

RELATING: QUALITY TIME TOGETHER

In today's busy world, one of the most important keys to a successful partnership is the ability to spend quality time with our mate. A couple who cannot play together is unlikely to stay together. However, the pressures on each person's time are considerable, and being able to create time for our partner among the myriad of tasks and conflicting expectations is far from easy. In this article, we will provide content and practical exercises to help you and your partner carve out shared quality time.

The Pressure of Time

According to Charles Handy in *The Age of Paradox* "In this turbulent world we never seem to have enough time, yet there has never been so much time" Our life expectancy has risen, and technology has reduced the level of manual labour that we have to perform. In addition, specialisation has increased efficiency and output of physical goods and services. However, alongside these developments, two factors appear to be placing an increased pressure on the availability of leisure time to spend in our relationships: more work and more information.

More Work

Not only does work now take place anytime, anywhere via e-mail, cell phones, etc., but also work hours are increasing because of increased pressure to do more with less.

'We are living to work, not working to live.'

More Information

In addition we deluged by information in all aspects of our life. Paper, TV, Radio, Pagers, Cell phones, Internet, and then expected to respond to all information immediately!, No longer the wait a few days for the return of a letter!

Time for "us"

Against this backdrop of increased work information exchange, separating out time for the relationship becomes more and more difficult. Instead couples may find themselves making a bargain of their time for money: hoping that material consumption will give meaning to the relationship, and satisfaction to their lives. Unfortunately, it does not work that way.

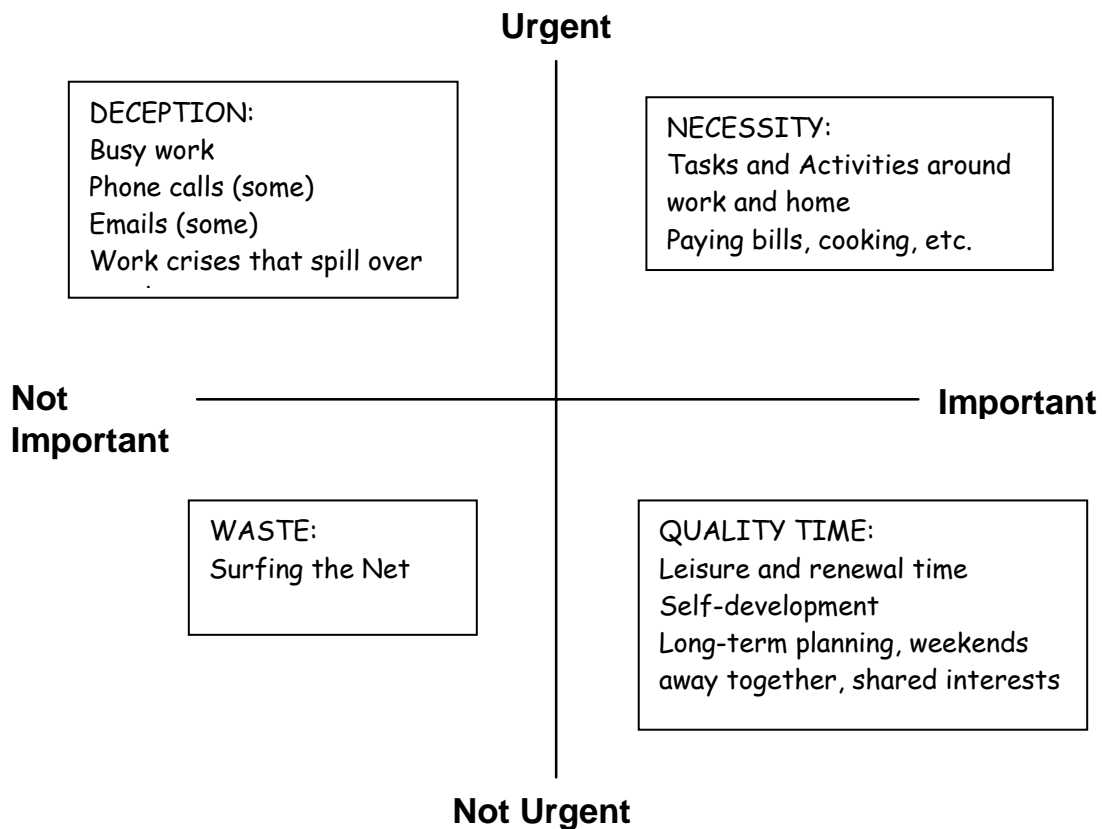
Prioritizing Quality Time Together

With this constant pressure of time, it is important to be able to prioritize tasks and activities in order to achieve time for our relationship.

