

Strategic Time Management

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Table of contents

Preface	1
Introductions	3
Training Norms and Guidelines for the Participants	4
Learning objectives	10
Chapter 1: A Meaningful Life	12
The Elements of Meaningful Life	14
Metaphor	15
Chapter 2: Planning	16
Chapter 3: The Art of Never Being Late	18
Worksheet: The art of never being late	22
Worksheet: Example of step breakdown	23
Worksheet: Breakdown of steps	24
Chapter 4: Time Quadrants	25
Please write down the meaning of the word Important	25
Please write down your vision for the next 20 years	33
Exercise: Identify an activity and list its important and not-important elements	38
Chapter 5: DMRs (Discretionary Mental Routines)	59
Chapter 6: Time Restricted Q1 activities (TRQ1s)	80
Chapter 7: The Art of Guarding Commitments: The GK Book and the to-do lists	81
Chapter 8: The Daily Scheduler	99
DS sheet	105
Appendix A: About the trainers	107
Appendix B: Book List	111
Appendix C: Answers to the tables	112
Appendix D: Comments Sheet & Contacts Sheet	113

In the name of Allah, the most Merciful and the most Beneficent

Preface

This book and the 'Timelenders' Strategic Time Management Workshop have evolved over many years of reflection and teaching.

At the age of thirteen, I got fascinated with time at Abbottabad Public School, a boarding school modeled after the military where we were kept on our toes round the clock. The studies were timed and so were the games, the recreation (an hour of supervised television a week) and even eating. Success was doing more in less time. I learnt that with exercise I can get away with less sleep; cold water shortened shower time; simple food was quicker to eat; the best time for difficult assignments was 4:00 am; and sleeping late was simply a bad idea...

I was moved then by a verse by Kipling which has always remained with me:

If you can fill the unforgiving minute
with sixty seconds' worth of distance run --
Yours is the Earth and everything that's in it,
and -- which is more -- you'll be a Man, my son!

Hard pressed for time during my studies at the University of Nebraska, I began experimenting with time management techniques like to-do lists.

I started my career as a project manager for a humanitarian Foundation in Chicago and later became the Director of the US operations and traveled extensively to Europe and Central Asia.

Faced with fast growth placing a huge demand on our officers' time, I decided to design a training. Having read and reflected for years, this was my chance to test my ideas.

The training proved effective and people from outside the company started requesting to join. In 1999 I conducted my first public training for thirty people.

I later founded Timerunners, a part-time affair. By the time I left the US for Pakistan, a few hundred people had been trained. I established Timelenders in Karachi in 2002.

Since then thousands of people belonging to over 75 nationalities have been trained. Our clients include local and multinational companies, not-for-profit organizations, government and the armed forces. We have trained in Kuwait, Malaysia, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, UAE and the US.

The training and the book has the input of thousands who have attended the workshops. They have taught me, enriched my learning and improved the content through their insightful comments to which I am grateful.

The definition of Strategic Time Management has constantly been revised. New ideas and modules have been added.

Three modules have spun off from the main training: the **Strategic Visions Workshop** which helps us understand the technicalities of setting up a vision whether corporate or individual; **Sleep Management Workshop** and the **Where Do You Want to Go Workshop** which helps us look at the Islamic perspective of visions.

Lastly, my gratitude is to Allah (swt) for enabling me to put this book together and I pray that this book may be of benefit to you (Ameen).

Suleman Ahmer
CEO
Timelenders

Introductions

Name:

Company:

Designation:

How long have you been with the organization?

How did you come to know about Timelenders?

Jr. High School (Matric):

High School/F.Sc./F.A:

Graduation/Post graduation:

Hobbies:

Training Norms and Guidelines for the Participants

1.0 Timings: While following time schedules is very important in all aspects of our lives, it is all the more so at training workshops. This is because training is generally aimed at “behavior modification” and thus offers us an opportunity not only to gain knowledge about the theme at hand but also to realign our self-development habits.

1.1 Our Workshops are very sequential and missing out on even a small section would necessarily entail later challenges; it would be difficult to reconnect with the group which would have moved forward and the learning deficit would not be easy to make up. Unless the participant’s absence is due to an unavoidable emergency, such absence would, at the very least, mean missing out on his or her responsibility to the sponsoring organization and also to herself or himself as a conscientious learner. Accordingly, we expect all participants to be on time at the beginning of every session of the workshop. Care must be taken to come back at the scheduled /agreed time(s) after the breaks. We shall not wait for any participant when starting or re-starting a session.

1.2 In the event of an unforeseen happening, if a participant happens to miss out on more than one and a half hours of the workshop, we shall not be able to award the certificate to her/him. We have, however, developed a fair mechanism to offset the learning deficit and enable delivery of the certificate to such participants. We encourage any participant who has missed out on one or more sessions of the workshop to come to us after the workshop hours (preferably during the workshop or otherwise after it ends) for a special one-on-one make-up session in which our trainer(s) shall happily go over the missed out sections in our own time. It would only be after this special session that we would award the certificate. We are sure that participants would agree with us on this policy which essentially comprises a rights and fairness issue (it is the right of all participants to be treated equally and it is fair that a distinction be made amongst those who attend the training fully and those who do not).

2.0 Mobile/cell phones: We believe that training is a full time assignment. Like all other organizational activities, training should be undertaken with full concentration and seriousness. A distinction should not be made between

office work which is generally considered to be “important” and “mere” training. The ringing of mobile phones disturbs the whole group and sets back the training process, often severely. Accordingly, we cannot make any allowance or compromise on mobile phone usage inside the training room. While we strongly urge participants to keep their cell phones turned off, if that is not possible, the sets may be kept in silent or vibration mode. Although emergency calls may be attended by walking out of the room, participants should appreciate that doing so not only deprives them of the required focus and continuity but also disturbs other participants. We have lately become very strict after receiving strong complaints from our participants in this regard. Thus, if any individual participant continues to move out of the room very frequently, he or she should expect a “behavior modification intervention.” We believe this is also a rights issue – as one participant’s attending to phone (even by walking out) deprives others of their right to focus. There are ample breaks in which calls can be made and taken. Sending or receiving short messages (sms) from/in the classroom is also counterproductive to the important task of training and hence not allowed.

3.0 Questions & Answers: We strongly request participants to ask questions. No question is irrelevant or trivial. We shall deal with these questions in the following five ways:

- 3.1 answer it immediately.
- 3.2 ask you to wait as the coming section(s) will cover the relevant topic which will then answer the question.
- 3.3 ask the individual to meet the trainers later for a one-on-one session (when the question is very specific to the questioner).
- 3.4 put all questions on hold for a specific time.
- 3.5 admit our lack of knowledge and try to find the answer which may be given at a subsequent time.

4.0 Workshop Language: Depending largely on the choice of the participants (and partially on the facility of the trainers), the training shall be conducted in English, Urdu or a mix of both the languages (as is often the case in most

Pakistani organizational settings). Sometimes we may have participants who are totally unfamiliar with Urdu and in such cases the training would be conducted in English. This shall be clarified at the outset of the training. During an all English session, we shall sometimes use Urdu (especially poetry) which we shall translate for our English speaking friends.

5.0 Design of the folder: The folder which has been provided to all participants for use in the workshop has been specially designed and includes the following features:

5.1 Sheets of punched paper have been provided; it is strongly recommend that these sheets be used for note-taking and be subsequently inserted into the folder so that all the notes and handouts are in one place.

5.2 All of our workshops undergo continuous changes. Accordingly, when a major section is re-written or developed anew old participants would be informed via email; they may then download the material from our website, print it and place it in this manual.

6.0 Getting the most out of this workshop:

6.1 The brain performs different functions in the body. Comprehension and expression of ideas are two distinct functions of the brain and amongst these two functions expression of an idea is higher in complexity. Whenever the brain is given a cue that an idea will have to be expressed together with being understood and comprehended, the brain sequences the information differently and comprehension is automatically increased. Also, the person is more attentive knowing that this information has to be reproduced.

The best way to get the most out of this workshop would be to make an intention of passing on the knowledge gained to at least one person, preferably who is close to the officer – and as soon as possible. Please also keep in mind that as a part of participants' homework individuals will be asked to deliver condensed versions of the sections of this workshop to someone who is close to them. Generally participants would be asked to share the experience (of sharing the knowledge) the next day. This training delivery does not have to be very elaborate; only a few minutes of instruction would also suffice.

Participants have permission to reproduce all our training materials including the multi-media presentations; they are free to use it to train others and also to

make further copies. Of course, it remains their moral obligation to acknowledge the source.

6.2 When someone is spoken to, the listener is usually doing three things:

- a. The act of hearing, which is a mechanical action.
- b. Comprehension, in which the listener is making sense of what is being heard by comparing it with all the relevant data that is available in the brain.
- c. Judgment, in which the listener decides on the authenticity of the information received and the usefulness or the lack of it (for example the information may be correct but the listener may decide that it is not relevant to him/her or that it has limited or no use).

Since (b) and (c) cannot happen without (a), we can easily declare that (a) is a pre-requisite. Similarly it is clear that the better the comprehension, the better the judgment.

One of the most common errors that normal listeners make is trying to do both comprehension and judgment at the same time. So as individuals try to comprehend information while it is still in the process of arriving and as they comprehend it, they are also in the judging mode, many a times they arrive at a judgment before the complete information has arrived. Since the judgment has been made, the mind then tunes off to later pieces of information which could have resulted in a different judgment had those were also factored in. In general, this is called premature judgment.

Also, judgment takes away brain resources which were better suited for comprehension at that time, thus impairing our comprehension.

Premature judgment is one of the major reasons behind a lot of unnecessary conflict and misunderstanding.

Here are a few steps that we propose – and which participants would find valuable in getting the best out of this workshop:

1. Suspend judgment till all the information has been received. If some information is not clear, then a question should be asked to fill in the information gap.

2. If there is a lot of information (anything that goes on for more than five minutes), please take notes so that not only the important points but their sequencing is preserved.

3. Once the information has been gained, participants should calmly analyze the information and then proceed to make a judgment. Also, judgment can be delayed to a later, quieter time.

Our workshop is interspaced with breaks, group exercises, simple stories and anecdotes which provide ample time for judgment of critical ideas.

7.0 Reference manual vs. textbook: Please do note that this is a reference manual; during the workshop we shall be going back and forth in the manual. We apologize for any inconvenience that this may cause. Our workshops are dynamically structured which means that the sequence of questions and the flow of the discussions is based on the nature of the group; as we will keep restructuring the workshop flow, there is the need to move back and forth. We assure the participants that the little trouble that they would face will be well worth the payback in terms of clarity in developing concepts and improving understanding of the subject matter.

8.0 Quizzes: Quizzes might be given at various times during the workshop. The purpose is not to embarrass any one or more participants but to make sure that the whole group understands what is being presented. If any one or more participants do not pass a quiz, they need not get worried. It happens. In that case, we will ask the not-so-successful participants to give us two hours of their time after the workshop so that we may go over their questions and concerns. Any participant who fails the quiz, shall have her or his certificate withheld until the extra time which has been sought is made available by the individual trainee(s) to go through the concepts in which they had difficulty.

9.0 General Instructions:

9.1 Pre-workshop questionnaire: Please fill out the pre-workshop questionnaires if not already done by this time.

9.2 Names for certificates: Please fill out the sheet which will be circulated for ascertaining the correct and full names to be written on the certificates. Please fill this sheet whether you are a new participant

or are repeating the complete workshop. Please do not fill it out if you are a guest.

- 9.3 **Blank sheets:** Please use the blank sheets for taking notes – but remember to be environmentally friendly by using as little paper as possible.
- 9.4 **Name on the manual:** Participants are requested to please write their names on the manuals and keep them securely at all times.
- 9.5 **Valuables:** All valuables like mobile phones must be kept on the person of the participants – and especially so when leaving the training room, especially when going for lunch and breaks. The organizers are unable to assume any responsibility for loss of misplaced or lost valuables.
- 9.6 **Comfortable atmosphere and regulating temperature:** It is important that the participants feel comfortable. Therefore, they are requested to please inform the Workshop Coordinator immediately if the air-conditioning or the heating is either too high or too low. We highly recommend that participants bring a coat or jacket with them to the training to counter cold.
- 9.7 **Soft copies:** Soft copies of selected slides of the workshop presentation are available on 'Timelenders' website (www.timelenders.com).
- 9.8 **Assistance:** Participants should contact the Workshop Coordinator for any assistance.

The learning objectives of the Strategic Time Management Workshop

By the end of the workshop you should have learnt the following concepts in details

1. Technical definition of Strategic Time Management (STM)
2. The importance of technical meanings of words
3. The concept of Pony
4. The concept of Discretionary Mental Routines (DMRs)
5. Uniformity of DMRs
6. The link between 'Determination' and 'Promises'
7. How to increase determination
8. The universal consequences of breaking promises
9. Prioritization
10. The Eisenhower Grid as a basis of prioritization
11. Identifying and handling different Quadrant activities
12. Handling interruptions through filters
13. Internal vs. External Q1s
14. The art of never being late
15. The concept of the Time Restricted Q2 (TRQ2) and Time Restricted Q1 (TRQ1) activities
16. Managing promises through the GK book and to-do lists
17. Keeping appointments through the Daily Scheduler

You would have been introduced to the following concepts briefly

1. The concept of the vision
2. The importance of planning
3. Leadership and its role in Strategic Time Management

You would have been introduced to the following terms:

1. Vision
2. Important
3. Urgent
4. Buffer
5. Q1, Q2, Q3 and Q4 activities

You would have at least done the following:

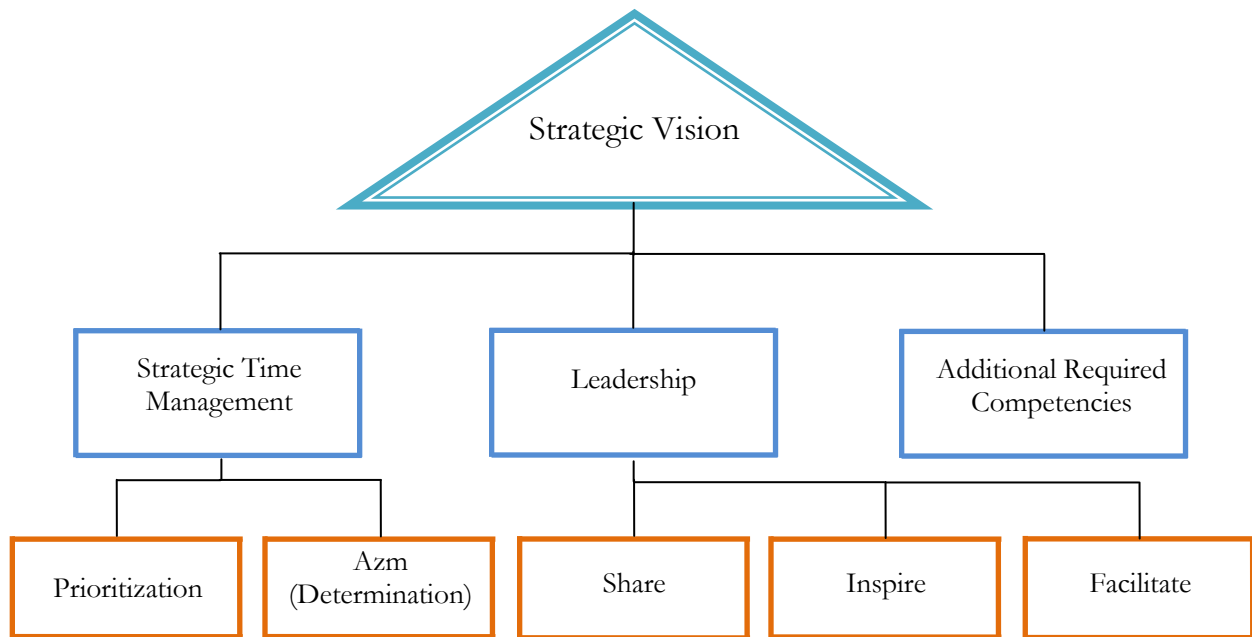
1. Done an exercise demonstrating that different people have different perceptions of the same words.
2. Completed the important/enjoy grid
3. An exercise to identify different Time Quadrant activities
4. Started to fill out the GK book
5. Partially worked on all the five to-do lists
6. Charted some of your assignments on the Daily Scheduler
7. Shared some of the concepts with someone outside the course
8. Done time estimation exercise in 'the art of never being late'.

A Meaningful Life

1. If you were to look back at your life now, would you like to say that you have tried to create a meaning in your life?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. I don't care

2. If you were to look back at your life at the time of your death, would you like to say at that time that you have tried to create a meaning in your life?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. I don't care

Meaningful Life

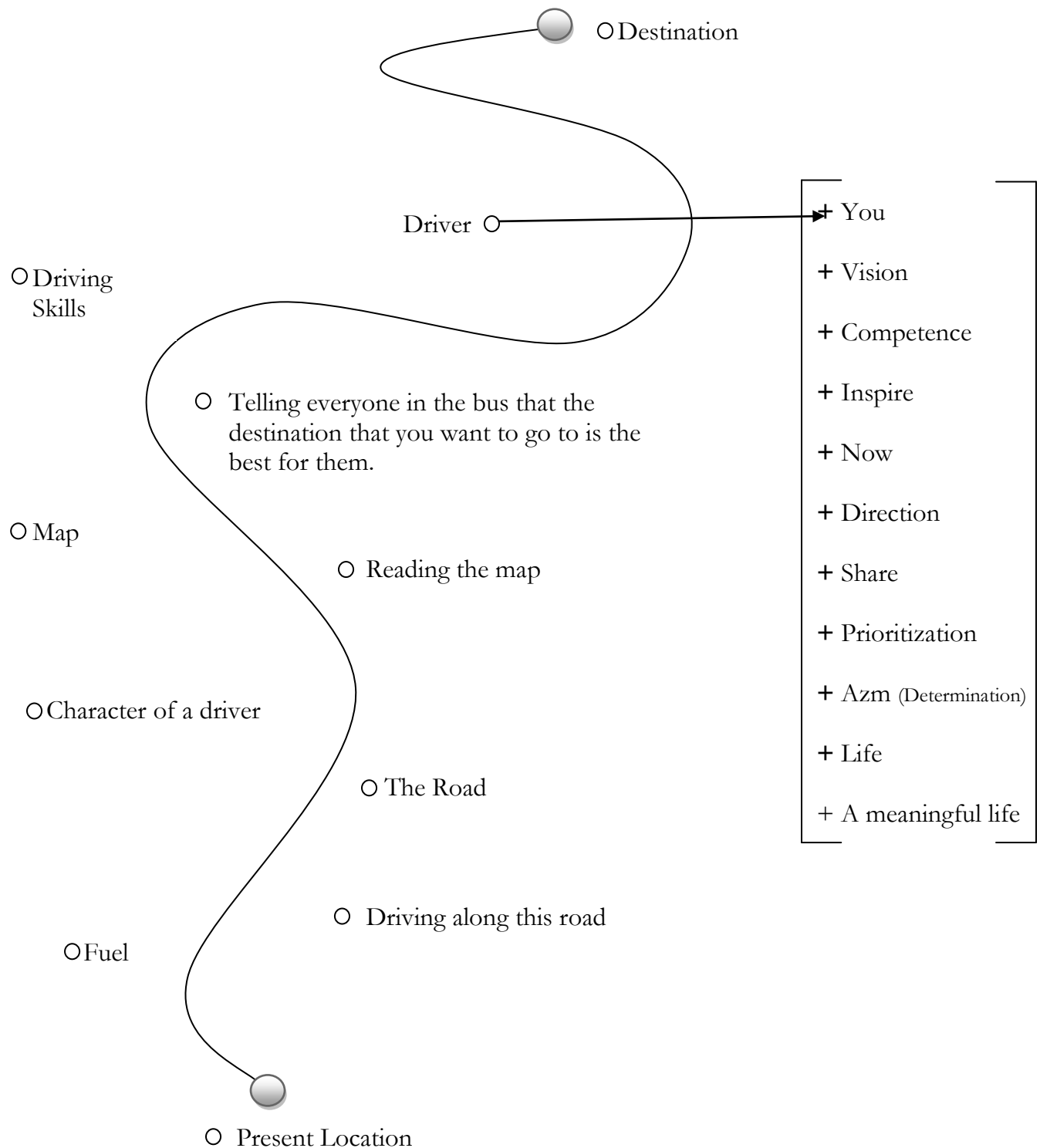


The Elements of Meaningful Life

Meaningful life has the following four elements:

1. **Strategic Vision:** A vision which is independent of time and correct.
2. **Strategic Time Management:** The ability to prioritize our day according to a strategic vision and then to accomplish these prioritizations through *Azm* (determination).
3. **Leadership:** Leadership is defined as the ability to share our vision with others and to inspire and facilitate others in pursuing the shared vision. The key element behind the ability to inspire others to pursue the shared vision is a character worthy of that vision.
4. **Additional Required Competencies:** The competencies that are required in addition to Strategic Time Management and Leadership for the success of the vision. Competence is knowledge, skills and abilities. For example, our vision of scaling Mount Everest will also require mountaineering skills.

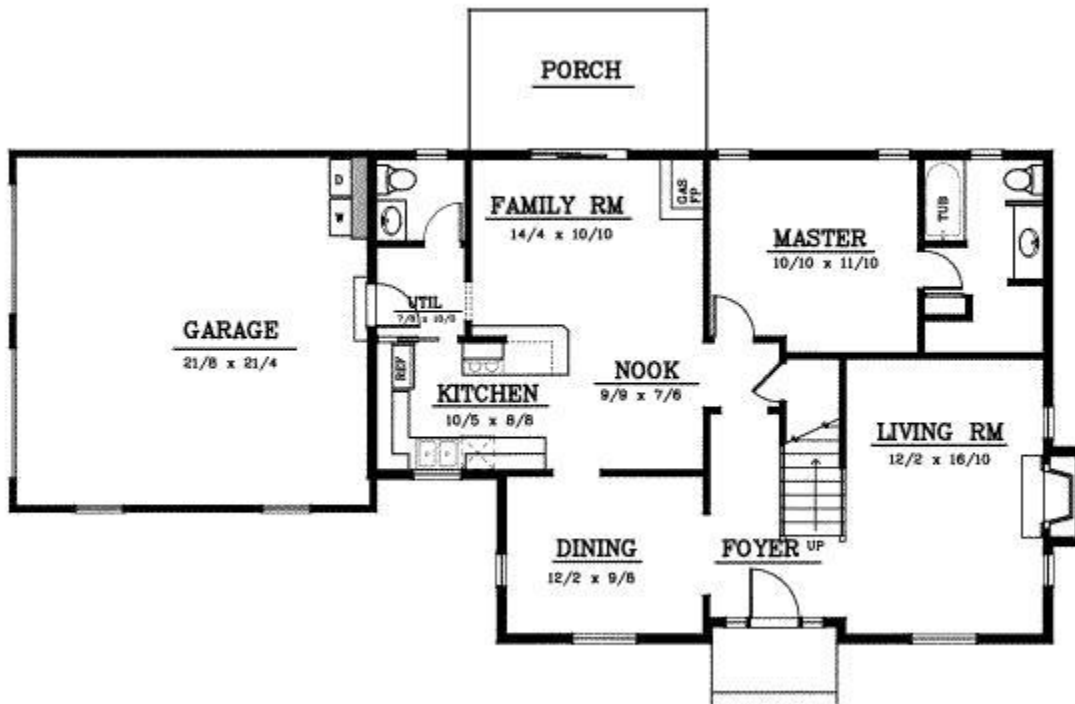
Metaphor: You are taking a bus filled with people to a destination.



