *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*) on the next page. This chart shows that our actions fall into one of four quadrants, depending on their importance and urgency.

Only you can determine the importance of your actions. Sure, others (such as friends and relatives) will have their opinions, but they don't really know what you value. If an action will help you achieve what you value, then it's *important* and you'd be crazy not to do it. Sadly, though, many people fill their time with unimportant actions, thus sabotaging their goals and dreams.

Likewise, only you can determine the urgency of your actions. Sure, others (such as instructors and counselors) will set deadlines for you, but these external finish lines won't be motivating unless you make them personally important. If meeting an approaching deadline will help you achieve something you value, it's *urgent*, and you'd be crazy not to meet that deadline. Sadly, though, many people miss important, urgent deadlines, thus sabotaging their goals and dreams.

I've heard all sorts of excuses from students who "couldn't" get an assignment in on time. However, when I asked, "Could you have met the deadline if it was worth one million dollars?" their answer was almost always, "Sure, but it wasn't."

Explore the need for purposeful action in Exercise 12-2 on page 119 of the Facilitator's Manual.

Do not confuse a creator with a dreamer. Dreamers only dream, but creators bring their dreams into reality.

Robert Fritz

Exercise 12-1 on page 118 of the Facilitator's Manual helps students combat wasting time.

I am personally persuaded that the essence of the best thinking in the area of time management can be captured in a single phrase: organize and execute around priorities.

Stephen Covey

So now we know the real problem. It wasn't that they "couldn't" meet the deadline. They just didn't make the deadline valuable enough to do what needed to be done. Creators choose their own goals and meet deadlines (even those set by others) because it's what *they* want, because it's important to creating the life *they* desire.

As you read on about the four quadrants, ask yourself, "In which quadrant am I choosing to spend most of my time?" The choice you make will dramatically affect the outcomes and experiences you create.

Not all of your daily activities are of equal importance, and your mission is to organize and prioritize all activities into a working plan.

Charles J. Givens

- QUADRANT I ACTIONS (Important and Urgent)** are important activities done under the pressure of nearing deadlines. These are critical actions that must be done *now* or the consequences may be grim. One of my friends in college began his junior paper (the equivalent of two courses) just three days before it was due. He claimed that success in college was *important* to him, and the impending deadline certainly made this assignment *urgent*. He worked on the paper for 72 hours straight, finally turning it in without proofreading. Although he squeaked by this time, he fell deeper and deeper into his pattern of procrastination. In our senior year he failed too many courses and was dismissed by the university. When you act on low priorities and neglect high priorities, you sabotage your goals and dreams. At the last minute, procrastinators dive desperately into Quadrant I to handle an action that has always been important but is now desperately urgent. People who spend their lives in Quadrant I are constantly dashing about putting out brush fires in their lives. They frantically create modest achievements in the present while sacrificing extraordinary success in the future. Worse, Quadrant I is the one in which people experience stress, develop ulcers, and flirt with nervous breakdowns.
- QUADRANT II ACTIONS (Important and Not Urgent)** are important activities done *without* the pressure of looming deadlines. These actions move you a step closer to a personally valuable outcome or experience.

It is not enough to be busy... the question is: What are we busy about?

Henry David Thoreau

	Urgent	Not Urgent
Important	<p>Quadrant I <i>Example:</i> Staying up all night cramming for an 8:00 A.M. test.</p>	<p>Quadrant II <i>Example:</i> Creating a study group in the first week of the semester.</p>
Not Important	<p>Quadrant III <i>Example:</i> Attending a hastily called meeting that has nothing to do with your goals.</p>	<p>Quadrant IV <i>Example:</i> Mindlessly watching television until 4:00 A.M.</p>

When you engage in an important activity with time enough to do it well, you can create your greatest dreams. Lacking urgency, Quadrant II actions are easily postponed. Almost all of the suggestions in this book belong in Quadrant II. For example, you could postpone forever keeping a journal, using the Wise Choice Process, adopting the language of Creators, discovering and visualizing your dreams, designing a life plan, and creating personal affirmations. However, when you do take purposeful actions such as these, you create a rich, full life. Quadrant II is where you will find Creators.