Whenever we have to prioritize tasks and activities, we need to ask ourselves two critical questions:

1. Is it urgent?
2. Is it important?

From these two questions we can create four quadrants:



The Urgent/Important Quadrant is called the Quadrant of Necessity: these are tasks and activities that have to be completed on the home and work front. However, there may be other options for completing these tasks. Many time crunched couples choose to outsource routine tasks such as grocery shopping, house cleaning, garden maintenance in order to buy themselves time for the other more important quadrants.

The Urgent/Not Important Quadrant is called the Quadrant of Deception. We feel like we are being productive, but in reality this is "busy work". In today's society, responding to the pressure of time, most of us develop, according to Stephen Covey, "the Urgency Habit". We are constantly running at 100 miles an hour, not necessarily stopping to question the importance of the things we are doing. The telephone must be one of the greatest opportunities to use the Urgency

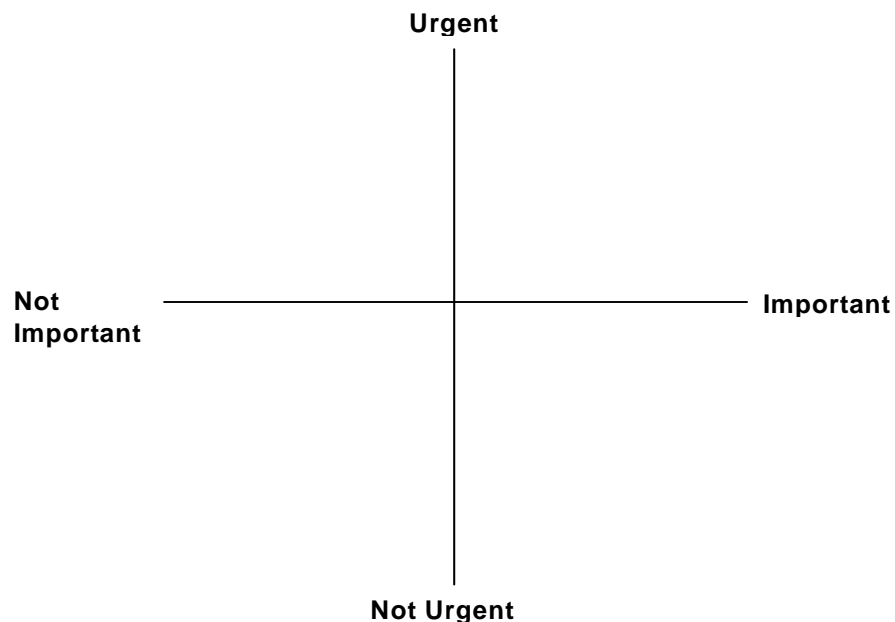
habit; it rings and what do we want to do? Of course, answer it!! Even if we are eating dinner at the time!

The Important/Not Urgent Quadrant, the Quadrant of Quality Time, is often the quadrant that encompasses our leisure time with our partner. After all, they are always there, but this work project is critical isn't it?! We tend to put this leisure time on the "back burner" to revisit at a later time. Unfortunately this often creates problems: either our marriage breaks down, or we get sick from overwork, or we forget even how to enjoy leisure time. Our Urgency habit destroys our ability to just interact and "be" with our partner. Remember, although it this goes at odds with our culture it is OK to take quiet time to renew. The body needs passive relaxation, other than sleep, to recover and regroup.

Types of tasks or activities in this quadrant include leisurely dinners without interruption, long vacations, long-range planning and couples retreats.

The Not Urgent/Not Important Quadrant, called the Quadrant of Waste, involves tasks and activities that do not need to be done. It includes such things as Surfing the web, Excessive TV watching, and excessive playing of video games, etc. Here, there can often be a fine line between waste and renewal.

Work with your Partner: Prioritising tasks and activities



Work with your partner to try to prioritize some quality time together within the next two weeks.

1. Individually list the tasks and activities that you complete on a weekly basis.
2. Now individually put the tasks into the quadrant in which you believe they belong. Use different colours in the same quadrant.
3. Discuss the following questions with your partner.
 - **Quadrant of Necessity:** To what extent were you in agreement with the tasks listed in this quadrant? Which of these tasks could you accomplish more effectively or delegate?
 - **Quadrant of Deception:** To what extent do you each of you run on the Urgency Habit: what can you do to reduce your propensity for running on adrenaline?
 - **Quadrant of Quality Time:** How can you ensure you allocate time for the Important/Not Urgent Quadrant: for Quality Time? What tasks or activities that fit in this quadrant will you begin this week? This month? This quarter?
 - **Quadrant of Waste:** What tasks or activities will you try to eliminate from the Not Urgent/Not Important Quadrant?

As you look at these ideas, remember that much of the way we approach our use of time is a habit: we act this way, because we have got used to acting this way. Changing habits can take three weeks, to three months to forever! So keep communicating with your spouse and it is possible to build your intimacy, by sharing quality time.