Chapter 2: Planning

Steps that we take before building a house:

- We look at our requirements
- We view our budget
- We decide on our location
- We hire an architect





“We can safely conclude that it is unwise to start building a house without a vision and a plan.”

Just as it is unwise to start building your house without a plan, it is unwise to start your day, your week, your month, your year and your life without a vision and a plan.

We at Timelenders suggest that before we start our day we should invest

- At least 45 minutes to envision and plan our day
- At least 4 hours to envision and plan our week
- At least 8 hours to envision and plan our month
- And at least 3 days to envision and plan our year

Chapter 3: The Art of Never Being Late

*"Some people resemble a cheap watch. They are not dependable"*¹

Imagine two individuals: Ahmed and Kashtiello. Ahmed is punctual. Whether it is an official meeting or a social event, he is always there on time. The best part is that even on informal settings, he is never late.

His colleagues at office know that when Ahmed says that he will come at 2:20 pm, it is 2:20 pm, not a minute more or less. For social events like a marriage ceremonies, if the invitation is for 9:00 pm, he will be there no matter how many people show up. Even at home, if he says that he will return from work at 6:00 pm then that is 6:00 pm. His wife and kids know that he will be there because that is how Ahmed is: **punctual!**

Ahmed lives in a real world of changing situations, traffic jams and emergencies and everyone knows that Ahmed will inform and renegotiate his appointment in advance in the event of an extraordinary situation.

Mr. Kashtiello, on the other hand is exactly opposite to Ahmed. He feels that life should not be so strict. 2:00 pm for him means anytime between 2:00 pm and 3:00 pm. He believes that if one makes it to a meeting, regardless of being late, then that should be sufficient as life is too imperfect to allow people to be on time. If he is running late then people should realize that this is the norm of the world and should guess themselves that something must have come up.

At home he believes that his wife and children should be considerate enough to also understand that when he says that he will be coming at 6:00 pm then this means that it could be anywhere between 6:00 pm and 7:30 pm. He believes that happy go lucky lifestyle is the way to go.

¹ <http://www.naphill.org/posts/tftd/thought-for-the-day-sunday-march-27-2011/>

Who would you like to work for, hire or marry?

Here is a question that demands an honest answer: if all other attributes were the same—education, competence, looks etc—and you had the choice of working for, hiring or marrying either Ahmed or Kashtiello, who would you choose? Close your eyes, imagine the personalities and answer.

I can assure you that you would choose Ahmed.

If I were to ask you why? You would give me many reasons but the most important would be that Ahmed is predictable. You can count on him. He is dependable.

In a workshop in Abu Dhabi I asked the participants to tell me what attributes come to mind about a person who is never on time as opposed to someone who is always on time. Here are the attributes that the group came up with:

Ahmed	Kashtiello
Dependable	Undependable
Trustworthy	Irresponsible
Responsible	Careless
Organized	Inconsiderate towards others
Respectable towards others	

The interesting thing is that the image that comes to mind for Kashtiello may not be true but you would agree that the image is a damaging one.

Who would you like to be?

This is your choice. If you say that you would like to be like Ahmed then we are on the same page and if you feel that you would like to be like Kashtiello then I would recommend that you reconsider. Please check with people around you: friends, colleagues and family members and ask them as to what they think of someone like Ahmed and Kashtiello. You will be amazed at

the responses that you would get and I have great hope that these responses may help you to change your perception.

The art of never being late

Ahmed and people like him follow the art of never being late and it is very simple. It has two elements:

1. Correct time estimation

The first is to correctly estimate the time for all activities. Of course, we can't become too scientific in this but a good guess is what we are looking at. So if this is traveling somewhere then how much time would it take from the beginning to the end? Similarly, if this is writing a report or working on a project then how long will it take?

All it takes is to sit down and calculate the steps that an activity takes and individually calculate the time for each step and then add it up; the more complex the activity is, the more steps you should divide the task into.

For example if you are going to catch a flight that takes off at 5:30 pm? Work backwards from the time that you plan to be at the airport and estimate the time that it requires you to be ready and travel to the airport. This will look like this:

Activity	Estimated Time	Time
Flight time		5:30 pm
Arrive at the airport		4:00 pm
Travel to the airport	30 minutes	3:30 pm
Taking the luggage from the home and loading up the car and taking the car out of the garage.	10 minutes	3:20 pm
Shower and getting ready	20 minutes	3:00 pm
Packing up	20 minutes	2:40 pm

The interesting thing about breaking up an activity is that you would get a realistic picture. For you to catch a flight at 5:30 pm, you would need to start moving at 2:40 pm.

Now go ahead and apply the same concept to other activities in your life.

2. Keeping a buffer

I define a buffer as:

The time incorporated into an activity that accounts for delays that can be anticipated.

For example in the above example, we can have traffic delays or a flat tyre. The length of the buffer differs from situation to situation. For example in the above case you may decide to keep a 15 minutes buffer. This means that you need to start moving at 2:25 pm and not 2:40 pm.

A couple of simple exercises in the following pages will help you further solidify this concept.

Exercise 3.1: The art of never being late

Determine the point of departure, point of arrival and the estimated time that it takes you from the point of departure to the point of arrival.

Journey (Home to office, home to the workshop location, etc.):

Point of departure (Drawing room, dining room, etc.):

Point of arrival (Office desk, seminar room, etc.):

Estimated time (A):

Example of step breakdown between point of departure and arrival

Journey name: Home to office

Point of departure: Drawing room

Point of arrival: Office workstation

	Breakdown of steps	Time estimation
1	Drawing room till the ground floor of the building	1.5 min.
2	Ground floor to the car in the parking lot	1.0 min.
3	Drive to the company's location	12.0 min.
4	Searching for parking and parking the car	4.0 min.
5	From the parking to the office building	1.25 min.
6	Ground floor to the office workstation	2.0 min.
	Total	21.75 min.

Ex. 3.2: Breakdown of steps between point of arrival and departure and time estimation of each step

Go back to exercise 3.1 and copy what you had written as your point of departure and point of arrival. Also, take the Estimated Time (A) and put it down below.

Journey name: _____

Point of departure: _____

Point of arrival: _____

Estimated Time (A): _____

Now please break down the activity into different steps (try to have at least 6 steps). Once done then independently estimate the time for each step and then add them up. This will give you Total Estimated time (B).

	Breakdown of steps	Time estimation
1		
2		
3		
4		
5		
6		
	Total estimated time (B)	

Now that you have both A and B, please use the following equation to calculate the percentage difference between our general estimation and our estimation after steps breakdown:

$$\% \text{ off} = \frac{(\text{Difference of A \& B}) \times 100}{A} = \text{_____} \%$$

Chapter 4: Time Quadrants

Worksheet 4.1: Please write down the meaning of the word Important

Important:

Webster dictionary defines 'Priority' as 'the fact or condition of being prior; precedence in time, order, importance, etc.' And prioritization is defined as 'to arrange (items) in order of priority'.

As discussed in Chapter 1, words have different shades of meanings for people. For many, prioritization means arranging items in terms of importance while for others, prioritization means arranging items in terms of time; referring to the fact as to which item will be done prior to others.

In this book and workshop, we will use the term priority and prioritization to mean precedence in time and I would further add the decision of doing and not doing something as a part of prioritization; I would like to broadly define prioritization as to what is to be done first, what is to be done next and what is to be not done at all.

At almost every step in our life we are faced with choices whether it is with what to dress in the morning, what to have for breakfast, what means of transport to take to work to more complex decision making in choosing careers, life partners and deciding who to side with in conflicts.

For difficult choices, we first attempt to decide whether they can be done together and if yes, then this is the course we take but for choices where it has to be one or the other, we are forced to decide. It is like a fork in a road; one has to take either the right or the left side of the fork to continue the journey.

In others words, we are faced with the task of deciding about what should be done or not done and from things that we decide should be done, we are required to prioritize; should we take care of our emails first and then work on the report or should we take care of the report and then look after our pending emails? Should we have dinner after arriving at home and then talk to our son about poor grades or should we talk to him first and then have dinner. From simple situations to far more complex problems, the need to prioritize is always there.

Most of the prioritizations that we take are nothing but a set of Discretionary Mental Routines (DMRs)², which are developed over a life time of experiences and education. Unless we face something very complex and new and our brain is forced to work consciously, our response is automatic relying upon thousands of prioritization DMRs working in tandem.

As discussed in the section on DMRs, it is very possible that some of the DMRs that we carry are inefficient or incorrect. The person who carries the most effective and correct DMRs stands a better chance of success in life than a person who carries ineffective, inefficient and incorrect DMRs.

Let us take an example of three individuals having different motor and thought DMRs. Based on these DMRs let us look at how they react to Nadir who approaches them to point out a mistake that they have made:

Rashid, on being corrected becomes alert to the advice. He carefully notes what Nadir has said, looks deeply at the mistake that he has made and the context in which the mistake took place. He not only takes this correction graciously but also deeply feels indebted to Nadir. He then thanks Nadir from the depth of his heart and requests him to correct him again if he were to make other mistakes. Genuinely correcting someone is a disconcerting act but after this exchange Nadir feels relaxed and validated.

Ali, on being corrected becomes defensive. Before giving the advice proper thought, he requests for more information and argues that Nadir might not have seen or heard accurately. Later on he grudgingly acknowledges his mistake and thanks Nadir ceremoniously. Nadir's level of discomfort has been raised after the exchange.

Basim, on being corrected feels insulted and is enraged. "Who gave you the right to correct me?" He snarls and continues, "We all have shortcomings and I am aware of mine. I don't

² If not discussed till now, shall be discussed in detail in this workshop

need others to point them to me. It would be much better if you keep your eyes on your own mistakes rather than finding faults with others!” Nadir feels deeply hurt.

For Rashid, Ali and Basim, the reactions portrayed above are a result of many simple and complex DMRs working together. Who do you think has more chances of success in life? Who do you think has the least chance of success?

We would all agree that Rashid has the most chances of success. By encouraging constructive criticism he can better himself in many aspects of his life.

In other words we can say that Rashid has better and more effective DMRs than both Ali and Basim. This could be a result of a better learning and education in life, excellent mentors or instructional life experiences which have created mature and powerful DMRs.

In face of choices, when we are forced to decide and prioritize, our related set of DMRs become active and the wisdom of our prioritization depends upon the maturity, correctness and effectiveness of the DMRs that we have.

In the following section, we shall be introducing a simple yet very powerful and elegant framework for prioritization called the Time Quadrant System, which can be learnt and internalized as our own set of DMRs.

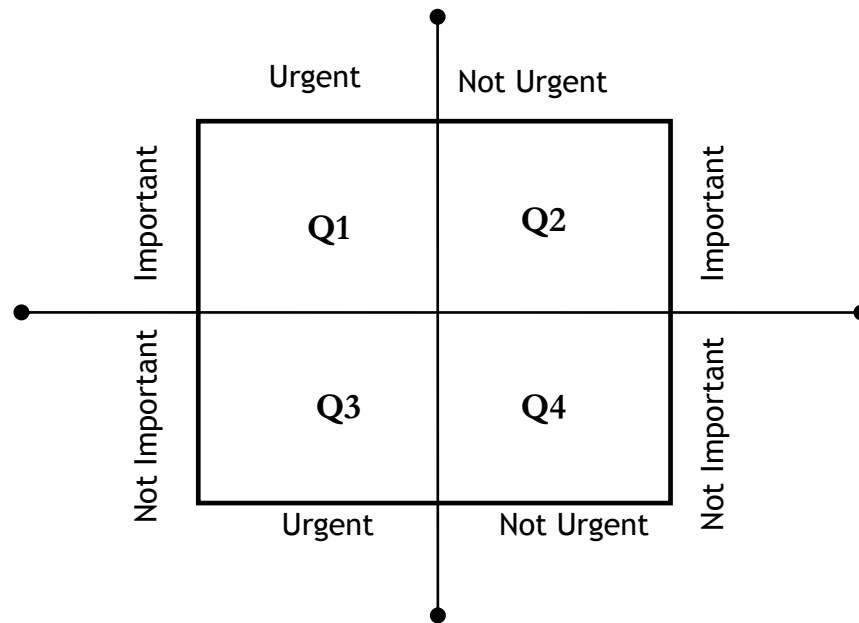
Dwight Eisenhower³, the former president of the US, is quoted to have said that ‘*Things which are important are seldom urgent and things which are urgent are seldom important.*’ This invaluable fact that Eisenhower highlighted about Important and Urgent has led to a grid called the Eisenhower Grid.

	Important	Urgent
Option 1	✓	✓
Option 2	✓	✗
Option 3	✗	✓
Option 4	✗	✗

This grid points out that things which are important can be urgent or non urgent and things which are urgent can be both important and not important.

³ Born on October 14, 1890 and was president of the US from 1953 to 1961.

Stephen Covey in his landmark book ‘The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People’ depicted this concept in the form of Time Quadrants⁴:



American Heritage dictionary gives the mathematical technical definition of Quadrant as ‘any of the four areas into which a plane is divided by the reference axes in a Cartesian coordinate system.’ Generally Quadrant is defined as one fourth of a circle.

For ease, the four options that come out of the Eisenhower Grid now translate into the four Quadrants as shown by Covey in which Quadrant 1, or Q1 are activities which are important and urgent, Q2 are activities which are important and not urgent, Q3 are activities which are not important but urgent and Q4 are activities which are not important and not urgent.

As said earlier, the Time Quadrant System is a very powerful framework, which can be learnt and internalized. As we proceed in developing the Time Quadrant System, you will find many of the concepts and DMRs that you are using validated while you would also discover that some DMRs that you have need to be reviewed and refined.

We shall develop the Time Quadrant System in three stages:

⁴ Covey has not given the reference of Eisenhower, it is our assumption that he has picked it from Eisenhower as Covey writes that the material for the Seven Habits came out of his studying success literature of the last 200 years. Covey politely declined to respond or be interviewed on this issue.

First, we shall learn to identify all of our activities according to the Quadrants as to what activities in our life are Q1s, Q2s, Q3s and Q4s.

Secondly, we shall learn the different handling strategies for each of the four Quadrants.

Thirdly, we shall see that the four Quadrants have a specific relationship with each other leading to a model of intervention which can be applied to complex situations.

Our research shows that Eisenhower was the first one to introduce the important and urgent grid but the concept found wide popularity due to the phenomenal success of Covey's 'The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People'.

I started teaching Time Quadrants in 1997. It started off from teaching colleagues at work and then moved on to weekend courses in Chicago.

The first challenge that I started to face was that whenever I would teach quadrants, there would be a lot of disagreement amongst the class on which activity falls in which quadrant. I was perplexed and disturbed with this recurring pattern. One day I asked the class to define the words important and urgent and to my amazement found that people defined these words differently. I had found the reason for the disagreement!

I found that not only did people have different meanings in their minds for these words but also the meanings of important and urgent were overlapping.

Following are the responses from a group of people⁵ when they were asked to define 'important' during one of our trainings:

1. Top priority work which produces best results.
2. Most urgent
3. Essential
4. Something which should be taken seriously without specifying time
5. Highlighted
6. Something which has an impact
7. Cannot be ignored
8. Something that results in high value
9. Something of extreme value for this life and hereafter
10. Must be done or achieved

⁵ Strategic Time Management Training, May 2003, Karachi Marriot Hotel

11. Needs to be done immediately

Looking at the responses it is evident that there are shades of differences in how people define important. For example, something of extreme value for this life (entry number 9) may not have to be done immediately (entry number 11).

Similarly, when the same group was asked to list their understanding of the word ‘urgent’, the following list emerged:

1. Most important at that moment.
2. Something to be implemented immediately.
3. Timely action is required.
4. To be settled immediately.
5. Something which has immediate impact.
6. To be done immediately.
7. Immediate action.
8. Top priority.
9. To be done immediately to remain on track.

By looking at the above list, not only the shades of difference become apparent but also by comparing it to the definitions of important, we clearly see that in people’s minds the meanings of urgent and important overlap. This is a pattern which repeats over and over again whenever we do trainings.

It became apparent to me that to continue teaching this, I would have to articulate some definition of these words which we could agree upon or in other words standardize the meanings. So since teaching the material especially from 1999 onwards, the definitions of ‘Important’ and ‘Urgent’ have evolved and we shall be presenting them to you in the upcoming sections.

Curiously, Covey has not defined these words. This could be due to his allowing people to have their own version of the meanings or could have been an academic oversight⁶.

⁶ As stated earlier in the footnote, Covey declined to answer or be interviewed on why he didn’t define the words ‘Important’ and ‘Urgent’.

Important

Anything that takes us towards our Strategic Vision is called important and anything that doesn't take us towards or takes us away from our Strategic Vision is called not important.

A vision is the picture of the future that we want to see and a Strategic Vision is defined as:

Strategic Vision

A vision which is independent of time and is correct.

Possible elements of a Strategic Vision

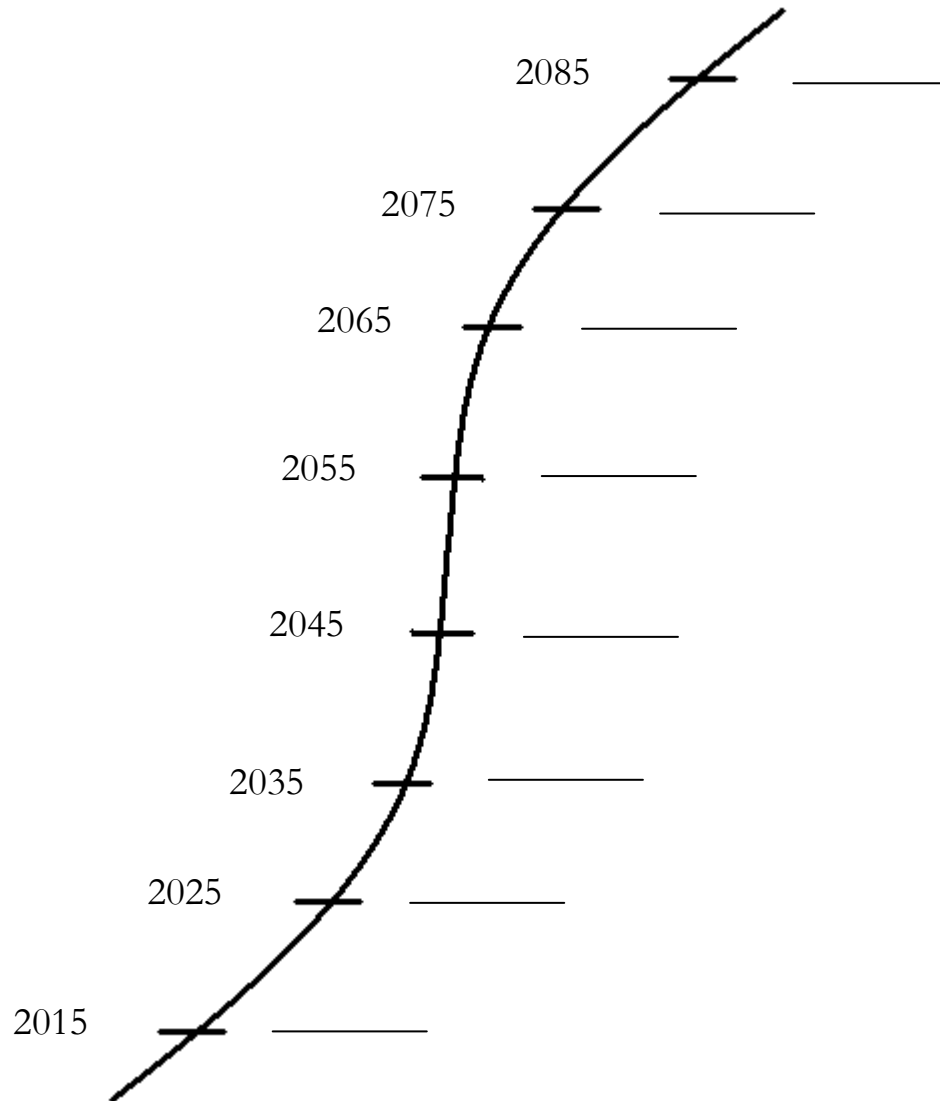
1. Good health
2. Strong and healthy relationships with family and relatives
3. Intellectual growth so as to be able to contribute positively to the society
4. Eradicating poverty and oppression from the society
5. Pleasure of the Creator
6. Being financially sound
7. Happiness
8. Satisfaction

Looking at the above elements then the following activities and things that you are doing will be important.

Possible Important activities in one's life

- | | |
|--|--|
| 1. Exercise | 10. Avoiding sins |
| 2. Balanced diet | 11. Maintaining worship |
| 3. Having a treadmill at home | 12. Developing excellence in everything we do |
| 4. Going for vacations with the family | 13. Being modest in spending |
| 5. Controlling temper | 14. Leading a simple life |
| 6. Spending time with the family regularly | 15. Being grateful |
| 7. Taking a degree | 16. Being kind to others |
| 8. Research | 17. Liking for others what we like for ourselves |
| 9. Reading relevant books | |

Ex 4.2: Please chart out your age on the line diagram:









Ex 4.3: Please write down your vision for the next 20 years:

Your age in 2035: _____















Your vision in 2035:

Ex 4.4: looking at the long term vision that you have articulated (20 years), write down important and not important activities and classify them according to whether you are doing them or not.