- **QUADRANT III ACTIONS (Not Important and Urgent)** are unimportant activities done with a sense of urgency. How often have you responded to the demand of your ringing phone only to be trapped in a long, unwanted conversation? Or you agree to something because you can't bring yourself to say "no"? When we allow someone else's urgency to talk us into an activity unimportant to our own goals and dreams, we have chosen to be in Quadrant III.
- **QUADRANT IV ACTIONS (Not Important and Not Urgent)** are simply time wasters. Everyone wastes some time, so it's not something to judge yourself for, though your Inner Critic may try. Instead, listen to your Inner Guide. Become more conscious of your choices, and minimize wasting the irreplaceable hours of each day. A college professor I know surveyed his classes and found that many of his students watch more than 40 hours of television per week. That's the equivalent of a full-time job without pay or benefits!

A study in 1961 showed that students in higher education studied an average of 25 hours per week. Twenty years later, in 1981, college students' study time had dropped to 20 hours per week. By 2003, the average dropped again to only 13 hours of studying per week. These numbers help explain why so many capable students get off course in college. It's difficult to learn complex subjects with so little time spent in Quadrants I and II.

WHAT TO DO IN QUADRANTS I AND II

So what do Quadrant I and II actions look like? In college, Creators attend class regularly. They take good notes. They do all assignments to the best of their ability. They schedule conferences with their instructors. They create study groups. They organize their notes and study them often. They predict questions on upcoming tests and carry the answers on 3 × 5 study cards. No external urgency motivates them to take these purposeful actions. They create their own urgency by a strong commitment to their valued goals and dreams.

By contrast, Victims spend much of their time in Quadrants III and IV, where they repeat unproductive actions such as complaining, blaming, excusing, and wasting time. Not surprisingly, they move farther and farther off course each day.

If you want to know which quadrant you are in at any moment, ask yourself this question: "Will what I'm doing now positively affect my life one year from today?" If the answer is "yes," you are in Quadrant I or II. If the answer is "no," you are probably in Quadrant III or IV.

While it is true that without a vision the people perish, it is doubly true that without action the people and their vision perish as well.

Johnetta B. Cole, former president, Spelman College

A vision without a task is but a dream, a task without a vision is drudgery, a vision and a task is the hope of the world.

From a church in Sussex, England, ca. 1730

Creators say “no” to Quadrant III and Quadrant IV activities. Sometimes the choice requires saying “no” to other people: *No, I’m not going to be on your committee this semester. Thank you for asking.* Sometimes this choice requires saying “no” to themselves: *No, I’m not going to sleep late Saturday morning. I’m going to get up early and study for the math test. Then I can go to the movies with my friends without getting off course.*

When we say “no” to Quadrants III and IV, we free up time to say “yes” to Quadrants I and II. Imagine if you spent just 30 additional minutes each day taking purposeful actions. Think how dramatically that one choice could change the outcome of your life!

Remember to reread the visualization of your dream (**Journal Entry 10**) often to help you stay motivated. Also, remember to say your affirmation (**Journal Entry 11**) each day to remind you of the personal qualities that will keep you on course to your dreams! These are both great Quadrant II actions.

JOURNAL ENTRY

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In this activity, you will assess the degree to which you are acting on purpose. **Your purpose!** As you spend more time in Quadrants I and II, you will notice a dramatic improvement in the results you are creating.

- 1 Write a list of 15 or more specific actions you have taken in the past two days. (The actions are *specific* if someone could have recorded you doing them with a video camera.)
- 2 Using an entire journal page, draw a four-quadrant chart like the example in the article.
- 3 Write each action from your list in Step 1 in the appropriate quadrant on your chart. After each action, put the approximate amount of time you spent in the activity. For example, Quadrant IV might be filled with actions such as these:
 1. Watched TV (2 hours)
 2. Phone call to Terry (1 hour)
 3. Watched TV (3 hours)
 4. Went to the mall and wandered around (2 hours)
 5. Hung out in the cafeteria (2 hours)
 6. Played video game (4 hours)
- 4 Write about what you have learned or relearned concerning your use of time. And as a result, what will you do that you have not been doing? Effective writing anticipates questions that a reader may have and answers these questions clearly. To dive deep in this journal entry, answer questions such as the following:
 - What exactly did you discover after analyzing your time?
 - In which quadrant do you spend the most time?
 - What specific evidence did you use to draw this conclusion?
 - If you continue using your time in this way, are you likely to reach your goals and dreams? Why or why not?
 - What most often keeps you from taking purposeful actions?
 - How do you feel about your discoveries?
 - What different choices, if any, do you intend to make about how you use time?