Time Management Matrix by Stephen Covey – Urgent vs Important

Stephen Covey, author of *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*[1] and *First Things First*[2] popularized the concept of a Time Management Matrix for prioritizing that I love (Side note: I say "popularized" because it appears Eisenhower was originally credited with using it).   The system advocates the use of four quadrants to determine the tasks you "need" to do and deciding what should be made a priority.

For those who are not familiar with it, here's a picture and a brief overview.

[3]

[4]

- In **Quadrant 1** (top left) we have important, urgent items – items that **need to be dealt with immediately.**
- In **Quadrant 2** (top right) we have important, but not urgent items – items that are important but do not require your immediate attention, and **need to be planned for**. *This quadrant is highlighted because Covey emphasizes this is the quadrant that we should focus on for long term achievement of goals*
- In **Quadrant 3** (bottom left) we have urgent, but unimportant items – items which **should be minimized or eliminated.** These are the time sucks, the "poor planning on your part does not constitute an emergency on my part" variety of tasks.
- In **Quadrant 4** (bottom right) we have unimportant and also not urgent items – items that don't have to be done anytime soon, perhaps add little to no value and also **should be minimized or eliminated**. These are often trivial time wasters

In addition to providing text examples, I'm going to have a little fun and illustrate items from each quadrant using one of my favorite comics, XKCD[5]. Note: XKCD sometimes contains strong language and is not always safe for

work. All the items in this post however are, though they do contain some swearing.
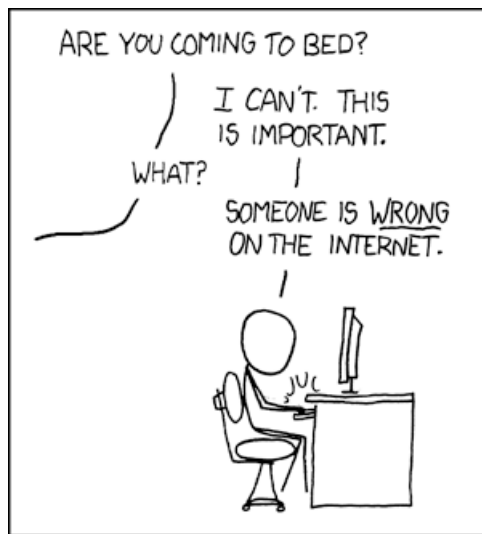
Quadrant 4 – Not Urgent and Not Important
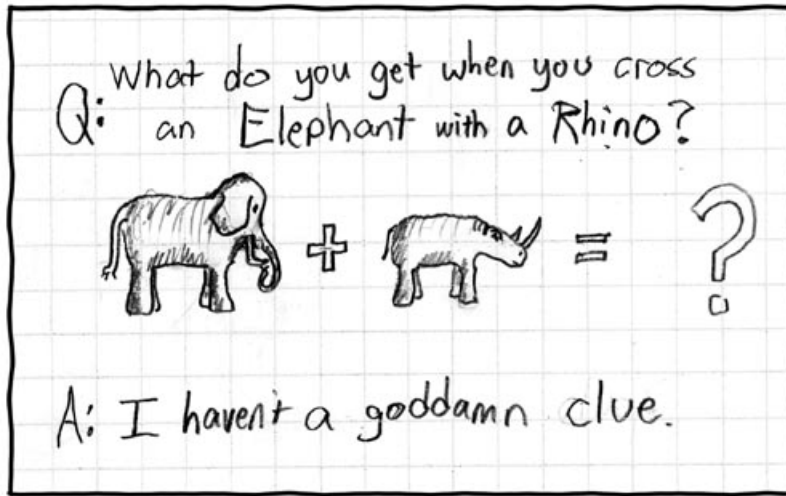
Clearly, not urgent, not important – and an obvious time waster. Other time wasters include:

- Mindless web browsing
- Too much television/channel surfing for the sake of channel surfing
- Reading lots of random RSS feeds (no matter how fast you may read them[6])
- Junk and low value email[7]