Imp	Doing	Activities/things
		
		
		
		

Now that we have classified our activities accordingly, let us look at another factor which clouds our decision making and this factor is when we enjoy or don't enjoy something. There are things that we do that we enjoy or don't enjoy. If we are not careful, our decision making gets clouded as we start to justify things that we enjoy as important and vice versa instead of unemotionally keeping our vision as our basis for this classification.

Ex 4.5: So in this exercise, I would like you to further classify activities based on enjoying and not enjoying:

Imp	Doing	Enjoy	Grid lines	Activities/things
			1	
			2	
			3	
			4	
			5	
			6	
			7	
			8	

Now that we have classified our activities accordingly, let us look at another factor

Classification of activities/things which take us towards one element of our strategic vision while at the same time taking us away from another

While keeping the different elements of our Strategic Vision in sight, it will be evident that some activities would clearly fall under important while others will fall under not important: for example having a balanced diet, avoiding sins, being respectful to others etc. Similarly some activities can be seen to be clearly not important for example spending on things which are not needed, being ill mannered, having junk food, missing out on obligatory worship.

On the other hand some activities will fall in the grey area as they would be taking us closer to some elements of our strategic vision while would be taking us away from some at the same time. In this situation, we would need to weigh the positives and negatives of that activity (which elements of our vision is this activity taking us towards and which elements is it taking us away from respectively and the relative weight of those elements in question) and then make the final decision on its importance. If the positives are more than the negatives than it is important otherwise it is not important.

Let us look at an activity as an example. Suppose we would like to take our family on vacations at a time when we are financially stretched and have certain financial obligations to meet like paying off a debt. So let us look at the positives and negatives of this activity:

Activity: Taking family on vacations to another country

Positives (Important elements)	Negatives (Not important elements)
Relaxation	Financial instability
Better relationship with the family	Failure to meet financial obligations
Intellectual growth due to exposure to a new country	Failure to reach peace of mind that comes with financial stability

In many cases when we say that an activity is important, it doesn't mean that it has no 'not-important' elements in it rather its important elements outweigh its not-important elements.

Similarly, when we say that an activity is not important, it doesn't mean that it has no important element in it rather it means that its 'not important elements' outweigh its important elements.

Exercise 4.6: Identify an activity and list its important and not-important elements

Activity: _____

Important Elements (Positives)	Not-important Elements (Negatives)
1. _____	1. _____
2. _____	2. _____
3. _____	3. _____
4. _____	4. _____
5. _____	5. _____
6. _____	6. _____
7. _____	7. _____
8. _____	8. _____
9. _____	9. _____
10. _____	10. _____
11. _____	11. _____
12. _____	12. _____
13. _____	13. _____
14. _____	14. _____

Urgent

Just as we saw the need for having a technical definition of the word 'Important', we need a technical definition for the word 'urgent' as people have different perceptions of this word also. For some, 'urgent' is synonymous for high priority where as for others, priority and importance overlap.

The following definition has evolved over many years of teaching:

“Urgent is defined as anything which if not done in the present, most probably cannot be done later if you are alive and able”

Present can be defined as now or within a stipulated span of time. For example if a phone is ringing then answering this call is urgent because if it is not answered within a few seconds, it cannot be answered later. Hence according to the technical definition, answering this call is urgent. In this case, the present would be defined as a few seconds.

Another example would be to apply brakes to avoid an accident; this activity is urgent because if the brakes are not applied 'now' then you can't apply them later to avoid this particular accident. Here the present is defined as 'now'.

Please bear in mind that both 'Important' and 'Urgent' are mutually independent! It is precisely because of this that we are able to get a grid with four options. The biggest challenge that we face in teaching the Time Quadrants is to help people end the overlap of priority and value in the word 'urgent'.

Please do keep in mind that the above definition that I have articulated is not the dictionary meaning of the word urgent but rather a technical definition for developing the Time Quadrants system or the Time Matrix.

Here are the two steps for determining whether an activity is urgent:

1. Clearly define the activity in unambiguous terms. For example, there is a difference between:
 'answering calls' and 'answering a particular call'

‘watching cars passing by’ and ‘watching a particular car coming from the opposite side of the road’

‘going to sales’ or ‘going to a particular sale which is ending today’

2. Once the activity is defined, please ask a question in the passive voice: ‘If this activity is not done now, can this activity be most probably done later if I am alive and able?’ If the answer is no, then this activity is urgent otherwise not urgent.

Ex 4.7: Please apply this question to each of the activities listed below and figure out whether the activities are urgent or not^[1].

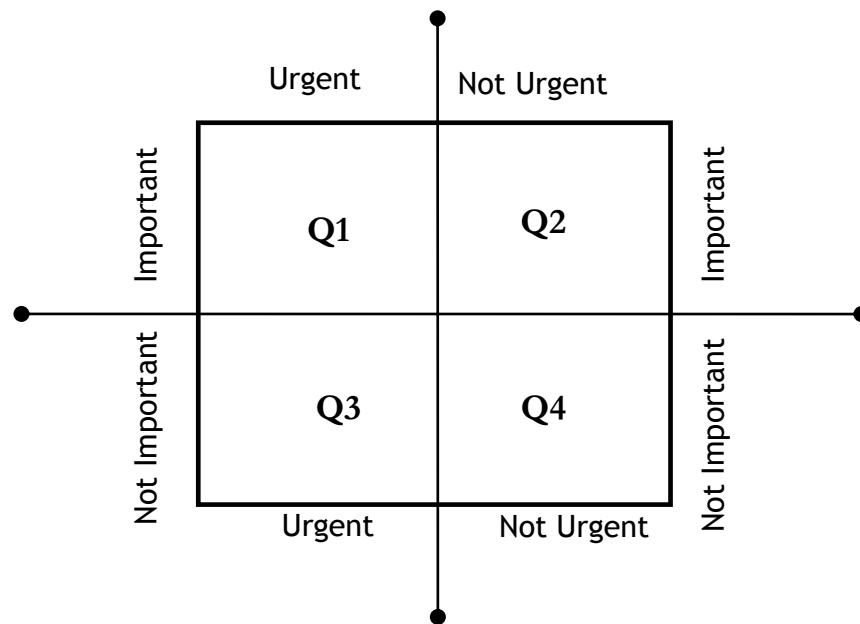
	Activity	Urgent
1	Sleeping	X
2	Watching a live cricket match	✓
3	Gossip	X
4	Exercise	
5	Seeing a particular car coming from the opposite side while driving from one city to another on a divided highway	
6	Seeking forgiveness from your spouse	
7	Hugging your child	
8	Going to a sale which is ending today	

You would have noticed as you determined the urgency/non urgency of activities listed above that urgent activity is time dependent and person independent whereas importance is person dependent and time independent and hence the logic of asking the test question in passive voice to determine urgency.

Once the urgency is determined^[2], we can now move on to determining importance and hence the classification of the quadrant in which the activity falls into. As a quick reference let us look at the Time Quadrants once again:

^[1] Please see Appendix C for the answers

^[2] To determine the quadrant in which an activity falls, we can either determine the urgency first and then determine importance or vice versa; the critical thing is that we need to make these determinations independent of one another.



Ex 4.8: Please complete the rest of the grid given below^[3]:

	Activity	Urgent	Important	Quadrants
1	Sleeping	X	✓	Q2
2	Watching a live cricket match	✓	✓ / X	Q1 / Q3
3	Gossip	X	X	Q4
4	Exercise			
5	Seeing a particular car coming from the opposite side while driving from one city to another on a divided highway			
6	Seeking forgiveness from your spouse			
7	Hugging your child			
8	Going to a sale which is ending today			

^[3] Please see Appendix C for the answers

Our prioritization DMRs get corrupted when we are not able to distinguish between urgent and important or in our understanding the meanings of the two overlap; in this case the question that we usually confront is:

‘How can an activity that is urgent be not important?’

Marketers understand the tendency of people to confuse urgency and importance and hence focus their sales pitch on urgency to increase sales. This is done by emphasizing that the sale is about to end or that the business is going out of business and the inventory is being liquidated. Apart from the assumption that inventory will be sold at throw away price, there is the subtle inclusion of urgency: a business only closes once and if this opportunity is not availed now, it would not be possible to avail it later. This noise that is created in our minds regarding urgency distracts us from the most critical question:

Is it important for me to buy this item?

Remember, every valuable thing is not important. All that glistens is not gold and all that is gold is not important. Only those things are important which take us towards our vision!

One participant of our workshop, now a friend, told me that once he bought a new pair of shoes on a sale in Dubai only to discover that he has exactly the same pair of shoes at home bought a few months ago! Welcome to the world where urgency and importance overlap.

This brings me to a juncture where I would like to point out a very destructive international and timeless *pony*.⁷

‘If something is not urgent then it means that it is not necessary to do it now!’

Because of this *pony* which lurks in our subconscious mind^[4], we keep postponing activities which are Q2s. For example, regular exercise is not urgent but it is necessary that it is done today; seeking forgiveness from God is not urgent but it is necessary that it is done now!

⁷ Pony is a slang that we use in Timelenders for misconception or a confusion.

^[4] This can very well lead to a state of self-deception or more dangerously to a negative ‘game’. In transactional analysis, game is a self deceptive routine that we unconsciously follow in our behavior to defend a position that we have taken. I would encourage you to see ‘Games People Play’ by Dr. Eric Berne, Penguin Books, 1968.

I believe that if we can take care of this *pony*, we can create a revolution in our lives. Later in the workshop, we shall learn how to institutionalize not delaying our Q2s through the Daily Scheduler and the concept of TRQ1.

Quadrant 1 or Q1 activities: Activities that are both ‘Important’ and ‘Urgent’

These are activities that are Important and Urgent at the same time. An example would be to respond to someone having a heart attack. This response takes us towards the goal of saving that person’s life (Important) and this response cannot wait (Urgent). In brief we call this a Q1 activity or just Q1.

Please do keep in mind that quadrants define and classify our actions only. External situations do not fall in quadrants. For example, the heart attack is not a Q1 activity rather the response to the heart attack is a Q1 activity. An external situation which forces us into a Q1 activity is called a ‘Q1 situation’. So the heart attack is a Q1 situation as it creates a Q1 activity for us.

Quadrant 2 or Q2 activities: Activities which are ‘Important’ but ‘Not Urgent’

Example of this quadrant would be exercising and brushing of teeth. Both of these activities are Important but they can be delayed. Not brushing our teeth today does not mean that we cannot brush them later in the day or the next day.

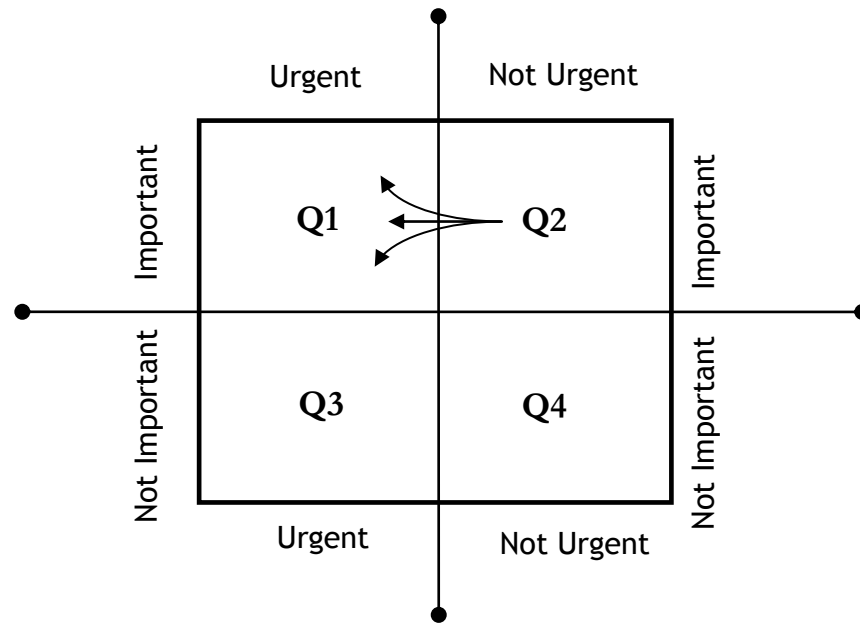
The Relation between Q1 and Q2

Looking at Q2 activities let’s ask a question: If a Q2 activity is postponed for too long, which quadrant would it move into?

A little reflection will yield the answer: Q1!

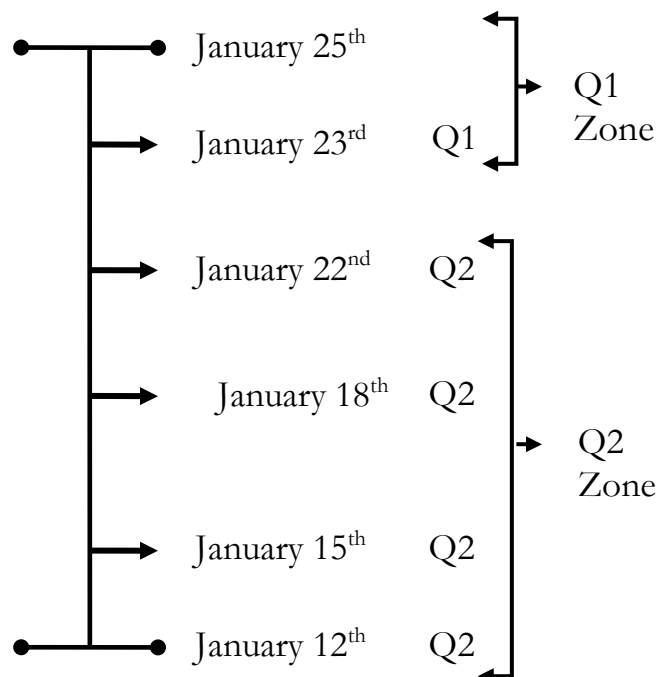
Regular car maintenance is a classical Q2 activity. If this activity is indefinitely postponed, a number of problems can arise. For example, the car can break down in the middle of the road resulting in multiple Q1 situations. Now moving the car out of the road is a Q1, making alternate arrangements to reach your urgent meeting is a Q1 and so on. So we see that neglect of one simple Q2 has resulted in not only one Q1 but multiple Q1s.

Hence we conclude that failure to perform Q2s in a particular time frame will result in having the Q2s make a transition into Q1s and most of the time when this transition takes place, multiple Q1s are generated.



Let us take another example: Suppose you are to write a report that is due on the morning of January 25th. The report will take 2 days to write. If you were to start writing the report on January 12th, it would be a Q2 activity. Similarly, if you were to start writing on January 15th, it will still be a Q2 activity. In short, if you were to start the report any time before the morning of January 23rd, it will remain a Q2 activity. On or after the morning of January 23rd it will become a Q1 activity, as it cannot be delayed any further. In other words, we can say that there are two distinct zones: the Q2 zone and the Q1 zone.

A report is due on January 25th that will take 2 days to complete.



We can easily see that if given the choice to do the report, it would be a wiser choice to start the report in the Q2 zone rather than in the Q1 zone. It is also apparent that generally—barring some exceptions that we shall discuss later—the stress level would be higher in the Q1 zone as compared to the Q2 zone. Again, most of the time higher stress levels correspond to lower quality of work.

In general terms we can say that comparatively Q1 is a high stress, low quality zone as compared to Q2 which is a low stress, high quality zone.

There is an argument that some people only work in Q1 zone and hence for them Q1 is a higher quality zone. The answer to this is that such people sometimes face lower intrinsic motivation and hence do not start their work in the Q2 zone. They wait for the job to assume a crisis proportion by entering into the Q1 zone. At this time they feel the urge to start as they do not have any option left.

This is a bad habit. Not only are such people forced to work under higher stress levels but also do not have any margins for eventualities or unforeseen circumstances. Also, we would still maintain that if these people were to do their work in the Q2 zone, their quality of work will be higher in Q2 as compared to Q1.

Like I have said earlier, there are exceptions to this simple rule which depend on the nature of the job as well as on the way a person perceives and handles stress.

Daniel Goleman in his book ‘***Working with Emotional Intelligence*** (Bantam Books: 1998)’ writes:

“The single most striking finding from brain studies of people under stress—like giving a talk in front of a critical audience—shows the emotional brain at work in ways that undermine the workings of the brain’s executive center, the prefrontal lobes, located just behind the forehead.

The prefrontal area is the site of the “working memory”, the capacity to pay attention and keep in mind whatever information is salient. Working memory is vital for comprehension and understanding, planning and decision-making, reasoning and learning.

When the mind is calm, working memory functions at its best. But when there is an emergency, the brain shifts into a self protective mode, stealing resources from working memory and shunting them to other brain sites in order to keep the senses hyper-alert—a mental stance tailored for survival.”

Hence stress primes us for ‘fight or flight’ and gives us that extra strength to ward off physical danger. So if the activity at hand requires that extra dose of adrenaline, stress is good, for example, saving oneself from drowning or running away from a mad dog.

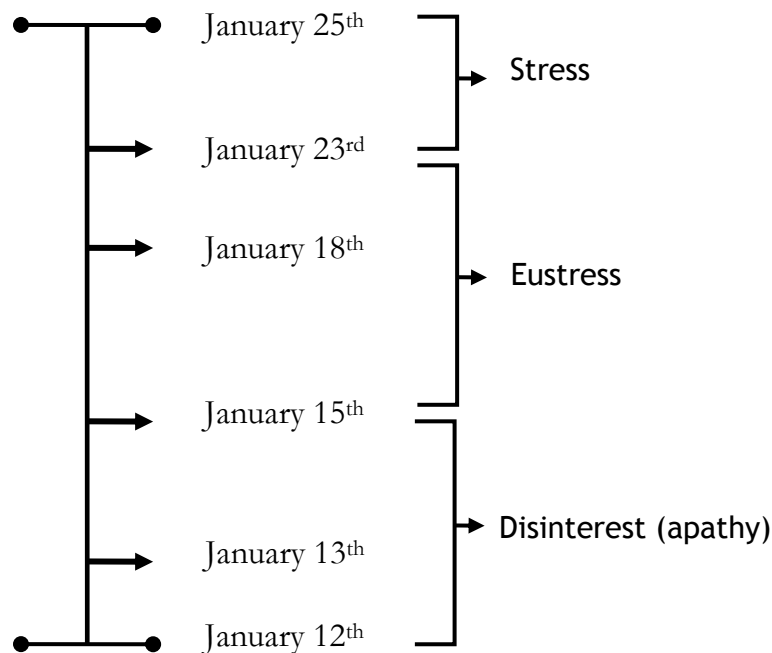
But for other activities which involve thinking and analyzing there is a clear case against stress as illustrated by the above passage.

Daniel Goleman further discusses the research that clearly indicates that moderate amount of stress is good as it creates interest and pushes us to start our work and become interested in it. Psychologists call it ‘Good Stress’ or Eustress. Eustress also corresponds to different chemicals that are being secreted in our brain as opposed to bad stress or just stress. These chemicals are called catecholamine and when secreted result in our brain feeling engaged and interested.

When a person moves beyond Eustress to stress, another chemical called cortisol comes into action which puts the brain into the emergency mode and reduces its power to think and analyze.

Now let us steer this discussion towards our quadrants. So what do Q1 and Q2 zones correspond to?

Whenever there is a task at hand, a person will move from disinterest (apathy) to interest and motivation (Eustress) to Stress.



For different people, the frontiers of these zones will differ. For someone who is doing something which has a high intrinsic value, the Eustress zone will start early.

Similarly for someone with stronger nerves, working closer to a deadline will not trigger higher levels of cortisol hence the person will not move into stress.

Where Q1 and Q2 zones give a general idea of high and low stress areas based on outside elements in terms of deadlines, the more accurate high and low stress areas are internal. Eustress and stress zones of a person are unique to him or her alone.

Each of us with a little self-observation can conclude where we stand.

Stress is also triggered by emotions such as anger, rage, frustration, anxiety, worries etc. We can safely say that when we work in the Q1 zone, triggers for stress definitely exist like worry and anxiety (whether stress results or not will vary from person to person).

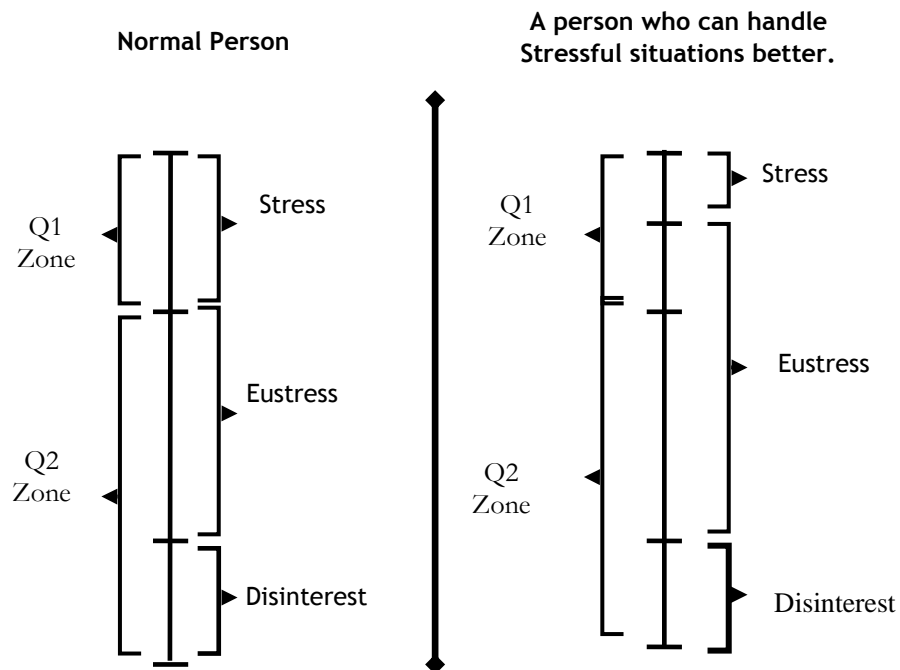
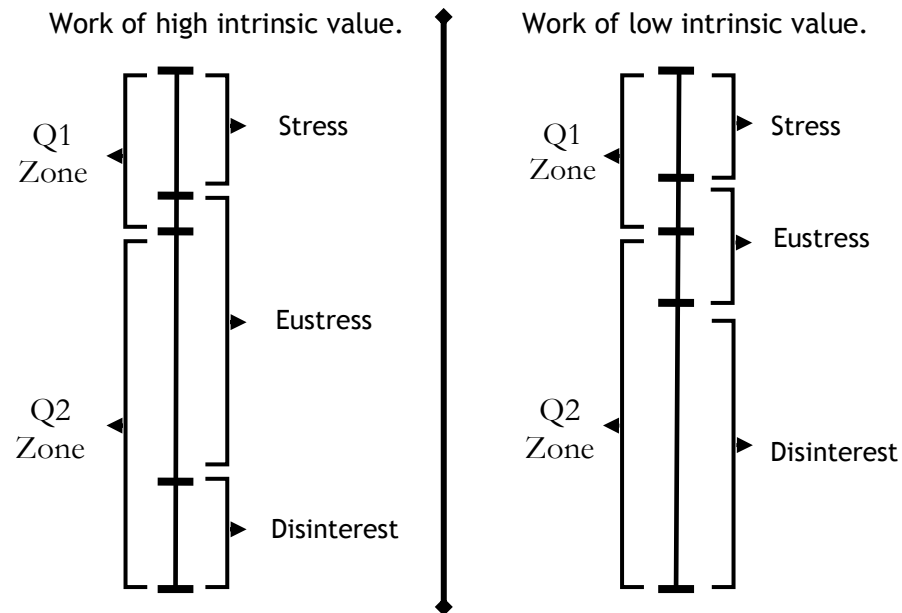
Suppose you are going on a long trip. Your car is new and you have a spare tire in the trunk. You know that you can get a flat tire but the thought that you have a spare tire will keep you reassured. For a moment consider if you do not have a spare tire. You have the same car and the same driving conditions, but in the back of the mind you harbor worries and anxiety. A question will keep troubling you at the back of your mind: what if I get a flat tire?

Similarly, when we work in Q1 zone, we are working without any buffers.

Subconsciously, just like the case of driving without a spare tire, small questions keep troubling us: what if I fall ill? What if the electricity fails or the printer breaks down?

These triggers can very easily push us beyond Eustress to stress, even if it is at a low level.

I am sure that there could be people who have conditioned themselves to an extent that they need to have the Q1 zone to push them into Eustress. They have conditioned themselves to work in Q1 without getting stressed. But I am sure you would agree that such people are the exception rather than the norm.



After the discussion of stress, we can now say that the safe route is to try to avoid Q1 zone as much as possible. Having the understanding of how to classify activities into different quadrants will help us to identify and avoid the Q1 zone.

Suppose you have a meeting with a person at 4:00 pm. The drive time is 30 minutes. If you were to leave at 3:30 pm, you would be in the Q1 zone. According to the Murphy's Law⁸ 'If something can go wrong, it will' and a small delay in traffic will cause you to miss your deadline.

A better way would be to calculate some of the delays that can be anticipated and build that into a margin with which to start. In the above example there could be a 10 minutes traffic delay and a 5 minute wait at a railroad crossing. In this case you should keep a 15 minute margin. If you were to start off at 3:15 pm, you would be in the Q2 zone.

With this let me introduce the definition of a Buffer:

Buffer

**"This is the margin of time incorporated into an activity,
which accounts for delays that can be anticipated."**

Hence the 15 minute margin in the above example is a buffer.

Q4 activities: Activities which are 'Not Important' and 'Not Urgent'

One of the most common examples that people give of a Q4 activity is window-shopping. Gossip and chit-chat are also favorite examples.

When thinking of Q4 activities, it is very important to understand that people will have different understandings of Q4 activities. Something that is Q4 for one may be Q2 for another. The reason is simple: people have different visions in life and hence their understanding of importance will differ.

Q3 activities: Activities which are 'Not Important' yet 'Urgent'

This quadrant proves the trickiest to identify. The reason is that it puts to test our ability to clearly focus on the technical definitions of Important and Urgent and separate them from how we use these words in our day-to-day affairs.

⁸ Murphy is a fictional character to whom certain laws are attributed. Murphy's laws are very commonly referred to in engineering.

Now let us take the example of picking up of a ringing phone when one is in another department. The best way to analyze any example is to start by the method of elimination. First let us analyze this example by way of urgency—I suggest that we start off by urgency first because the urgency of activities becomes readily apparent whereas importance takes some time and reflection to determine.

Since the phone is ringing, its picking up can't be delayed hence it is clear that picking up of this phone is an Urgent activity. Since it is Urgent, it could either be Q1 or Q3 and can't be Q2 or Q4.

Now, let us determine whether picking up of this phone is Important or not. Since I am in another department, the phone can't be for me and thus picking it up will not take me towards any goal or objective. Thus the picking up of this phone is Not Important. Since it is Not Important, it can't be Q1 and thus we are left with only one choice that is Q3.

From the same logic picking up of a wrong telephone call is a Q3 activity.

At this point some people voice a confusion that since when the phone was ringing we didn't know whether it was an Important or Not Important call. How can picking up of such a call ever be Q3?

The answer is that not having prior information of an event will not change the reality of the event. Similarly, getting information later about the event will not change the reality of the event either. Coming to know that a phone call was Not Important later will not change the reality when the phone was ringing: picking it up at that moment was not an Important activity.

Another thought then comes to mind is that if we were to find out later that our picking up of the phone call was a Q3 event then what was the benefit as the action has been done? The answer is that now this information can be used later to design better filters to avoid the mistake in the future. We shall discuss more about Q3 and its filters later.

Please take a few moments and carefully see the examples listed as Q3 activities and see if you can understand why they are Q3 activities.

1. Receiving a friend who has come to gossip.
2. Going to a sale which doesn't have things that you really need.
3. Seeing the Sun rise on a particular date.
4. Attending a party of a very distant friend.
5. Going to a concert when you have exams the next day.

What to do when having difficulty determining which quadrant an activity falls into?

Sometimes, one faces the problem when he becomes double minded. For example, the walk in the garden with one's family? Is it a Q4 or a Q2? Similarly, whether smoking for someone is a Q4 or a Q3?

In such confusion, it is Important to play safe. When confused, Urgent takes precedence over Not Urgent and Important takes precedence over Not Important unless proven otherwise. So, translating into quadrants, if confused whether something is Q1 or Q2, consider it Q1 until unless proven otherwise. Similarly, if one is confused between Q1 or Q3, consider it Q1 until proven otherwise.

An example is of the ringing of the fire alarm. We know that it can be a false fire alarm (Q3 situation) or a real one (Q1 situation). Once we hear the alarm and not knowing whether it is a Q1 situation or Q3 situation, we consider it a Q1 situation and run outside the building. We should return to the building only after we are sure that it was a Q3 situation.

Similarly, when the phone rings, we pick it up because we don't know whether it is a Q1 situation or a Q3 situation. With the availability of CLI (Caller ID), we don't pick up the calls that we know for sure are Not Important. Hence we say that CLI is a filter.

General Handling of the Quadrants

Now that we have learnt to identify different activities in our life according to quadrants, let us look at the general ways to handle all the quadrants' activities.

Handling Q1s

Should you rush to do all the things which are important and urgent or in simple words, Q1s? The obvious answer seems to be yes. Beware: the answer is no!

If you rush to tackle all of the Q1s in your life then you would soon find that you are losing control over events around you and are being managed by crises.

Some Q1s are not to be done!

This is where the whole concept of prioritization based on Time Quadrants comes in. The DMR of rushing into doing all of the Q1s is an example of an incorrect DMR.

We need to develop our DMRs through practice to immediately help us identify all of our activities according to the Time Quadrants.

Step by Step approach to handling Q1s in your life

Here are four possible situations and what you need to do:

1. You have two or more Q1s activities facing you at the same time: quickly calculate which is the most important, do that and sacrifice the rest. If you can only attend your sister's wedding or your friend's wedding on the same night, which one should you choose?
2. You have a Q1 activity versus a Q4 or a Q3: the answer is simple, focus on your Q1 as Q4s and Q3s are both not important and have to be dropped out of our lives.
3. You are faced with a Q1 activity and a Q2 activity and this Q2 activity is about to convert into a Q1 and if it does, this new Q1 will be of a bigger magnitude than the first Q1. In this case you should sacrifice the original Q1 and focus on this Q2. A possible example could be being faced with counseling your troubled teenage daughter (Q2) who is disturbed with something in school versus showing up at an official dinner (Q1).
4. You are faced with a Q1 versus a Q2: this is the most difficult to judge because most of the time we go after the Q1 and in doing that we are being driven by urgency and not importance. At this time we should evaluate what we need to do based on importance not urgency: it may be wiser to do the Q2 and sacrifice the Q1. Remember, life is about choices and sacrifices. It may be wiser to let go of a social event (Q1), sacrifice the good time and the possibility of gaining some beneficial contacts and instead focus on your regular exercise or some quality time with your family (Q2s).

Conclusion

We should not rush to do all of our important and urgent activities (Q1s). We need to have a systematic approach where all of our decisions are not being driven by urgency rather by a balanced view of both the parameters: importance and urgency.

Handling Q2s

As discussed in detail, generally Q2 zone is the low stress, high quality zone. We should work to focus our life in this zone. A general rule of the thumb is that the success of a person is directly proportional to the number of hours he/she spends in the Q2 zone in a day.

With careful planning, keeping the bigger picture in mind and self discipline, a person can systematically increase the proportion of his/her time in the Q2 zone.

Handling Q4s

All of us can come up with a list of Q4 activities that we sometimes engage in. When coming up with this list, it is critical to ensure that these are indeed Q4 activities. If we are not sure, we should play safe and put them in Q3 or Q2.

Once identified, you will see that Q4s are nothing but time wasters. These activities do not add any value to our life. The strategy to handle Q4s is simple: Just drop them from your life.

Please do keep in mind that just as it is important to know what is Important to you; it is equally important to know what is Not Important to you so that it can be avoided. A person makes a grave mistake when he feels that spending a little time doing Q4 activities will not have any impact on his life. If we look at the quadrants, we can easily see that all the four quadrants are interconnected. For example, the moment we drop Q4s from our life, the time that is freed up is now available for Q2 activities. Having more time available for Q2 activities will have a profound impact as it will move us into a lower stress zone and will also cut down on the Q1s which result due to the neglect of Q2 activities.

“I suddenly have a lot of time now!” is a comment of a person who decided to drop his Q4 activities.”

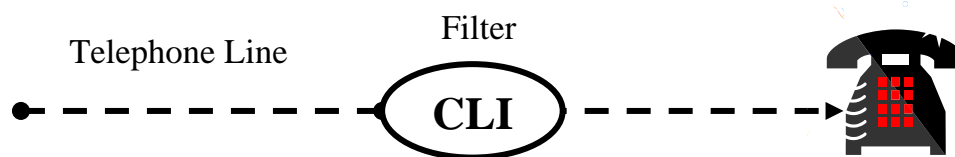
A lot of times we are not able to drop our Q4s due to some important elements in them. Please keep in mind that something which is not important doesn't imply that there are no 'important' elements in that activity rather the implication is that the not important elements outweigh the important elements.

For example, smoking with all of its ill effects on health could at times give us a diversion for our stress. So this would be the 'important element of smoking'. The intelligent thing to do should be to find a Q2 activity which could help us reduce our stress. If we were to take care of the important element in the Q4 activity through a Q2 activity then it would be easier for us to drop our Q4. This is why we add a word to our strategy of handling Q4s which is: **drop your Q4s intelligently!**

Handling Q3s

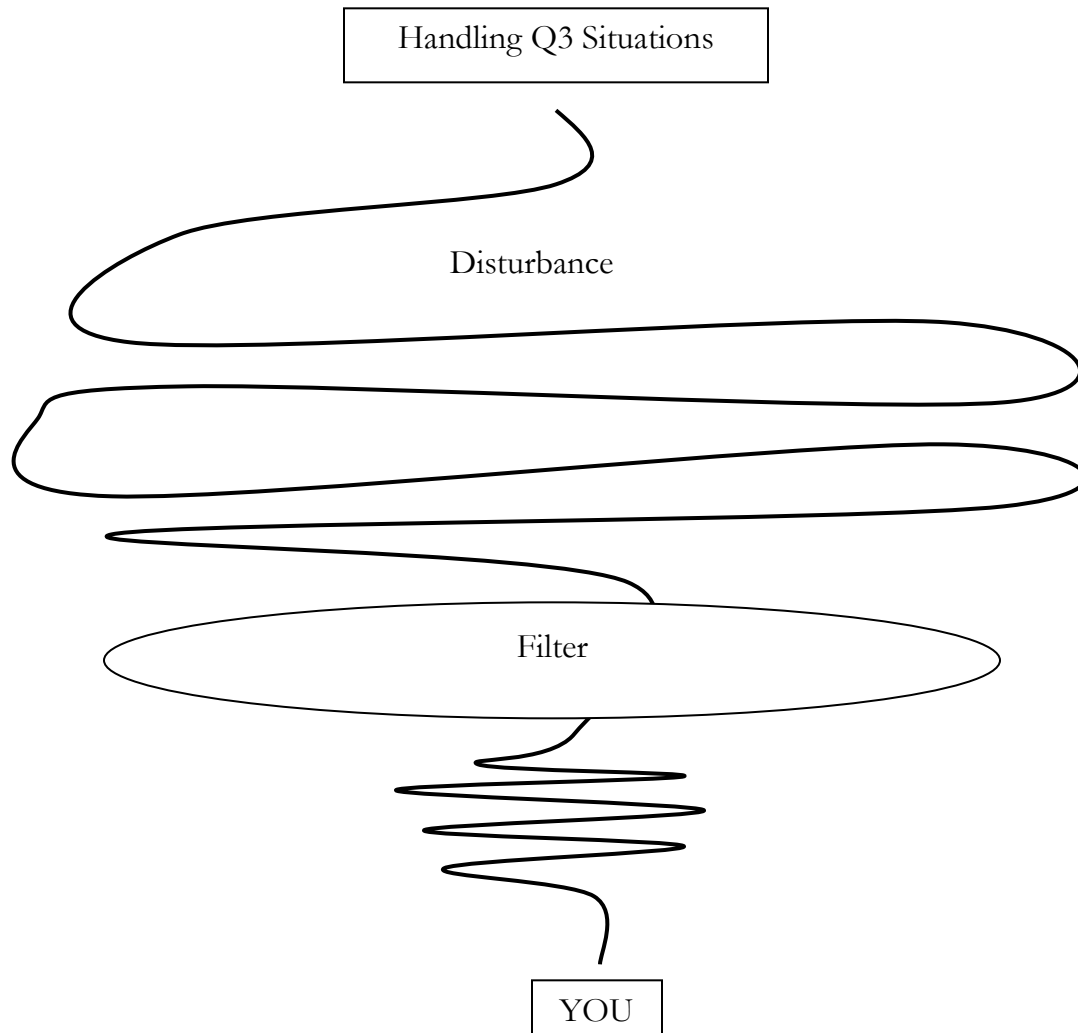
Just like Q4s, Q3s are also Not Important and hence waste our time and don't add any value to our life. However, unlike Q4s, which can be dropped directly and are in our control, Q3s are mostly interruptions that act on us from the outside. The only way to reduce them is to create filters to pre-empt them. Filters might not help us in completely removing the Q3 activity but they will surely help us in reducing the disturbance.

Receiving a wrong phone call is a Q3 activity. The filter to avoid doing this is to have a CLI (Caller ID) system. For calls that you can immediately identify as Not Important, you can choose not to receive them. But please do keep in mind that there would be a few numbers that you would not be able to identify and in this case you will have to pick up the phone to determine whether they are Q1 or Q3.



Another example of a Q3 activity is of friends dropping in at work without notice just to chit-chat. Responding to these friends is a Q3 activity. The filter that can be developed in this case would be to determine how many friends are in this habit of dropping in to chat. Suppose they are 10 in number. The Filter would be to talk to them and ask them to visit you during some specified time like 3:00 pm to 5:00 pm on Tuesday and 5:00 to 7:00 pm on Thursday. Please tell them that when they visit you at an odd time, you are not able to

give them the attention that they deserve and if they were to visit you at the above-specified time, you would be able to give them proper attention.



Now during these periods you would schedule a Q2 activity for yourself like reading an important business book that you have been thinking of reading for some time.

Now if your friends were to show up in this time you would be able to put the book aside without any trouble because it was a Q2 activity (Important and Not Urgent). If none of your friends show up at this time, you would not be perturbed as you are engaged in a Q2 activity. Often people get restless and disturbed when they are waiting for someone because they are engaged in Q4 activities and in the back of their minds they know that their time is being wasted as they wait. Talking to the friends and setting up timings for

them and then scheduling Q2 activities for yourself while waiting for them, would all be considered a filter.

It could be pointed out that in spite of this explanation; there still would be people who would not show up at the scheduled time. At this point we have to see the trade off: suppose out of 10 friends, 7 start to show up at the scheduled time. We can see that 70% of the problem has been solved and we have to now cope with only 30% of the problem.

One of our participants complained that his wife calls him during work and most of these calls prove to be Q3s. The strategy to deal with this would be to try to see a pattern when his wife is most likely to call. Chances are that there would be a pattern: maybe she is likely to call after the kids are done with breakfast and washing up in the morning. Similarly, another probable time is in the mid afternoon when she is done with lunch and taking care of the dishes. One strategy would be to pre-empt the call of the wife by calling her before she calls him. Since the husband will initiate the call, he would do it at his leisure and now the wife will not have the need to call at a time when he is engaged in a Q1 activity.

The above example is a simple one and may not work for all. The idea is to illustrate the concept of setting up a filter to handle our Q3 activities.

In Pakistan, a challenge is the late arrival of guests in marriage functions. If the dinner is announced at 9:00 pm, some people will come as late as 11:00 pm. On the marriage of one of our friends, all the guests had arrived by 9:15 pm.

The secret was in designing an elegant filter: my friend invited some of the elders of his family three weeks prior to the event at his home for dinner and announced that the food will be served at 9:00 o'clock. Like always, people were late but he served the food at the promised time. The rest is simple. The news spread quickly within the family that the food was served at the promised time and hence the expectations of the people were that food would also be served at the promised time in the upcoming event.

In conclusion, please list all of your Q3 activities that you come across in your life and design a filter for each one of them. For some, the filters would be as simple as just fighting the urge of picking up the phone when it is ringing while you are in another department.

Similarly, in companies whole departments can brainstorm together to see what constitute as Q3s on a group or departmental levels. The members of the department can then creatively come up with filters to tackle the situation.

Here is a simple filter that I found at the office door of a friend, Mr. Abu Ahmed Akif. He reported that the traffic of people to his dropped by 50%. Please read the filter and enjoy!

Mr. Abu Ahmed Akif's notice

Welcome!

The matter that has brought you to my office, could it have been discussed via email?

If yes, please be kind enough to send me an email and if no, please read on:

Could the matter be discussed over the phone?

If yes, then please call me and if no, please read on:

Could the matter be discussed during my office hours between 12:00 pm to 2:30 pm?

If yes, then please come within that time and if no then please do step in!

- Abu Ahmed Akif

Internal and External Q1s

Q1s are of two types; Internal and External Q1s. Q1 situations, which arise because:

- ⌞ We have ignored a Q2 activity
- ⌞ We have delayed a Q2 activity
- ⌞ We have not found and done a possible Q2 activity.

The breakdown of the car in the middle of the road because its regular maintenance was ignored or delayed would be called an Internal Q1.

External Q1s are those Q1 situations, which are not internal Q1s.

Careful thought will disclose that most of the Q1 situations that people have in their lives are Internal Q1s. This ratio between Internal and External Q1 will vary from

person to person. Usually people report that 70% to 95% of Q1s in their lives are Internal Q1s.

One of the tragedies which results in extreme mismanagement of time is when a person is not able to distinguish between External and Internal Q1s. Such a person will generally tend to have a victim mentality and will have feelings of helplessness and loss of control.

A person who understands that most of his Q1s are Internal will try to work to avoid them by focusing on the Q2s, the neglect of which has resulted in the ensuing Q1s.

What to do when swamped by Q1s!

All of us come across situations when we are swamped by Q1s. These are usually trying circumstances when we are putting out fires constantly throughout the day and are basically being driven by crises.

To illustrate the strategy to deal with this situation, let me recount a true story that happened with one of the participants of our workshop in Chicago. A young college student by the name of Ms. Hammad approached me during the workshop and said that the workshop was of no use to her as we are talking about planning for our time. She was facing a never ending cycle of Q1s and didn't have time for planning which is a Q2 activity.

I told her to dedicate half an hour a day for Q2 activities and whether it makes sense or not to continue dedicating this time. The rest of the time she was free to dedicate to her Q1 activities. I told her that in the course of a few days she would feel a little relief and when she does, she can increase her time for Q2 activities to 1 hour and similarly after a few days she can increase it to one and a half hours and so on.

She called back after a few weeks with an excited voice and disclosed the good news that she has come out of her cycle of Q1s!

A little bit of analyses can lead us to understand what happened. Usually when we are swamped with Q1s we tend to get into the habit of only tackling them and end up ignoring Q2s which become Marginal and then move into the Q1 zone. Not only do these create stressful situations for us but in the process they also multiply. When Ms. Hammad started to tackle some of the Q2s before they became Q1, she basically choked the source of Q1s into her life and systematically came out of her predicament.

Chapter 5: DMRs (Discretionary Mental Routines): Our Personal Autopilots

It was midnight in a spring in the mid-nineties. My car winded its way on highway I-80 through the Alleghany Mountains of Pennsylvania towards New York City. The traffic was sparse and the occasional vehicle that I would overtake would be trailers trucks slowed by the hilly highway.

Due to my extensive travel, I had driven this stretch a number of times before: from Palos Hills, a suburb of Chicago where I lived to New York City, a good 1290⁹ km. I would usually leave Chicago at around 7:00 am and would make it to New York City by 9:00 pm but this time some prior engagements delayed my departure and I was still 225¹⁰ km away from my destination.

I know of many people who claim that they can't sleep in a moving car whether driving or not. I am not one of them.

I was fighting sleep that night. I had bought chocolate and Pepsi-my normal routine-and had slowly consumed them but now they were over and again my battle with sleep was intensifying. The beautiful winding road, the dark night and the quiet new rental car gliding through the mountains were all just stacking up against me.

I thought of stopping and taking a nap but the highway narrows in the hills with a small shoulder and I didn't feel comfortable. I calculated that the next rest area may be around 50 km away so I decided to push another half an hour not knowing that a small nightmare was around the corner.

I had no recollection as to exactly when I had dozed off. All I remember is that suddenly I became aware of waking up at the wheel of a car going at around 90 km/hr. The surge of panic was so intense that I became fully awake with my heart pounding!

Both of my hands were on the steering wheel, the car was on the highway, the speed was fine: it was as if nothing had happened. I thanked Allah (swt)!