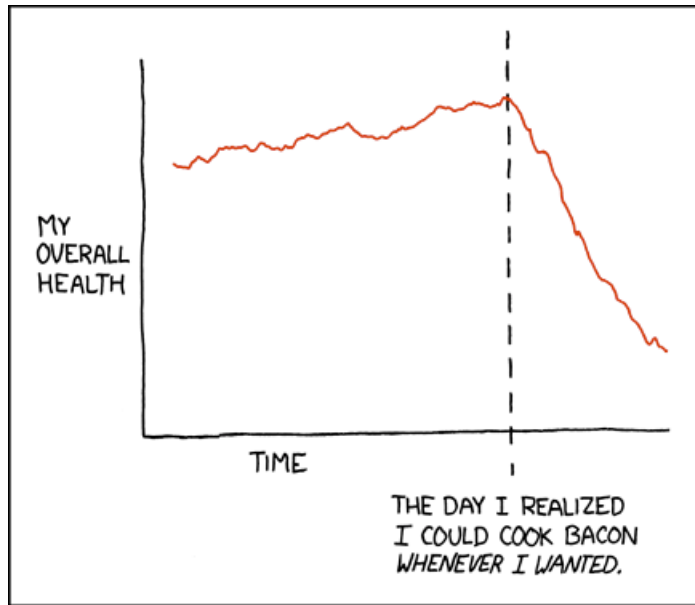## Quadrant 3 – Urgent and Not Important

My favorite examples, though I could have picked out more –

Other "Urgent" tasks that add little to no value

- Phone calls that are off topic
- Email that you have to reply to right away or it loses value ("Do you want some donuts? I have some in my office!")

Quadrant 2 – Not Urgent And Important

Your overall health is something you may take for granted today, and may not see urgency in dealing with it – but long term, we **know** it's of supreme importance.

There are some other important, yet not urgent, things that fall into this quadrant as well:

- Exercise
- Reviewing your career path
- Maintaining relationships with family/friends

Quadrant 1 – Urgent and Important
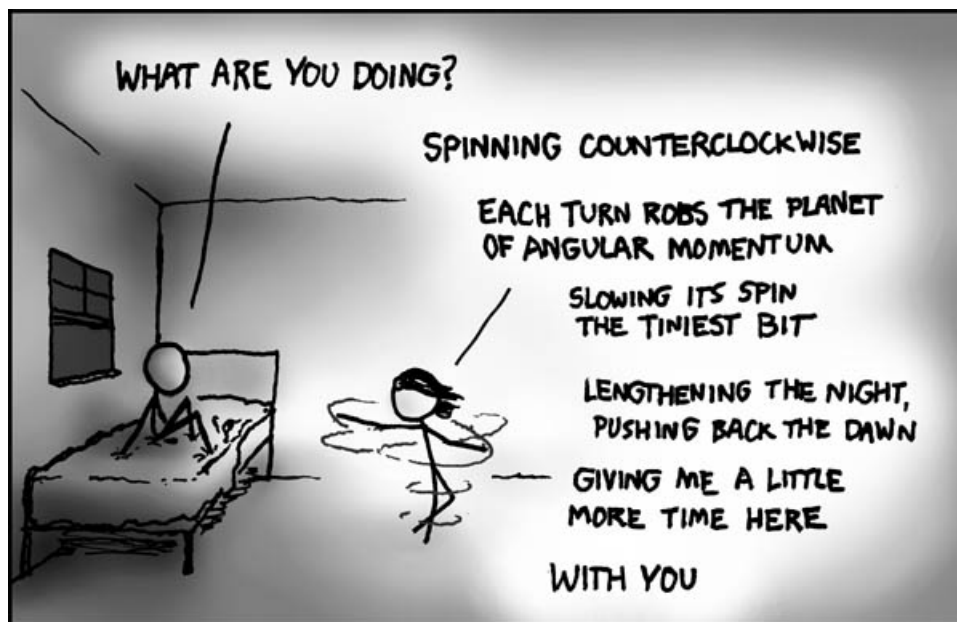
Perhaps not entirely rational, but at least her priorities are in order. Other examples:

- Family Emergencies

- Real, hard deadlines for important projects

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