The final shock was the look at the odometer—which I am very particular about when I drive: I had driven around 25 kms! That would be around 15 minutes of driving and I had

⁹ This was the distance that my direction software would tell me from Palos Hills, IL to New City, New York where I would mostly stay. This would normally take me 13-14 hours of driving.

¹⁰ Going back and recollecting, I was probably somewhere near East Stroudsburg, Pennsylvania at the end of the Alleghany Plateau.

absolutely no conscious recollection of those minutes and that distance driven. I had actually driven in a state of semi-consciousness for 15 minutes on that winding road.

The shock had left me alert. Soon the rest area arrived and I pulled over and took an hour of sleep and with a combination of driving and stopping over for naps made it to New York in the early hours of the next day.

This incidence poses many questions: how is that in a state of unconsciousness or semi-consciousness, my body operated and continued driving the car expertly without any error? What would have happened if there was an obstruction on the road? Is this some supernatural thing that I encountered or is it something that can be explained scientifically? Can people be programmed to do this?

These and other such questions will be the topic of this chapter. So before we answer these questions by the end of the chapter, let us take a look at the concept of DMRs or Discretionary Mental Routines¹¹.

Our brain operates on two levels, the conscious level and the sub-conscious level. For example if you were to raise your hand on my request, you are doing this on a conscious level. Similarly, deciding which restaurant to go to for dinner, navigating a car through difficult weather conditions or preparing an important speech are all done on a conscious level.

As opposed to this, singing in the shower, breathing, digestion and typing away at a keyboard are all activities that we do subconsciously.

Here are some interesting facts: both consciously and subconsciously we do multitasking i.e. doing two or more than two things simultaneously: for example subconsciously our brain regulates our breathing and digests food at the same time. Consciously we often drive and talk over the phone.

The difference is that on the subconscious level multiprocessing can take place whereas on the conscious level it is not possible. By multiprocessing I mean that we process information in real time simultaneously as if we have multiple microprocessors working at multiple tasks at the same time. Our conscious mind can multitask but cannot multi-process. The notion that we can multi-process consciously is a myth or to be more precise, a dangerous myth.

Sometimes people confuse multitasking and multiprocessing: a simple distinction is that multitasking is what happens externally which is that you are doing multiple things at the same time whereas multiprocessing is what is happening inside the brain.

¹¹ DMR is a term that I have coined to avoid getting people too much entangled in psychology as the terms used are technical with varying connotations like schemas, neural pathways and cognitive maps.

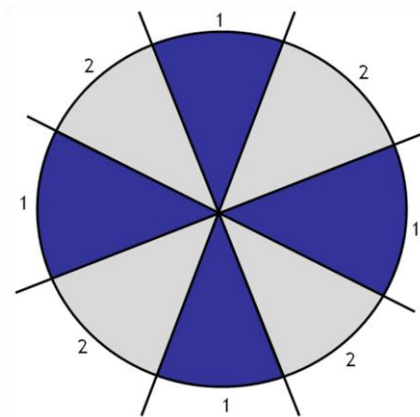
Diagrammatically this can be shown as follows:

	Multitasking	Multiprocessing
Subconsciously	✓	✓
Consciously	✓	✗

The subconscious mind can multi process and hence can multitask. The conscious mind multi-tasks without being able to multi process through two ways: multiplexing and through the development of DMRs.

Multitasking through Multiplexing¹²

This term is used in the discipline of computer science where a microprocessor handles different tasks by multiplexing which is that it divides its time into microseconds and assigns them to different tasks.



Now since this division is in minuscule intervals and the microprocessor speed is very high, the end users don't feel the switching and it appears that the computer is handling all the tasks simultaneously.

This is exactly what happens when we drive and speak over the mobile phone. Our conscious attention switches between the two tasks rapidly and sometime not too rapidly.

¹² The earliest communication technology using electrical wires, and therefore sharing an interest in the economies afforded by multiplexing, was the [electric telegraph](#). Early experiments allowed two separate messages to travel in opposite directions simultaneously, first using an electric battery at both ends, then at only one end.

A quick reflection will result in the following positives and negatives of multitasking consciously through multiplexing.

Positives	Negatives
Saving of Time	Loss of concentration
	Loss of quality

In light of the above it is apparent that we should only do multiplexing if the loss of concentration on the tasks doesn't entail a risk: for example teaching chess to my children was a painstaking task. These little beginners would spend minutes thinking on simple moves. The solution I found was to read a book while playing, knowing that the loss of quality of my game doesn't matter much in this situation. But this would not be a good idea if I intended to win a game of chess against a formidable player.

This is why countries have enacted laws to prohibit talking on the phone while driving. Similarly, if we need to have concentration to produce some quality work, it is unwise to multiplex it with some other task. A better way would be to give blocks of time to both the tasks like an hour each or a couple of hours each and then focus on one task at a time.

Multiprocessing on a conscious level through DMRs

The second way that the mind multi-processes without multitasking is through the creation of DMRs. DMRs are like computer programs which are created by the brain and placed in the subconscious mind. Each DMR has a trigger--which could be a stimulus outside the body, a stimulus within the body or another DMR--and every time this trigger is activated, the DMR runs automatically without the intervention of the conscious mind thus freeing up the conscious mind for other work requiring conscious attention.

Please do keep in mind that most of the time, the DMRs will be triggered and would run without the knowledge of the conscious mind.

A simple example is of us learning how to drive a vehicle with manual gears: when we first started, we used to change the gears of the car consciously, often looking down at the gears to the dismay of the person teaching us driving. But slowly as we practiced more and more, our brain developed the DMRs and now we change the gears automatically and are able to focus our conscious mind towards navigating the vehicle through traffic. The trigger for the DMRs for changing gears is the feel of the pull of the engine which gets stronger as the revolution of the engine increases and the change of the pitch of the engine noise.

I divide DMRs into three types with one type having two sub-types. I have done this classification based on how the DMRs originate:

Instinct DMRs

These are the DMRs that we receive at birth. They are simply preprogrammed before birth. We are born with thousands upon thousands of these DMRs.

Some examples would be sucking of milk by a child, crying, breathing, smiling when happy or amused, swallowing, movement of the tongue between the teeth while chewing.

Motor DMRs

These are the DMRs which are only formed when there is a repetitive muscle movement. The examples of Motor DMRs would be changing the gears of a car, typing, swimming, walking, running, playing sports and writing.

Thought DMRs

Thought DMRs can be further divided into Instant Thought DMRs and Repetitive Thought DMRs.

Instant Thought DMRs

In the beginning of 1993, I once drove from Germany and crossed into Austria through the Pfander Tunnel in the night. On entering Austria I checked into a small motel. Early next day I took off without paying attention to the small beautiful town nestled in the snowy peaks of the Austrian Alps.

A few years later someone gifted me a perfume by the name of Aspen. The moment I smelled it, I felt transported to that night in Bludenz¹³, Austria. It happened in a flash! Was it the smell in the motel or a shrub in the town? I can't tell now.

Interestingly, without even realizing I had developed an Instant Thought DMR linking that smell to the town and it was there in my subconscious mind for years. On the first trigger, which was that aroma, the DMR went into action to alert my conscious mind to the association and transporting me back in time.

Instant Thought DMRs are formed instantaneously like by seeing someone just once. The image of the face is instantaneously registered in the brain along with information such as the setting where the sight happened or the event or even the name. The trigger could be seeing that person again which will immediately run the program—the Instant Thought DMR—sub-consciously and the conscious mind will be alerted that this person's face appears familiar. Someone who resembles this person could also become a trigger.

¹³ I am not quite sure that it was Bludenz but it was either Bludenz or a town very nearby on E-60.

Similarly certain beliefs and assumptions which are developed instantaneously would fall under Instant Thought DMRs.

Repetitive Thought DMRs

Many years ago I noticed that whenever I would come across someone who was not good looking, I would feel a pang of arrogance: the thought that I am better looking than this person would seize me.

I was not comfortable with the feeling and consciously, I knew that this was arrogance; plain and simple. My religious inclination indicated that this could get me in trouble here and in the hereafter.

To fight this I started a mental exercise: every time I would come across such an individual, I would consciously acknowledge that Allah (swt) has created this person in this form and it is no fault of the person. Also, Allah (swt) is Just and with such people (as with people who are born with physical deformities), there is a great likelihood of a credit on the Day of Judgment. For some, this credit could mean a difference between the Hell-fire and the Paradise. And I would softly whisper to the person to wait for what is yet to come. This life is indeed short and transitory.

In the beginning it was difficult as I would forget to repeat it but slowly and steadily a Repetitive Thought DMR developed and thereafter whenever I would come across such a person, it would run automatically. By the grace of Allah (swt), my struggle against these negative feelings started to bear fruit.

Repetitive Thought DMRs are built in the brain without the help of any muscle movement but in order to be built, as I demonstrated in my personal experience above, they require the mental process to be repeated. The examples of Repetitive Thought DMRs would be arithmetic, learning the multiplication tables and developing mental attitudes.

Please do keep in mind that Repetitive Thought DMRs could be developed through conscious thought or without us even realizing that they are developing subconsciously like being exposed to certain advertisements repeatedly.

One of my favorite examples is a Marlboro cigarette advertisement. It shows a beautiful landscape with mountains and a lone rider dressed up as a cowboy riding a beautiful horse. Only one line adorns the advertisement: 'It is Marlboro Country'.

What notion or thought is this advertisement conveying? In our workshops I would show the advertisement and ask the audience. The following are the responses:

1. If you smoke, you are in control as the person is
2. Smoking frees you from the hassles of daily life

3. Smoking means peace and tranquility being projected through the beautiful picture

We can go on. I am sure you can think of other notions that this advertisement is trying to create.

Interestingly, if you were to consciously consider these, they will appear absurd. Of course how can smoking solve your hassles of life? Yes, it will temporarily alleviate the negative feelings by giving you the high that is the hallmark of nicotine but once it wears off, you are where you were when you started if not worse off. Then why invest so much in such advertisements?

The answer lies in the fact that repetitive thought DMRs can be formed subconsciously. This extremely powerful aspect of the functioning of our brain can work for us or against us. If we are exposed to positive stimuli and information repeatedly then positive and correct DMRs will be developed and unfortunately negative or incorrect stimuli or information will result in negative or incorrect DMRs.

This is the trick behind advertisements. They are placed at places where it is difficult to ignore: roadsides, on television during our favorite programs and in all possible nook and crannies. And slowly over the period of time, our repetitive thought DMRs are developed. The dangerous thing (for negative DMRs of course and a blessing for positive DMRs) is that once the DMR is developed, the locus of control shifts towards the trigger associated with the DMR. This means that whenever the trigger will present itself, the DMR will run without our conscious intervention. For example, a person may develop the DMRs of using foul language but there could be a meeting where there are elders present and the person may consciously avoid using foul language in that meeting.

DMRs as the building blocks of behavior

Our behavior is nothing but the combination of our conscious thoughts plus all of the three types of DMRs.

Behavior = Conscious thought + Instinct DMRs + Motor DMRs + Thought DMRs

As we progress in life, we develop hundreds of thousands of DMRs which are housed in our subconscious minds with their unique internal and external triggers. This is why humans are able to demonstrate extremely complex behavioral patterns and engage in very complex activities like sports and arts.

During my trainings I routinely demonstrate the following example: I ask people to observe as I tackle the feeling of thirst. I will look around in the room, identify a bottle of water, walk up to the table, take that bottle in my left hand, open the cap by my right hand, pour water in a glass, walk back to my seat, sit while folding my legs, take a look into the glass, drink water using my right hand while drinking the water in three sips and then placing the glass on the table.

A simple process that amazingly uses so many DMRs along with conscious thought. Let us dissect the above behavior:

Action/Activity	Classification
Deciding to use this example to illustrate that behavior is a combination of conscious thought and DMRs	Conscious thought
Feeling of thirst due to the lowering of hydration level in the body	Instinct DMR
Identifying which bottle to take as a number of tables have bottles on them	Conscious thought
Walking up to the table	Motor DMR
Taking the bottle in the left hand	Motor DMR
Twisting the cap counter clockwise to open	Motor DMR
Pouring of water with the left hand into the glass being held by the right hand	Motor DMR
Taking a seat (based on the teaching of the Prophet (sas) that eating and drinking should be done sitting)	Motor and Repetitive Thought DMR
Folding my legs	Motor DMR
Taking a look into the glass	Motor and Repetitive Thought DMR
Drinking in three sips	Motor and Repetitive Thought DMR
Identifying which table to put the glass back on	Conscious thought
Putting the glass on the table	Motor DMR

Without the underlying DMRs, our behavior would become too slow, painstaking and would take up a lot of effort of our conscious mind. Each time we would be learning on the go and reinventing the wheel.

There is a very powerful saying:

Watch your thoughts, as they will become your words
 Watch your words, as they will become your actions
 Watch your actions, as they will become your habits
 Watch your habits, as they will become your character
 Watch your character, as it will become your destiny¹⁴
 (Anonymous)

¹⁴ This quote is being attributed to a number of people and successive research has failed to identify the true author that is why I have attributed it to anonymous.

Let us understand this quote through the model of DMRs.

Watch your thoughts, as they may become your words

While doing business consulting of a family owned enterprise, I received a distress call from one of the brothers who said to me:

“Yesterday, I requested my elder brother to transfer funds from my company’s accounts to my personal account. On this request the brother just erupted with anger and started shouting at me. He said hurtful things such as I don’t work properly but I am always there to ask for money; that I am good for nothing and lazy. He used abusive language.”

I advised him to calm down, have patience and not to respond.

By the grace of Allah (swt), after a couple of days the elder brother called and apologized. There was a piece of information that I didn’t give the younger brother as it would have broken his heart: the information was that it was just not possible for the brother to have said all what he said just out of the blue. Unfortunately, some time ago—could have been weeks or months—he would have started to entertain such thoughts about his brother. The wise course of action would have been that he should have confronted the brother, shared his feelings and asked for an explanation. The younger brother might have had a very good explanation for the elder’s perception of not putting in ample effort and the matter would have been settled amicably.

Instead of this the brother just kept harboring those thoughts and guess what developed: Repetitive Thought DMRs! The trigger would be the sight or sound of the younger brother. So every time, he would meet the younger brother, he would consciously check the DMR and consciously not allow it to run but that fateful day, he was so overwhelmed with anger that he lost control of the conscious checking of the DMR and it ran resulting in those damaging words.

So I repeat: “watch your thoughts, as they will become your words.”

First of all we should watch our thoughts. If they are correct they should be repeated and cultivated and if they are not correct or are known to be harmful they should be avoided like arrogance and jealousy¹⁵.

¹⁵It would be valuable to add a quote by Imam Ghazali in his book *Ihya' Uloom al-Deen* which sheds light on this topic:

“If the first inward thought is not warded off, it will generate a desire, then the desire will generate a wish, and the wish will generate an intention, and the intention will generate the action, and the

Watch your words, as they may become your actions

Research shows that majority of the people who commit suicide will first start speaking about it. Psychologists caution that when you hear people indicating their desire to commit suicide, take them seriously.

When people start to repeatedly say something, they are not only developing Repetitive Thought DMRs but also Motor DMRs as speech involves multiple muscles. When these muscles are used repeatedly then according to our definition Motor DMRs are developed. Now we have a situation that we have developed multiple DMRs associated with triggers and the likely hood of these words and thoughts slipping into action has increased. Again, if these are negative DMRs then the person will have to remain on guard all the time to ensure that they don't translate into action. On the other hand, if these are positive DMRs then developing them will be a blessing and when the person would like to do the positive act, the DMRs will be there to assist him. And at times without his conscious knowledge the positive DMRs will be triggered.

Watch your actions, as they may become your habits

If you were to repeat an action over and over again, you will develop Motor DMRs. What are Motor DMRs? They are nothing but your habits, whether good or bad.

What is a habit? The dictionary¹⁶ meaning of habit is:

'An acquired behavior pattern regularly followed until it has become almost involuntary'

It is something that you do subconsciously without conscious thought. For example you would say that someone has a good habit of offering his seat to elderly and women on a bus. This means that whenever he would see an elderly person or a lady, he would immediately offer his seat. The decision happens automatically without any conscious thought. Such a person doesn't have to weigh this moral decision consciously, look at the pros and cons (doing something right at the cost of one's comfort etc.) and then decide. He just does it. The trigger is the sight of an elderly or a lady without a seat, and the DMRs are the act of offering his seat. This is his habit.

So for this person to have developed this habit, he would have had started doing this consciously in the beginning. And with adequate repetition this converted into his habit and is now done involuntarily.

action will result in ruin and divine wrath. So evil must be cut off at its root, which is when it is simply a thought that crosses the mind, from which all the other things follow on."

¹⁶ Collins English Dictionary - Complete & Unabridged 10th Edition

If someone one does an act deliberately then it is not called a habit.

Similarly, you would have come across people who are habitual liars. They would just lie whether there is some benefit or not. It has become a habit. Initially they would have lied consciously but with repetition, this bad act converted into a habit or a set of lying DMRs.

Watch your habits, as they will become your character

What is Character? Character is nothing but the aggregate of your habits and your thoughts DMRs whether repetitive or instant. Character defines who you are. The character traits that we possess whether simple or complex are exhibited at different points in our life subconsciously or involuntarily.

If generosity is part of someone's character then he or she will exhibit it without conscious thought and will be generous at all times where the proper trigger arrives or in another words where generosity is called for. Same is true for courage, empathy, sympathy, integrity, fortitude and patience.

Someone's character may have negative character traits which would be the opposite of positive character traits like cowardice, being unforgiving, miserliness, arrogance and envy.

The dictionary defines Character¹⁷ as:

'The aggregate of features and traits that form the individual nature of some person or thing'

Watch your character, as it will become your destiny

What you sow is what you reap. It is evident that outcome in our lives will be determined by our character both in this world and hereafter.

DMRs are the building blocks of our habits and character

From the preceding discussion it is evident that the building blocks for our habits and character are DMRs. If we want to develop the right and correct habits and ultimately the right character, we would have to start off with our DMRs.

Similarly, rectification of incorrect habits and negative character traits will also have to be started from rectification of the building blocks, the DMRs.

¹⁷ Ibid

Our behavior is a prisoner of our DMRs

As discussed earlier, our behavior is nothing but a combination of our conscious thought and our DMRs. So are we really prisoners of our DMRs? Not completely, as we can consciously watch our DMRs and act against them like a miser making a big donation in public to earn fame or a gentle mother sternly admonishing her son for a mistake.

The issue is that even for simple behaviors, there are hosts of DMRs at play with each having its set of external and internal triggers. And it is very difficult to keep an eye on all of them and inadvertently some of them will run escaping our attention. In a crowded shopping mall, for example, it is easier to keep an eye on a toddler wandering off and getting lost than to keep an eye on 6 toddlers running around!

The smart way is to focus on the root which are the DMRs and have positive and correct DMRs to begin with. This is the only best way forward to ensure that our behaviors are positive and correct.

Why at many times, multiple interviews with potential employees produce incorrect selections. The answer is simple: when people come in for interviews, they will act consciously, trying to behave the way that they are expected to behave and their DMRs which are the true foundation of their behaviors will not show. No wonder, Umar Bin Khattab (ra) has said that if you would like to get to know someone, travel with him or have a financial transaction with him. These two activities are complex activities and it is very difficult for a person to put up a show. It would be very difficult to hide the true DMRs in these interactions which are of longer duration and involves stress and emotions.

So if you would really like to know the character of a person then one of the best judges would be either the spouse or someone that the person has lived with. This is why spouses, if ill intentioned, can do the most damage to someone's reputation as people give their opinions the most weight due to the reasons mentioned above.

Uniformity of DMRs

Our DMRs are uniform or consistent. This means that once a DMR is formed, it will run in all different circumstances and situations uniformly and consistently. Why? Because a DMR is blind to situations and circumstance as the only thing that it sees is its unique trigger. So whenever that trigger is present, it will run regardless of where the trigger is placed.

For example a red traffic light is a trigger which sets into the motion the DMRs which allow the driver to stop the car. Now it doesn't matter where this red traffic light is encountered, it will always have the same effect whether you are driving in Dubai, New York or Cairo.

There is an exception though. If we develop DMRs and then are exposed to an exception repeatedly, our brain is so powerful that it may develop a conditional DMR. Conditional DMRs would then incorporate the exception with the underlying triggers.

A simple example is driving on the right side of the road¹⁸ in countries where you have right-hand traffic. Once you develop the DMRs of driving on the right hand side of the road then doesn't matter which road you travel on, you would always drive on the right side of the road.

I have lived in the US for 11 years. Initially, every time I would come to Pakistan on vacations, I would have a challenge. Pakistan is a left-hand drive country. The first few days would be very troublesome as I would catch myself driving on the right side. It is scary as such a mistake could result in a serious accident. With the passage of a few days, my DMRs would adjust and I would start driving on the left side unconsciously through the modification of the DMRs. Again, the same challenge would emerge on my return to the US when on arrival I would have to be careful once again and consciously try driving on the right side of the road.

During the mid-nineties something interesting happened. My work in those times required me to shuttle very frequently between the US and Pakistan and I noticed that a conditional DMR got developed along with a clearly defined condition which stipulated that Pakistan means driving on the left and the US means driving on the right and with this conditional DMR, the problem went away. So on arrival in Pakistan, I will automatically drive on the left and vice versa in the US.

Trucks shuttle between Karachi, Pakistan and Kabul, Afghanistan very frequently taking goods for Afghanistan from the Karachi port as Afghanistan is a landlocked country. If you happen to go to the Torkham border in the KP province, you would see an interesting site as the traffic switches sides on crossing the border: Pakistan is a left-hand drive country whereas Afghanistan is a right-hand drive.

The drivers who frequent this route don't make mistakes regarding which side of the road to drive because they, due to their frequency, have developed conditional DMRs. So say a

¹⁸ The terms right-hand traffic and left-hand traffic refer to regulations requiring all [bidirectional traffic](#) to keep either to the right or the left side of the [road](#), respectively. This is so fundamental to [traffic](#) flow that it is sometimes referred to as the rule of the road. This basic rule eases traffic flow and reduces the risk of head-on [collisions](#). Today about 66.1% of the world's people live in right-hand traffic countries and 33.9% in left-hand traffic countries. About 72% of the world's total road distance carries traffic on the right, and 28% on the left. (Wikipedia contributors. "Right- and left-hand traffic." *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*. Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia, 2 Aug. 2012. Web. 3 Aug. 2012.)

driver Gul Khan will start from Kabul and drive all the way from Kabul to Torkham and then switch sides and end his journey in Karachi without having to think twice about change of sides on the roads. The only condition is that Gul Khan should have done this many times consciously to have developed the conditional DMRs.

A very important point to note is that once a conditional DMR is created, then it is applied consistently along with the condition. Which basically means that for Gul Khan, driving anywhere in Pakistan would mean driving on the left side of the road and driving anywhere in Afghanistan would mean driving on the right side of the road. A potential problem can happen if Gul Khan happens to be sleepy and mistakes a location in Pakistan as being in Afghanistan!

I have used the examples of simple DMRs to illustrate the concept of the uniformity of DMRs and conditional DMRs but the same is true for DMRs as the complexity increases. For example, a gentle person will be gentle whether he is at home, work or a public setting. Similarly, a person who is a coward will show cowardice at all spheres of his or her life. The only exception to this is for someone to act consciously and we have seen above that such exceptions have their limitations.

A person who is quick to forgive will be forgiving to all; a generous person will be generous to all in all different situations.

It is this uniformity of DMRs which accords habits the status of character traits: traits which define who we are. It is so interesting to note that we are not defined by what we do consciously but rather what we do subconsciously. For someone to be defined as honest, a single act of honesty will not suffice rather a long term consistent pattern—the characteristic which comes only from having a set of DMRs—of honesty will be needed. This would be true for all character traits, whether positive or negative.

Just as the example of right-hand and left-hand drive may develop into conditional DMRs, more complex DMRs may also give us conditional DMRs. Just as DMRs could be positive or negative; conditional DMRs could also be positive or negative.

For Gul Khan, the driver from Kabul, right-hand side and left-hand side driving are conditional DMRs which are helping him and are a blessing. In other cases, Conditional DMRs may be negative and work against us.

In one of my workshops, a participant on hearing about uniformity of DMRs asked me to explain the behavior of a person who is gentle with his co-workers at work and is harsh with his family. The answer lies in the development of conditional DMRs: so the condition unfortunately is that with co-workers be gentle and with family members, be harsh. Just as we have to guard against the development of negative DMRs, we need to guard against the development of negative conditional DMRs.

It is then evident that negative conditional DMRs are more dangerous than plain negative DMRs as they are more difficult to identify and hence rectify. A person who is ill mannered with everyone will need little convincing of seeing his wrong habit than a person who is good mannered with many and ill mannered with some. He will argue that he is good mannered and will refer to the people he was good with. This is why you would sometimes find stories of criminals getting positive feedback from their own neighbors. The sad truth could be that their conditional DMRs of behavior stipulated that they be good to their neighbors as not being good to them may raise a red flag and could ultimately lead the law enforcement towards their criminal activities.

The concept of the three selves

In Psychology there is a concept of an internal dialogue where we engage in a conversation with ourselves. So within us there is a distinct self that we are speaking to.

Please reflect in your life: do you remember any internal dialogues?

Consider that you are trying to lose weight. One day you finally make a resolve to yourself that from now till you come to your ideal weight, you would avoid sugary stuff: sweets, ice-cream, chocolates and cakes.

Three days down the road, you are invited for dinner and there sitting right in front of you is the most gorgeous chocolate cake you have seen for ages, home baked and its delicious smell filling the room. When the time comes for desert, the internal dialogue starts:

“I haven’t had such a cake for so long. It is an opportunity. I can make an exception.”
(*You*)

“But, you have made a commitment to reduce weight. This is not right. You are going against your commitment. You make an exception and this exception will turn into a rule and you will lose this battle once again. You will be where you were before.” (*Self*)

“Oh, come on. You can have just a small piece. Just to taste. This will not hurt. And you can always, jog a little extra the next day. Be easy on yourself. An exception here and there will not hurt.” (*You*)

Does this sound familiar? And this dialogue continues on and on till you make a decision. If you went forward and had the cake, you will walk away with guilt and if you fought the urge and held your ground, you would have a feeling of contentment that you did the right decision.

The conclusion that I would like to draw from this discussion is that we are interacting with our self, constantly in dialogue as the discourse above proves. Intuitively we are all

aware of this and this is why we express this fact in our day to day lingo. Going back, examine the sentence:

'One day you finally make a resolve to yourself that from now till you come to your ideal weight...'

See how you are making a resolve to yourself!

In one of my early classes on psychology at the University of Nebraska, US, the instructor said that Sigmund Freud was the first one to introduce the concept of the three selves: the Id, Ego and Superego. Freud articulated that the human psyche has three parts where in general Id represents the part which is primarily driven by desires and pleasures; Ego is driven more by reality and pragmatism; and Superego is driven by values and moral and will cause a sense of guilt if the person does something which he or she perceives to be wrong.

I immediately objected by saying that the concept of the three selves (*nafsoos* in Arabic) was first introduced in the Quran centuries ago and a debate ensued.

The Quran speaks about the concept that our self can be in three forms:

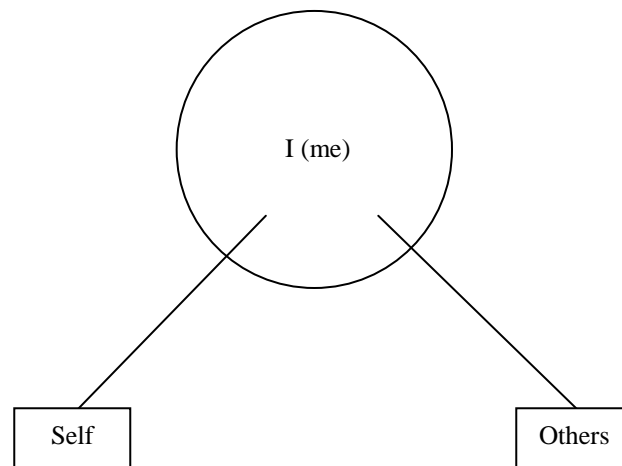
Nafs-e-Ammara is the form of self which is driven by desires. If we work on it then it moves to the next level which is called *Nafs-e-Lawwama*. In this state we do get carried away and do mistakes but a sense of guilt is experienced. If further worked upon and developed this converts into *Nafs-e-Mutmainna* which is the highest level and is underlined by a sense of peace and tranquility.

Transactional Psychology also talks about the Child, the Parent and the Adult—the three mental states or ego states that a person can operate from. Here the Child represents the emotional part of our personality whereas Adult is the reasoning part whereas the Parent is the dogmatic one constantly telling us what to do or what not to do¹⁹.

I have purposely not delved into the details of the selves as it is not required for our discussion. The purpose is to illustrate clearly the presence of a distinct self with which we are constantly communicating and interacting (Internal Dialogue).

Just as we are interacting and communicating with ourselves, we are also interacting and communicating with others. Let me show this in the form of a diagram:

¹⁹ This is a very simple explanation. For details I recommend: Harris, Thomas. *I'm OK, You're OK*. Harper 2004.



Uniformity of DMRs across self and others

It is very important to note that whether I am communicating with myself or others, I am using the same mind along with its DMRs. I don't have two brains and minds: one to be used when I am interacting with myself and the other when I am interacting with others.

So the DMRs that I am going to be using with others are going to be the same DMRs that I am going to be using with myself. So if a person has a set of DMRs which gives him the character trait of gentleness, then whether he interacts with himself or others, he will exhibit gentleness. In simple words, a person who is gentle with others will be gentle with himself and vice versa.

This is a very powerful point as it will be true for all DMRs. So a person who is harsh with others will be harsh with himself. A person who is a miser will show miserliness with others and he will show it with himself. You will experience misers putting themselves in great pains but not spending money on themselves to ease their misery. So it is very common to find a miser putting up with extreme heat in his car and not using the air conditioning just to save a little money.

So a person who has courage will not only face others with courage but will also face himself with courage. It takes a lot of courage to face ourselves when we discover that we are wrong and to admit our shortcomings.

Humans have known this fact for a long time. All what I am doing is to articulate this fact through the concept of DMRs and their uniformity.

Mark Twain, an American author and humorist, wrote:

“When a person cannot deceive himself the chances are against his being able to deceive other people.”²⁰

How true? If a person doesn't have the DMRs of deception, he would not be able to deceive himself and others. On the contrary, if a person starts to consciously deceive others then over a period of time he will develop the DMRs of deception and then subconsciously he would start deceiving himself.

You will find many people who are in a state of self-deception. You will find many smokers in this situation or denial. If you were to ask them if they know that smoking is injurious to health and that it causes cancer. They will say yes. Then, how is it that even though that they have this knowledge they continue to smoke? Let me articulate the way the self-deception works. The internal dialogue goes as follows:

‘Yes, smoking causes cancer but like many people who smoke and are not stricken with cancer, I will also be like them. I will not get cancer!’

If you look at the above sentence, you would be able to see clearly that there is a risk of cancer which every smoker is exposed to but the sentence is deceiving as it is denying that risk completely.

There are two very beautiful verse from the Holy Quran which say:

O you who believe! Keep your duty to Allah and fear Him, and speak (always) the truth. He will direct you to do righteous good deeds and will forgive you your sins. And whosoever obeys Allah and His Messenger (SAW) he has indeed achieved a great achievement (i.e. he will be saved from the Hell-fire and made to enter Paradise). (33:70-71) (Translation by Mohsin Khan)

In the translation by Picthal:

O ye who believe! Guard your duty to Allah, and speak words straight to the point. He will adjust your works for you and will forgive you your sins. Whosoever obeyeth Allah and His messenger, he verily hath gained a signal victory.

In the translation by Sahih International:

O you who have believed, fear Allah and speak words of appropriate justice. He will [then] amend for you your deeds and forgive you your sins. And whoever obeys Allah and His Messenger has certainly attained a great attainment.

²⁰ Twain, Mark and Harriet E. Smith. *Autobiography of Mark Twain: Reader's Edition, JU, Volume 1*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2012.

The word that is used in the Ayah is '*Qulun Sadeedah*'. *Sadeedah* literally means 'straight'.

I came across this verse when I was a teenager and for a long time I used to wonder as to why Allah (swt) is promising that by saying the straight word (speak the truth; speak words straight to the point; speak words of appropriate justice) He (swt) will amend for us our deeds? (direct you to do righteous good deeds; will adjust your works for you; will [then] amend for you your deeds).

Later on it became evident that one of the wisdoms of these verses is that if we strive to be straightforward and honest with others, we shall develop the DMRs of straightforwardness and honesty and once these are developed then they will assist us in being straightforward and honest to ourselves which plays a very important role in rectifying ourselves. Of course, this would only work as a mean and the final rectification will happen with the will of Allah (swt). Being honest with oneself is the best cure for self-deception.

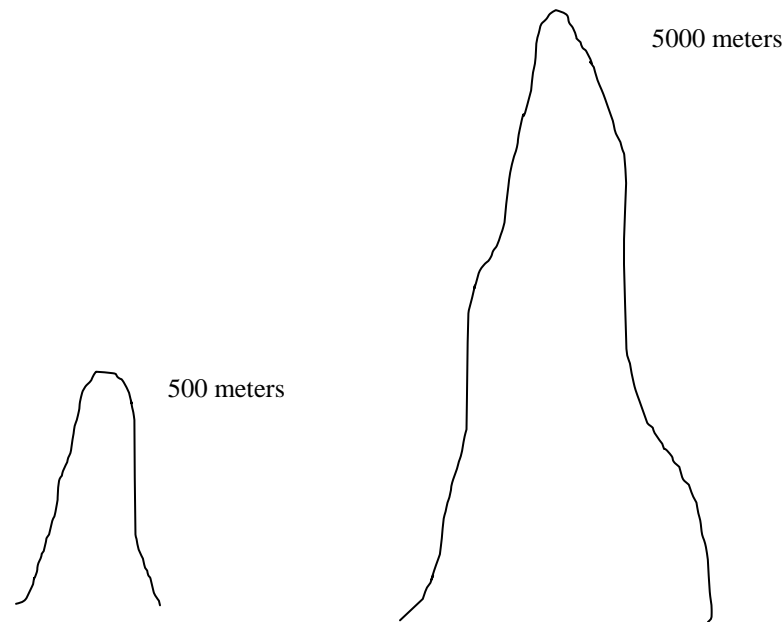
The conclusion of the previous paragraphs is that we interact with ourselves and others and since we have a single brain with its set of DMRs, the DMRs that we use with ourselves are the same DMRs we will use for others. Since DMRs are the building blocks of our behavior and character traits, the behavior and character traits that we shall exhibit to ourselves and would be the same that we exhibit to others. So a person who is gentle with others will be gentle with himself; a person who finds it is easy to forgive others will find it easy to forgive himself and so on.

Having made this point, now we move on to a very powerful conclusion that if we want to develop our DMRs, we can develop them on one dimension—either the self or others—and their development will reflect on the other dimension automatically.

In other words, if a person starts to work on being gentle with others, he will find that he is becoming gentle with himself automatically as these are the same DMRs. Let me give a simple example: suppose there are two mountain tops: one is 5000 meters high while the other is only a 500 meters high.

Suppose you want to develop your physical ability to climb the 500m mountain. If you focus on increasing your ability to climb the 5000m mountain, your ability to climb 500 m. will increase automatically as the resources to climb the mountain are the same whether they are muscular strength, stamina or stronger lungs. Similarly, the vice versa will also be true: if you increase the ability to climb the 500m mountain, your ability to climb the 5000m will also increase your physical ability to climb the 5000m mountain.

Now suppose that it more dangerous to climb the 5000m mountain. At this time you are focusing on only the physical ability and strength and not the part requiring developing the nerves to manage this danger, then it would be wise to use the 500m mountain to develop the ability? And once this is developed then to focus on developing the nerves by then taking on more dangerous mountain tops.



This is the logic behind first learning to fly planes on simulators. When we use the simulators, we are developing our DMRs of flying in a non-risky environment and once this is done then we move on to flying the real machines.

The reason for giving the examples above is to see the utility of the uniformity of DMRs: that they can be developed in one setting and then be useful for other settings.

A person once complained to the Prophet Mohammed (sas) about the hardness of his heart. He (sas) advised him to go and pat the heads of orphan children to bring softness in his heart.

On the face, it seems a simple advice but it has great depth if we were to analyze it.

Research shows that Allah (swt) has created the faces of off-spring of humans and animals in such a way that they trigger compassion and affection. This compassion and feelings of affection in turn motivates caretaking. Ethologist Konrad Lorenz called these traits 'baby schema' which included physical features such as the large head, round face and big eyes²¹. Interestingly, even the off-springs of animals will elicit such feelings in humans and the more the off-springs resemble the baby schema of human off-springs, the more the feelings²².

²¹ Glocker, M. L., Langleben, D. D., Ruparel, K., Loughead, J. W., Gur, R. C. and Sachser, N. (2009), Baby Schema in Infant Faces Induces Cuteness Perception and Motivation for Caretaking in Adults. *Ethology*, 115: 257–263. doi: 10.1111/j.1439-0310.2008.01603.x

²² Wikipedia contributors. "Cuteness." *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*. Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia, 13 Jun. 2012. Web. 8 Aug. 2012.

The second element that triggers the feelings of compassion is the knowledge that the child is fatherless or in cases both fatherless and motherless. This knowledge generates sympathy.

Now if we were to repeatedly pat the heads of orphans, these feelings will be repeated and with repetition this will translate into a set of DMRs reflecting compassion, affection and sympathy. With repetition they will strengthen. DMRs are uniform. These set of DMRs will now be exhibited whenever there is a trigger for such feelings. Hence the stronger such DMRs are, the softer the person will behave and this beautifully correlates to having a softer heart.

Conclusion

I had begun this chapter with the story of driving for around 15 minutes on a highway while in a semiconscious state and then having no recollection of the event and I had posed the following questions:

How is it that in a state of unconsciousness or semi-consciousness, my body operated and continued driving the car expertly without any error?

What would have happened if there was an obstruction on the road?

Is this some supernatural thing that I encountered or is it something that can be explained scientifically?

Can people be programmed to do this?

Now with the whole concept of DMRs, their types and developments, the uniformity of DMRs across different situations having been looked into, the answers to the above questions can be easily answered.

First, what happened is not a supernatural phenomenon. Having driven extensively on the US highways, my brain had developed very refined DMRs for driving and in the state of sleepiness that I was in with my conscious mind going to sleep, the subconscious mind continued to navigate the car. Yes, if something extraordinary would have happened that required my conscious thought, an accident would have happened like a car suddenly veering on my lane or a sudden obstruction. And lastly, people can be programmed to do many things subconsciously through the development of DMRs.

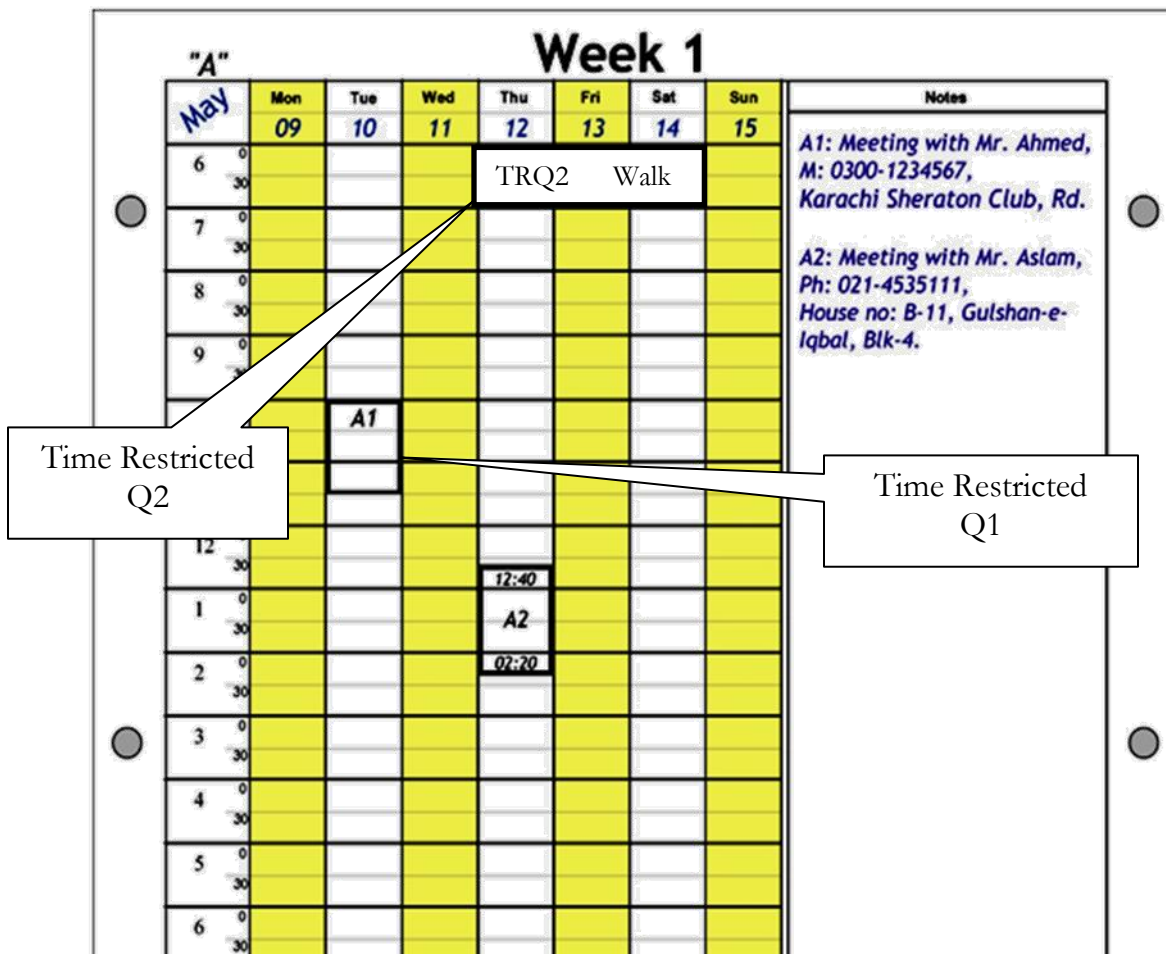
The contents in this chapter have to be understood very clearly as they form the basis of two very important discussions: one is the development of character that is an integral part of our workshop on leadership and the second is the development of determination (*Azm*) which appears in our Strategic Time Management workshop.

Chapter 6: Time Restricted Q1 activities (TRQ1s)

Q1 and Q2 activities bound by time are called TRQ1s and TRQ2s respectively. In other words, TRQ1s are appointments given to others while TRQ2s are appointments given to yourself.

The golden rule of success:

“The degree of success of a person is directly proportional to how well he can convert his Q2s into TRQ2s and then treat them as TRQ1s.”



Chapter 7: The Art of Guarding Commitments: The GK book and the to-do lists

‘The palest ink is better than the sharpest memory.’

-A Chinese proverb

This chapter introduces a tool to guard *each and every* commitment and promise that we make. By guarding I mean that we should avoid breaking a commitment by not forgetting it and renegotiate it if we find that we would not be able to fulfill it. For example, if we were not able to return a book on Wednesday as promised, we should take an extension from that person hence effectively renegotiating our promise.

This tool is the system of the GK book and the to-do lists. This simple system is extremely powerful, giving you a fool proof method to remember and track your commitments, or in other words ‘guard’ them.

Recently I met a participant of our workshop who said that he had not broken a *single* commitment in the past year; this was true for both his professional and personal life. It was indeed heartwarming but was it a surprise? No. Anyone following the system outlined below can easily make such a claim. Inshallah, you could be that person!

The ‘Gatekeeper of Tasks book’ or simply the ‘GK book’

The GK book is not the name of a physical entity rather the name of a concept that you should have the means to record each and every commitment that you make. In other words:

“You must not make a commitment unless you record it as you make it.”

No time lag must occur between a commitment and its recording. Accountants are trained in recording transactions instantly because the moment there is a time lag, memory comes into play, introducing the chance of things being forgotten.

Our memory has not been designed to keep everything that we come across permanently. Keeping things permanently in our memory requires extra effort like memorization of the Quran. Our minds have been designed to forget, which is a blessing. Imagine life if we were to vividly remember the death of a loved one years later!

This is the reason that Allah (swt) has commanded:

O ye who believe! When ye deal with each other, in transactions involving future obligations in a fixed period of time, reduce them to writing. Let a scribe write down faithfully as between the parties: let not the scribe refuse to write: as God Has taught him, so let him write. (2:282)²³

Since commitments are made at all times, it is natural to demand that the GK book, the tool for recording commitments instantaneously, should be portable and with you at all times. If you are without your GK book, the rule is simple: do not make a commitment!

The GK book could be in any form: a simple pocket notebook, Palm Pilots or Pocket PCs. A piece of paper will also work but I strongly advise against as it could easily be lost. Nevertheless, it is still far better than memory: *a short pencil is better than a long memory (a Far Eastern Quote)*

Someone enquired if the people in the prophet's (sas) era kept notebooks. Arab society then was an oral culture with highly developed memories allowing the memorization of vast amount of information instantly. Stories abound of how the Arabs would memorize hundreds of verses of poetry when coming across them just once. Well, if you have a memory like that then your GK book is your mind but if you are like all of us average people, GK book is a must.

To initiate the system is to start carrying a GK Book and recording all commitments. This is the key function of the GK book.

An additional function of the GK book is to record all useful bits and pieces of information that come your way, giving you the confidence that all information recorded in the day would be in one, readily accessible place. This will help you fight the urge of putting pieces of information here and there. People waste time finding numbers scribbled on newspapers.

The GK book, if it is a notebook, has a filing system as all information is being filed chronologically. For example, if you want a telephone number taken 5 days ago, you would search the entries that you had made approximately around that date which is inefficient. *The GK book is a good place to gather information, not store it.*

²³ Translation of Abdullah Yusuf Ali.

If carried faithfully, your GK book would have entries from both your professional and family life like:

1. Telephone numbers and addresses with accompanying notes.
2. General reminders like buying a battery for your watch or buying a stapler for your office
3. Daily or travel expenses.
4. Reminders regarding appointments with people.
5. Picking up milk for your home.
6. Grocery lists.
7. How much you jogged the other day.
8. The winning idea that came to you while you were stuck in the traffic jam.
9. An excellent proverb or a verse from poetry that you would like to refer to later.

When the GK Book starts getting filled, the next step is to take information from the GK book and file it in its proper place.

Filing of Information from the GK book

Mr. Abu Ahmed Akif, a friend, gave a beautiful example: When we bring groceries home, we never leave them in the basket: Eggs go off to the fridge; the meat is placed in the freezer; the biscuits in the cookie jar, etc. If there is an item which doesn't have a parking place, we find a place for it. Why? Because when the time comes to fetch an item, we would not have to rummage through the whole of the kitchen.

The same goes for the GK Book; all information that finds itself worthy of being in the GK book must have a place where it must transfer to. If a piece of information doesn't have a parking space, then you would have to make one.

- **Addresses and telephone numbers:** These must be put in address books, databases like outlook or other contact management software.
- **Appointments and Meetings:** These can go in our appointment diaries, the Daily Scheduler (DS, another tool that we shall introduce later) or electronic tools like outlook etc.
- **Financial information:** This would go into a financial log or an accounts book.

- **Health Information:** You may be logging how much you jog and this would enter into a health log.
- **Quotes:** These could be entered into a folder titled 'quotable quotes'.
- **Commitments, promises and reminders:** These would go into the to-do lists.

Please see figure 1. On extraction of the information, the pages of the GK book should be discarded. If you can't tear pages out, staple them together indicating that information has been taken out.

The To-do Lists

To-do lists have been in use for time immemorial. It is commonly advised to start one's day by making a to-do list by thinking of all the things that we have to do in the day and jotting them down. One should start working on them after prioritizing them and cross the tasks as they are done.

The above is better than having no procedure at all. But there is a serious flaw. Can you guess?

The flaw is that you are making the list out of your memory except for the items which have been carried from the previous day. And again, once memory gets involved, there are chances of forgetting. No wonder, many a time our schedule is disturbed when we remember something in the middle of the day that we had forgotten to write earlier.

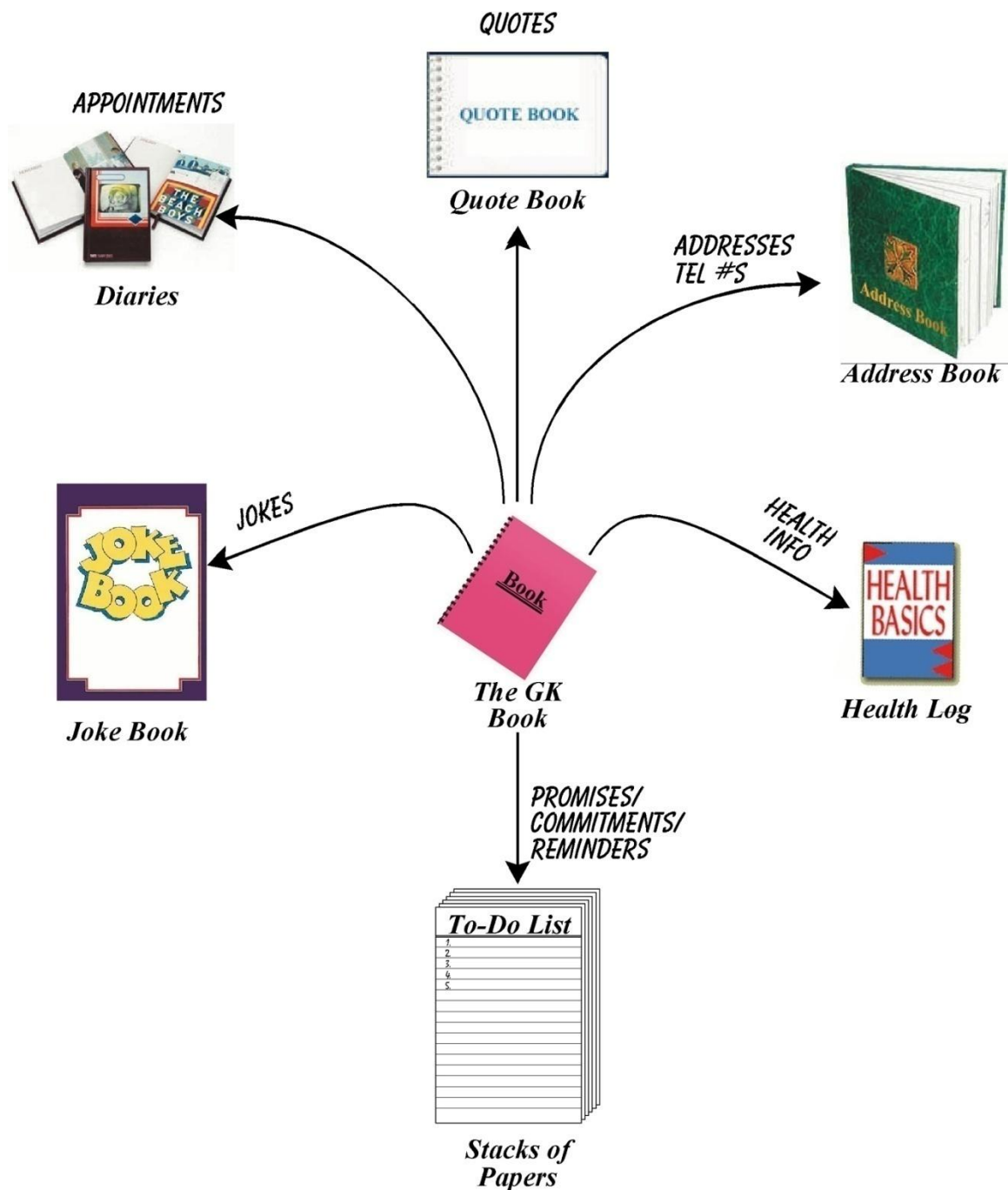
Let me introduce a simple but a very powerful procedure:

Step 1: Title five sheets of paper as below:

- Master to-do list (MTL)
- Current Year to-do list (CYL)
- Current Month to-do list (CML)
- Current Week to-do list (CWL)
- Today to-do list (TTL)

Step 2: Go through the entries in the GK book one by one, focusing on the commitments, reminders and promises that you have made to yourself all which are referred to as to-dos. If you have still not started maintaining the GK book, scan your memory for commitments that you have made and things that you need to do.

Figure 1: Filling of Information from the GK Book



Ask yourself:

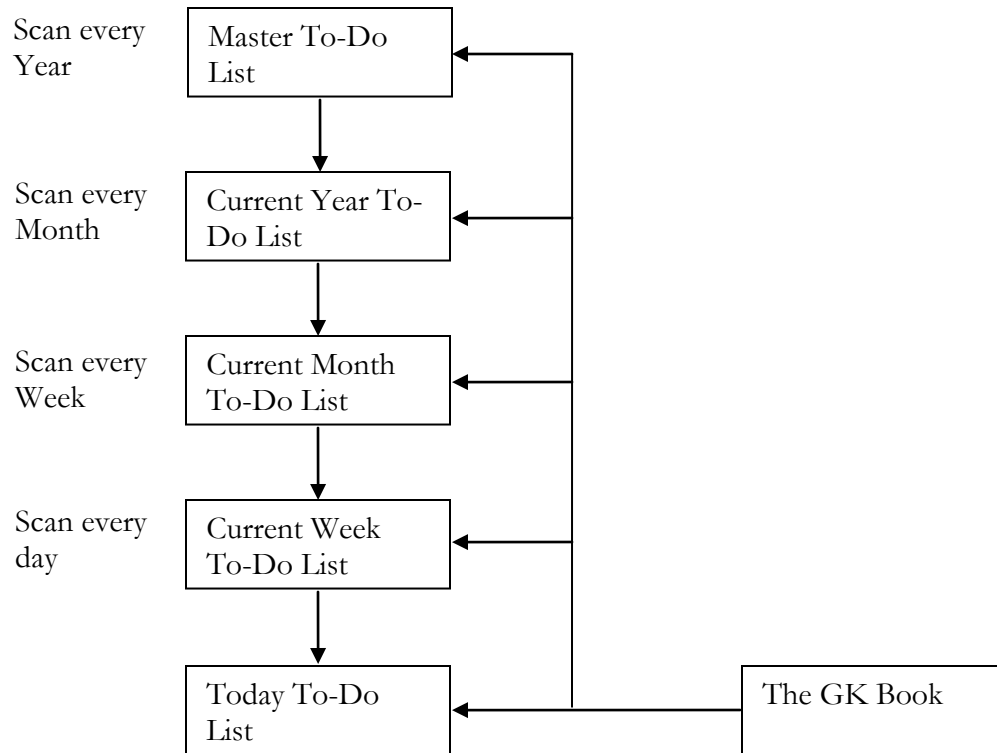
1. Is it (the to-do) to be done today? If yes, then log it in the TTL.
2. If it doesn't need to be done to-day but must be done by the end of the week, then log it in the CWL.
3. If it doesn't need to be done in this week but must be done by the end of the month, then log it in the CML.
4. If it doesn't need to be done in this month, but must be done by the end of the year, then log it in the CYL.
5. And lastly, if it has to be done but doesn't have to be done by the end of the year, then log it in the MTL.

The above five steps will get you started on your to-do lists which will grow by each passing day.

The day that you start on the system, follow the TTL that you had generated, making a new list the next day. This new TTL will receive entries from three sources:

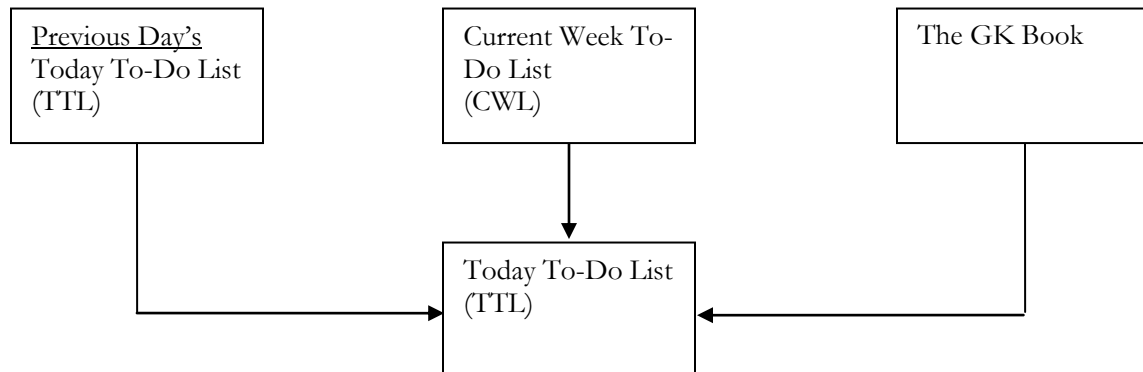
- a. The first set of entries would come through the five steps outlined above where you take your GK book and file its entries. If you are following the rules of the GK book then no commitment must be found in memory rather all commitments and promises would have been recorded and would be found in the GK book hence the GK book will contribute some entries to the TTL.
- b. The second set of entries would come from the previous day's TTL. Usually there would be items which you were not able to complete or tackle the previous day. You would look at those items and file them just as if they were entries in the GK book according to the five rules mentioned above. So the to-dos which need to be done today would be brought forward from the previous day's list.
- c. Lastly, you would scan you CWL and see which of the items from the list you would like to do today and bring them into the TTL.

Interaction of the GK Book with the To-Do Lists



According to the system, the CWL would be scanned every day of the week.

Compilation of the Today To-Do List



Please keep in mind that all of this scanning of to-do lists should be done at the time that you have dedicated to planning at a particular point in the day. Once the TTL has been constructed, you will not keep going back to any of the lists till the next day at the time of planning.

Your day will start with your TTL and your GK book. If a to-do comes in the middle of the day then you would ask yourself a question: does it have to be done today and if the answer is yes then you would put it down on the TTL otherwise it will go in the GK book. Please note again that during the day the other to-do lists must not be repeatedly opened as it would create too much hassle and inconvenience. Let the to-dos that don't have to be done today go to the GK and come on to the proper list the next day during your planning.

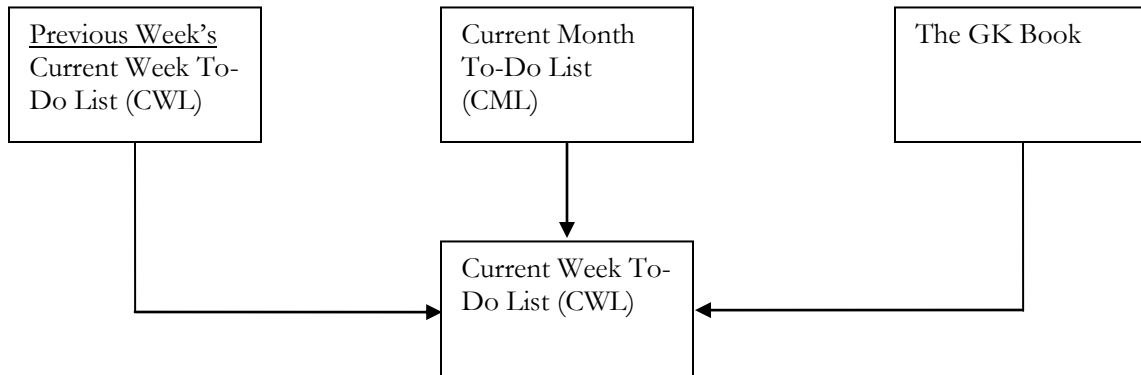
There are two very critical habits (Discretionary Mental Routines (DMRs)) that you need to develop without which the system will fail:

#1: After each to-do has been done from the TTL, you must strike it off the list and at that time take a quick look at the whole TTL and select the next to-do that you would want to do.

#2: Whenever you change your physical location (home to work, work to client, client to project site etc.) you must take a quick look at the TTL. For example you had to make an international phone call that can only be made from the office and can't be made from the project site. If you left for the project site without looking at the TTL, you will be in trouble.

At the end of the week, we shall be making a new CWL by carrying forward items which have been left untouched from the previous week. Next we will scan the CML and pick items which need to be done this week. In this manner, the CML would be scanned 4 times a month.

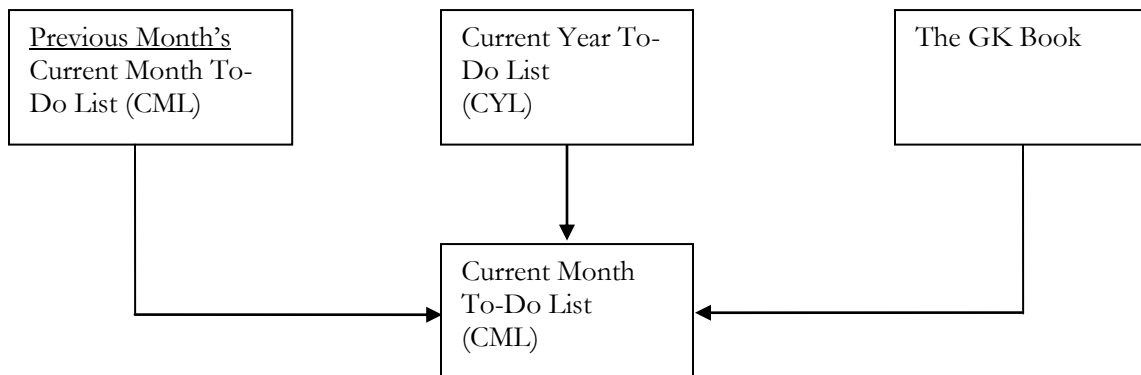
Compilation of the Current Week To-Do List



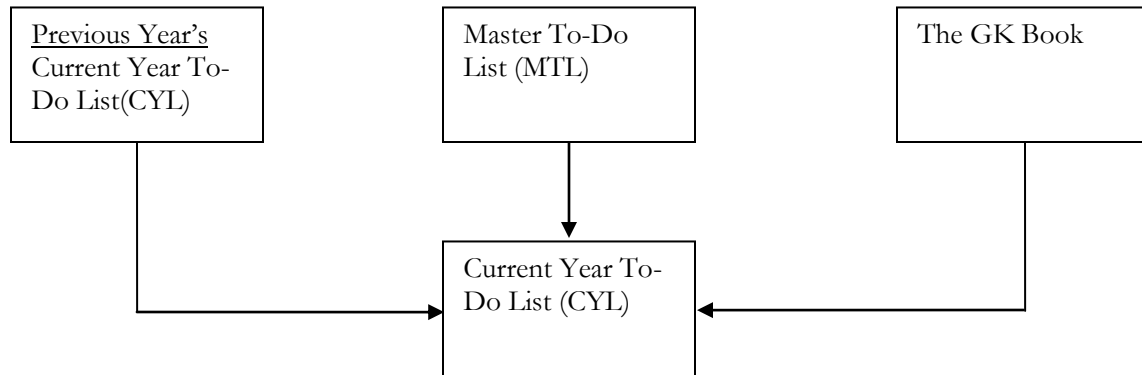
The same procedure is now repeated for making a new CML at the end of the month by scanning the CYL, and the CYL by scanning the MTL.

The CYL will thus be scanned 12 times in a year.

Compilation of the Current Month To-Do List



Compilation of the Current Year To-Do List



The above steps can be depicted in the form of the following formulas²⁴:

$$\begin{aligned}
 \text{TTL} &= \text{GK} + \text{TTL (previous day)} + \text{CWL scan} \\
 \text{CWL} &= \text{GK} + \text{CWL (last week)} + \text{CML scan} \\
 \text{CML} &= \text{GK} + \text{CML (last month)} + \text{CYL scan} \\
 \text{CYL} &= \text{GK} + \text{CYL (last year)} + \text{MTL scan}
 \end{aligned}$$

You will notice that in the system the moment a commitment was made it was recorded into the GK book from where it was moved to one of the five lists and from where it came to our TTL by the process of being scanned. At no point in the above routine was memory involved and hence the chances of forgetting a commitment are zero. The elimination of the role of memory from the process is the most powerful aspect of the system.

It is important to note that the primary function of the above system (GK book and the to-do list) is to guard our commitments and not strategic planning or handling our long term goals or objectives. Many people use the to-do list to also handle their projects or goals. It can be done but this is not the primary function of the to-do lists. For example someone wanting to perform hajj can list the different steps required to complete his preparations and handle the steps through the to-do lists.

²⁴ This brilliant contribution was made by Jahanzeb Ahmed of Siemens when he attended our workshop in January 2004.

For example he can list the different steps as:

1. Apply for a National ID card.
2. Apply for a passport.
3. Apply for a visa.
4. Get the proper training and knowledge of hajj.
5. Buy the equipment and gear for hajj.
6. Save money to buy the tickets and for payment of the boarding and lodging during hajj.

After having listed the steps, he could then log each step into the different lists (MTL to the TTL) and let the system take over from there.

I have seen the following challenges when I ask people to make the to-do lists:

1. People sometimes start to use the lists to handle the planning of their goals and projects and completely miss out on guarding commitments. This means that they have not realized the primary function of the to-do list.
2. People would attempt to make and manage to-do list without regularly carrying the GK book. If you are not regularly carrying the GK book and not faithfully recording *all* of your commitments in it, you are by-passing the system. The to-do lists will not be reflecting all your commitments and hence things will be falling through the cracks.
3. Some people follow the system for some days and then take a few days off. This will create extreme frustration and could lead people to doubt the whole concept. For the system to operate, you have to be following the system 100% of the time. Also, not following the system 100% may create a false sense of security. Commitments which otherwise you would have been carrying on your head would be missed by falsely assuming that the system will remind you of it.

If you were to miss a commitment while following the system, there would be only two reasons: either you are not following the system properly or you have intentionally ignored the commitment. There could be no other reason!

Now people can no longer tell their bosses that they forgot. The response from the boss would be, “How can you forget? Are you not on the system?” If the person

admits that he is not on the system, then he would be asked to come on to the system.

There is a concern that through this system we are developing a dependence on a tool. Yes, we are developing a dependence which is both healthy and positive. Once wrist watches were not worn, but now life would be very difficult without such an important tool. Same is true for mobile phones. The GK book and the to-do lists are also a necessity in the fast paced life of today if one is determined to guard his commitments and promises.

Another concern is that the GK book would compromise our memories. The main function of our minds is not to memorize things rather to process information. When we try to carry too many things in our minds which could have easily been written down, we clutter it and compromise our ability to think and analyze information. If we want to enhance our memories, memorizing sections of the Quran would be a better idea.

One course participant said that after taking the course, his concentration in his prayers has increased and he is disturbed less by thoughts floating into his mind while praying. The reason was that by recording all matters in his GK book he didn't need to carry all the clutter in his mind.

Here is a simple test to check whether you are using the system properly. Make a list of things that you did yesterday both in and out of work. Strike out activities which were generated during the course of the day yesterday. Take a look at the rest of the items; if they were present in your CWL or the previous day's to-do list, then you are on the system otherwise you need to ask yourself as to why these didn't appear on those lists.

As said earlier, GK book is a concept and not the name of a physical entity. Similar could be said of the to-do lists. I suggest that people start off on paper, understand the concepts and then move on to other forms of maintaining the to-do lists like databases. Microsoft outlook can do a marvelous job of maintaining your to-do list. Palm pilots also have such functions.

Handling daily or weekly reminders through the to-do lists

Since the CWL is scanned every day, you can easily use it for daily reminders. For example if you would like to remind yourself to charge your phone daily, put this

reminder in your CWL and since you would be scanning it daily, you would be reminded. Similar could be done regarding weekly and monthly reminders.

Test Questions

Here are some questions related to the to-do lists that have appeared in the exams that we take. It would be nice to reflect upon them to see whether you are able to answer them.

1. In the section on to-do lists, how many to-do lists are there and how does the system work? How does the GK book interact with the to-do lists?
2. For the to-do lists, how many times in a month according to the system would you scan the CML? How many times in a week would you scan the CWL?

Master To - Do List (MTL)

Definition: *This list has all the to-dos which have to be done but not this year.*

Examples:

- Performing hajj
 - Reading the book 'Muqaddama' by Ibn-e-Khuldoon
 - Learning Arabic and Karate
 - Writing an article in the newspaper on Time Management
 - Visiting Malaysia
 - Buying a new car
 - Teaching swimming to the children
 - Signing up wife for the gymnasium
 - Doing Project Management training
 - Getting an MBA in Finance
-

Breakdown of MTL > TTL

1. Performing Hajj
2. Visiting Malaysia
3. Getting an MBA in Finance

Current Year To - Do List (CYL)

Definition: *This list has all the to-dos which have to be done this year except for the ones which have to be done this month.*

Examples:

- Reading the Autobiography of Malcolm X
 - Taking the Strategic Negotiations Skills workshop
 - Taking children for summer vacations
 - Completing the HR policy manual for the office
 - Shifting to a new office space
 - Automating accounts in the office
 - Renovating the kitchen
 - Taking Rasheed for dinner
 - Go surfing with Shaikh Hashim
-

Breakdown of MTL > TTL

1.1 Get quotations of Hajj expenses, Govt & private both

1.2 Get training of Hajj

2.1 Write down scope & objectives of visiting Malaysia

2.2 Meet tour operators to chalk out the budget

3.1 Start MBA in Finance, 1 semester should be completed by the end of this year

Current Month To - Do List (CML)

Definition: *This list has all the to-dos that have to be done this month except the ones which have to be done this week.*

Examples:

- Get the car serviced
 - Pay the tuition fee of children
 - Get blood test done for father
 - Increase the brisk walk at one stretch to 5 kilometers
 - Finalize the manual for Time Management Training
 - Hire a driver for the office
 - Get the office AC serviced
 - Visit uncle
 - Call all the relatives in Lahore
 - Chalk out strategy for getting receivables within 15 days.
-

Breakdown of MTL > TTL

1.1.1 - Get quotations of Hajj expenses from Government & 5 private operators

1.1.2 - Call 3 friends who had done Hajj on Govt. Package & 5 who have done privately. Ask them their experience & costing

1.2.1 - Find 5 companies who provide training of Hajj

2.1.1 - Meet 2 teachers who've went to Malaysia for research

2.1.2 - Call 3 friends who've visited Malaysia for their experience, cost & travelling tips. Ask their recommended tour operators as well.

2.1.3 - Contact 3 tour operators, discuss what maximum can be done in 15 days trip to Malaysia

2.2.1 - Research best tour operators on google (30 minutes)

2.2.2 - Call 3 recommended tour operators for a meeting.

3.1.1 - Research best universities in town, on google (1 hour)

3.1.2 - Ask from Sir Imran Ghani recommended courses to be taken in MBA

3.1.3 - Finalize university & courses

Current Week To - Do List (CWL)

Definition: *This list has all the to-dos that have to be done this week except which have to be done today.*

Examples:

- Reply to all of the pending emails
- Get a back-up generator for the office
- Rearrange office furniture
- Get the DVD drive fixed
- Get Anti-virus program
- Submit the accounts of traveling
- Call the major clients in Islamabad
- Get eyeglasses fixed
- Need to get a hair-cut
- Need to get vaccination for the baby
- Replace car tires
- Invite Dr. Abdul Bari for the vision retreat

Breakdown of MTL > TTL

1.1.1.a - Get quotations of Hajj expenses from Government & 2 private operators

1.1.2.a - Call 1 friend (Abdul Mateen) who had done Hajj on Govt. Package & 2 who have done privately (Shahrukh Hussain & Nazar ul Islam). Ask them their experience & costing

1.2.1.a - Find 2 companies who provide training of Hajj

2.1.1.a - Meet Sir Fakhar ul Islam who've went to Malaysia for his research

2.1.2.a - Call 2 friends who've visited Malaysia for their experience (Umair Sajid & Ata ul Rehman), cost & travelling tips. Ask their recommended tour operators as well.

2.1.3.a - Contact 2 tour operators, setup a meeting in 2nd week of this month & brief them the agenda of the meeting

2.2.1.a - Make an excel list of tour operators for Malaysia. (15 minutes)

3.1.1.a - Research best universities in town & courses they are offering, on google (1 hour)

3.1.2.a - Ask from Sir Imran Ghani for a detailed meeting of 1 hour, discuss with him the agenda as well

Today To - Do List (TTL)

Definition: *This list has all the to-dos which have to be done to-day.*

Examples:

- Fix the back door of the apartment
- Call Anwar Hashim Saheb: 0334-2137684
- Call Dr. Salman in Lahore: 042-5833983
- Weekly report is due from Jamshaid and it has to be read and responded to.
- Backup of computer
- Locate my shoes for travel
- Give waist coat for laundry
- Pay Sui Gas bill
- Make a folder of utility bills and file the previous bills
- Take Rs. 5,000 advance from office and give it to mother
- Call and invite Ahmed for the Valima of brother
- Review the project report of Kaleem and give him a feedback
- Pick up milk, diapers, AAA cells and Cough syrup for home
- Congratulate neighbors on the marriage of their son.
- Complete marketing report for Dubai office
- Have UAE accounts reconciled

Breakdown of MTL > TTL

1.1.1.a.i - Research 3 banking websites to Get quotations of Hajj expenses of Govt Package

1.1.2.a.i - Call 1 friend (Abdul Mateen) who had done Hajj on Govt. Package. Ask him his experience & actual cost he was charged

2.1.1.a.i - Call Sir Fakhra ul Islam for a meeting in this week

2.1.2.a.i - Call Umair Sajid & Ata ul Rehman for a meeting in this week

2.2.1.a.i - Make an excel list of tour operators for Malaysia. (10 minutes)

3.1.1.a.i - Make a list of universities offering MBA Finance (10 minutes)

3.1.2.a.i – SMS Sir Imran Ghani and ask the best time to call him

Chapter 8: The Daily Scheduler

Introduction

The importance of promises, the grave consequences of not meeting them and the Islamic perspective together constitute the substance of keeping promises while the GK book and the to-do lists are the forms or tools behind managing and keeping promises.

Appointments are also promises and the GK Book and the to-do lists are not the effective way of handling them. For appointments I shall now introduce a tool that I call the Daily Scheduler or the DS.

The DS is just one ‘form’ of handling our appointments. There are many other tools that are available like planners, diaries and pocket palm pilots.

I strongly suggest that you understand the workings of the DS, compare it with other tools and then decide the one best for you.

Later in the book we shall see additional functions of the DS.

The Concept

The concept of the DS is:

“You should have the capacity to remember the time and duration of a meeting which was set months in advance”

The Physical aspects of the DS

The DS is shown on the next page¹. Please note: Each page reflects a week. Each box reflects half an hour in the day.

Do you notice holes on both sides of the sheet? Can you guess why? When I ask this question in our workshops, I get some interesting answers including that there must have been a mistake!

¹ I designed the first crude DS sheet in the mid nineties. Mufti Muzammil Hussain in 2002 suggested coding the appointments and added the notes section. Mr. Zulfiqar Ahmed in 2004 made the boxes reflect half an hour instead of an hour.

In bounded diaries you can see the next page when you are on the left hand page. If you are on the right hand page, you would have to flip the page to see the next page. I wanted a design where the next page could always be seen while working on the current page: the solution that I came up with was a folder with a binder clip and pages with holes on both the sides. So when you are done with the left hand sheet, you would not start working on the next page rather you would open the clip and affix the next week's page on the left hand side so naturally the next week will open in front of you automatically.

"A"		Week 1							Notes
May	Mon 09	Tue 10	Wed 11	Thu 12	Fri 13	Sat 14	Sun 15		
6								A1: Meeting with Mr. Ahmed, M: 0300-1234567, Karachi Sheraton Club, Rd. A2: Meeting with Mr. Aslam, Ph: 021-4535111, House no: B-11, Gulshan-e-Iqbal, Blk-4.	
7									
8									
9									
10		A1							
11									
12									
1				12:40					
2				A2					
3				02:20					
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10									
11									
12									

The Working of the DS

After giving dates to the days on the sheet, you would chart your appointments as follows:

Suppose you have a meeting with Mr. Ahmed on Tuesday from 10:00 am to 11:30 am. You would outline the three boxes as shown on the sheet.

Next, you would give a code to the box.

In the notes section, you would put the code and all the relevant summary of the meeting like the name of the person, a brief agenda and all the contact information of the person you are meeting.

In the event that you have a meeting with someone at a time other than at a half an hour mark, you would draw a box and put down the exact time inside the box.

Suppose your meeting with Mr. Aslam is from 12:40 pm to 2:20 pm, you will mark the appointment as shown on the sheet.

You can also color code the different boxes for easier reference.

Graphical Representation

‘A picture is worth a thousand words’. By charting your appointments you are giving a graphical or pictorial representation to your appointments hence making it easier to grasp and retain the information. Furthermore, you get a map of how your week looks like as the filled (or colored) boxes show time taken up and the available time is shown by empty spaces.

The Three Cardinal Rules of Using the DS

These three simple rules will give you exceptional control over your appointments:

Don’t give an appointment out to anyone without looking at your DS: It is easier said than done but is the most important rule. Whatever the pressure or the case, please avoid giving out an appointment without looking at your DS.

If someone requests a meeting and the DS is not with you, tell the person that you would get back to him later with a confirmation. Put down the request in your GK book and once you get to your DS, check it and confirm the meeting. Many a times you would be able to swear that the requested time is free but do keep in mind that memory is after all memory and you could have forgotten an appointment that you may have given some time before. So please play it safe.

Don't start your day without looking at your DS: Please take a quick look at your DS when you start your day. These few seconds can save you tons of problems.

Keep the active week on the left hand side: This function is possible due to the special design of the DS as explained above. This rule will ensure that your next week is open in front of you.

Along with the second rule, this rule will ensure that you would have at least a week's notice before *every* appointment.

Let's see how these rules will play out with the help of the following example:

Suppose it is 10th of March and Mr. Ali asks you for an appointment on the fourth of May from 10:00 am to 11:00 am. On checking your DS you find that you are open on that time as nothing is marked. The logic is simple: had there been a meeting, it would have been marked.

You would give this person a confirmation, block that time, given it a code and put all the relevant information on the notes section which of course will include the contact numbers.

On the 25th of March, suppose Mr. Basheer asks you for an appointment on the 4th of May from 9:00 am to 11:30 am. Resisting the temptation to say yes and checking your DS discloses that there would be an appointment conflict.

You would request Mr. Basheer to consider an alternate time.

Suppose, meeting Mr. Basheer is more Important than meeting Mr. Ali. In this case you would talk to Mr. Ali and seek to renegotiate your appointment with him. Having all of Mr. Ali's information in your DS sheet would ensure that you would not have to search for his numbers. The system thus ensures that no appointment conflicts happen.

A week before the appointment, the sheet prior to the appointment week will move on the left (as explained above) and the appointment will become immediately visible.

Since you are looking at your DS every day, there is no way that you would forget your appointment with Mr. Ali or with Mr. Basheer.

You can easily see that with these rules you can mark and handle your appointments set months in advance.

Some Important frequently asked questions (FAQs)**Q1: What if we don't know how long the meeting would last, how can we mark the DS?**

In this case you will have to estimate the time. Suppose, a little bit of research tells you that this meeting might take a minimum of 1 hour and a maximum of 3 hours. In this case you would have to mark 3 hours after the beginning time. If the meeting were to finish before 3 hours, you would utilize this time for a Q2 activity. During the daily planning time, you should anticipate this possibility and keep a Q2 activity lined up to be substituted immediately if time is freed up.

Q2: Do I have to code all of my appointments?

No. Sometimes the box of the appointment would be large enough to put down information in the box itself.

Q3: Why does the DS sheet starts from 6:00 am and goes to midnight?

Simply because putting 24 hours slots would take up too much space but if you need to mark hours late at night, you can customize your own sheets.

Q4: Should I carry my DS sheets or organizer with me at all times?

It depends upon your need and use. If your appointments are dynamic and you need to give appointments out frequently, carrying it with you would be a better idea otherwise it should be on your work desk at all times.

Q5: Is the DS organizer available in the market?

No. you can either photo copy the sheets and use a simple binder folder or can purchase a specially designed leather organizer from Timelenders. For details, price and shipping information please visit www.timelenders.com.

Q6: If my appointments are readjusted, how do I make that change in the DS?

For this purpose people use a pencil which can be erased. I use white eraser ink which is readily available.

Q7: Should I discard my DS sheets after they have been used?

I strongly suggest that you don't discard your sheets, you should file them. They would become a beautiful map of your life. If you were to ask me what I was doing on a

particular day three years ago, I would be able to tell you. And remember that you may decide to write your autobiography one day and your DS sheets would be a priceless asset. One participant of our workshop once said that he has made up his mind that he would never write an autobiography. Another participant responded: “Well, you never know, someone might decide to write a biography on you and find the sheets useful!”

	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	Sun	Notes
3 am 0								
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Appendix A: About Suleman Ahmer

Lead Trainer and Founder

Suleman's interest in the power of visions to transform organizations has resulted in consulting work with groups in Pakistan, the UAE and the US. He has consulted with both local and multinational organizations. Suleman has taught the fundamentals of Visions, Leadership and Time Management to thousands of individuals in Bahrain, Kuwait, Malaysia, Pakistan, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, the UAE and the US.

Suleman founded Timerunners, Inc. in Chicago in 1999; Timelenders, Inc. in Boston and Karachi in 2002 and Timelenders FZE in the UAE in 2007. Through Timelenders, Suleman teaches courses such as Strategic Time Management and Strategic Visions. The list of companies trained includes global giants such as GSK, Nestle, Pfizer, Philips, Siemens, Total and Telenor.

Before founding Timelenders, Suleman was associated with two Chicago based international relief organizations providing relief to areas affected by wars. He has served in six war zones including Bosnia, Croatia and Chechnya. He has traveled to over 25 countries. Suleman draws inspiration from his international relief experience and his background in research.

Suleman is an award winning author and his relief experiences are captured in 'The Embattled Innocence' published in the US and Pakistan.

His articles on geopolitics and history have appeared in prestigious magazines in the US such as The Washington Post for Middle East Affairs. He has spoken on these topics at over 40 US universities including the Harvard University, MIT, Emory, the University of Pennsylvania and Rutgers.

Suleman is an engineering graduate of the University of Nebraska and has done research with the US Air Force and the US Navy in solid state physics.

About Mr. Yameenuddin Ahmed

VICE PRESIDENT - GLOBAL TRAININGS

Yameenuddin Ahmed has been associated with Timelenders since 2004 as one of its key leaders in the area of life transforming trainings, coaching, and counseling. To date, Ahmed has helped thousands of individuals and hundreds of organizations in developing worthy and powerful visions and in bringing order, enhancing character, and improving performance in personal and professional living.

Ahmed has been in the professional field for the past 22 years. Prior to Timelenders, he worked with a large manufacturing group in the areas of finance, marketing, and human resource development. Carving himself a niche area of personal interest, he has evolved into a distinctive trainer and coach of personal and organizational enhancement achieved through clear visions and time management. During his time at Timelenders, thousands of professionals, young graduates, and hundreds of corporations have benefited from his meticulous and rigorous instructional mode.

Another distinction of Yameen is his ability to work with families, groups of youth and parents in developing visions for their families and the realization of the same by managing their time effectively to an extent that every single day we spend should take us closer to our visions. His ability to explain logical and easy to apply time management concepts and tools has made him one of the experts in this area, helping people become the architects of their own lives.

Ahmed's perspicuous style of presenting concepts and theories has made him one of the experts in the areas of visioning and self-management. His training sessions have delivered outstanding value both for money as well for training content that is relevant and of immediate practical value. In addition, he has the skill and experience to adapt his sessions to suit diverse audiences. Through his assertive and responsive training methodology, Ahmed has revolutionized the lives of countless individuals and organizations since his association with Timelenders.

The beneficiaries of his work include Fortune 500 & Forbes Global companies, local business groups, government organizations, and financial & educational institutions mainly in UAE, Pakistan and Saudi Arabia. To name a few, these include Saudi Arabian Basic Industries Corporation (SABIC), Etisalat UAE, Dallah Group KSA, Pakistan Navy, GlaxoSmithKline, Pfizer, Suzuki Motor Corporation, Ministry of Education Pakistan, Dar-al-Hekmah University KSA, and Al-Batha Group UAE.

In addition to his position as one of the lead Timelenders trainers, Ahmed is also a

prolific writer on the subject of personal and organizational development and the editor of 'Timelenders' monthly newsletter Envision. As a coach he has also assisted, and continues to assist, organizations in develop their in house trainers to implement 'Timelenders' concepts.

Currently, Ahmed is involved with research on productivity habits for his book *Changing Personal Productivity Paradigms*.

The following comments testify to his role of a trainer and a gifted mentor:

“One of the best workshops I have ever attended in my life. It has really put important things in life in the right perspective and has reinforced the value of limited time available and how to best utilize it ...”

Khalid Ali, CEO Security Leasing Corporation Ltd.

“It is really a wonderful program that made me realize the importance of time with reference to vision in life. I'm sure that these powerful contents and extraordinary delivery by the trainer will definitely bring a noticeable change in my life and I'll be able to be more organized, less stressed and will be getting better results of my efforts. I would like to thank and congratulate you for organizing such an effective workshop and would like to ask 'where have you guys been before'.”

Ashfaq Ahmed, Assistant Director, State Bank of Pakistan

About Mr. Kamran Zahid

Training Facilitator

We keep searching for effective leadership, mentoring, peer support, supervision and reflective supervision, however, it is not easy to find such a personage but one in a million can galvanize you!

Kamran Zahid is one of the resource and adroit public speaker who is associated with Timelenders. He served number of corporate through his resplendent skills. Pakistan Navy, Ufone, ITU Trainings, Paigham TV, Quran Academy, Daily Sama are few to name among dozens others.

He knows the art to make participants learn new concepts based on the knowledge they already possess within them. He enlightens the environment by his optimistic finesses and can-do inspiration. Taking a glimpse look into his highbrow life, he organized a number of seminars and workshops, hosted tens of TV shows & public events, which highlight his training, facilitation and presentation skills. Through his sessions number of audience had “has a bash” response.

Kamran Zahid has an elated personality and his work is everlasting just like his ceaseless efforts. According to one of his write ups he states that “***Clarify your life’s vision, and every single path you walk would change***”. One of his tremendous powers includes freelancing, counseling and empowering people.

He is a person whose profile makes people curious and his workshops and lessons are always a source to feel enchanted.

Appendix B: Book List

Resources for Vision:

1. Malcolm X, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* (The Random House Publishing Group, 1964)
2. Suleman Ahmer, *The Embattled Innocence* (Presslenders, 2009): Read Basheer: a friend's farewell, an essay in the book. You can order a copy of the book from our website or download a free version at www.timelenders.com

Resources for Leadership:

1. Safiur Rahman Mubarakpuri, *The Sealed Nectar: Biography of the Noble Prophet* (sas) (*Darussalam, revised edition, 2002*)

Appendix C: Answers to the tables

	Activity	Urgent
1	Sleeping	X
2	Watching a live cricket match	✓
3	Gossip	X
4	Exercise	X
5	Seeing a particular car coming from the opposite side while driving from one city to another on a divided highway	✓
6	Seeking forgiveness from your spouse	X
7	Hugging your child	X
8	Going to a sale which is ending today	✓

	Activity	Urgent	Important	Quadrants
1	Sleeping	X	✓	Q2
2	Watching a live cricket match	✓	✓/ X	Q1 / Q3
3	Gossip	X	X	Q4
4	Exercise	X	✓	Q2
5	Seeing a particular car coming from the opposite side while driving from one city to another on a divided highway	✓	X	Q3
6	Seeking forgiveness from your spouse	X	✓	Q2
7	Hugging your child	X	✓	Q2
8	Going to a sale which is ending today	✓	✓/X	Q1/Q3

Please highlight the number which best describes your impressions during this program

Key

5	Excellent
4	Very Good
3	Good
2	Fair
1	Poor

Methodology and Approach

Poor

Excellent

Relevance of course content to my needs	1	2	3	4	5
Pace of program	1	2	3	4	5
Course content was stimulating and exciting	1	2	3	4	5
Understood ideas	1	2	3	4	5
Understood how to put ideas into practice	1	2	3	4	5
Quality of Training material and Handouts	1	2	3	4	5
Overall course rating	1	2	3	4	5

Logistics

Quality of Food and other arrangements	1	2	3	4	5
Room were comfortable (Hotel Residents only)	1	2	3	4	5

Name of the trainer:

Presentation of subject	1	2	3	4	5
Depth of knowledge expressed	1	2	3	4	5
Ability to make the program interactive	1	2	3	4	5
Delivery	1	2	3	4	5
Ability to explain	1	2	3	4	5
Ability to answer questions with relevance	1	2	3	4	5
Overall Rating of Trainer (1 through 5)	1	2	3	4	5

Overall Rating of the Program	1	2	3	4	5
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(For Corporate Clients only)

Would you like to be notified regarding our upcoming workshops via sms & email?

☐ Yes

☐ No

Give your opinion about the trainer. Give strengths and areas of improvement

Strength	Area of Improvement

Thank you

Please suggest any other person(s) that you think would benefit or be interested in this workshop.

Name: _____

Date: _____

S. No	Name	Relationship	Email / Phone
1.			
2.			
3.			
4.			
5.			
6.			
7.			
8.			
9.			
10.			