

Good morning, everybody. Dennis Engelbrecht with The Family Business Institute. Digging Deeper.

Today, I want to talk about planning versus urgency. And this probably is old news to some of you, but Stephen Covey created this two by two with four quadrants, measuring the extent to which an activity might be urgent, sort of on the right to left quadrants and important top to bottom, creating a two-by-two matrix. A lot of people in construction have trouble with prioritization with getting all their tasks done because they seem to be always short-staffed, and always have probably as much or more to do than they could possibly do. So I really think that within Covey's four quadrants really lies the key to personal success. Probably the easiest tool to use and maybe one of the more important tools you can use to really be successful personally and to be effective in your roles.

So, let's talk about a couple of aspects to that. The first thing I want to talk about is urgency addiction. It sounds like some sort of quacks recipe for what's going wrong with you, but urgency addiction is a real thing. And what happens with urgency addiction is while problem solving is an important skill, problem prevention is actually by far more effective. But with urgency addiction, we get addicted to solving the problems that in some cases we create by the failure to plan. And mistakes are made, and those mistakes are more costly and harder to recover from when they're done late in the game. It's sort of like last night I was watching a football game, there's one quarter left, and the losing team, the Giants are driving and they're right down at the end zone and the quarterback throws a pick six, and now that game is virtually over. There's just no time left to recover from that. And that's what happens with a lot of mistakes when we operate in the urgents.

So why is urgency addictive? Well, it actually creates an adrenaline rush, right? I've got to do this now. We got a problem, I got to dive in. It's sort of that firefighting mode. All right, this is hot, it's right now, I've got to do it. And we get an adrenaline rush from it, and that adrenaline rush actually feels good. It can be addictive. And then when we fix these problems or solve these problems, we get more endorphins released and we get people giving us positive feedback, pats on the back for solving this crisis and this problem sort of thing. So, what happens is it's very much like in the world of medicine and pain relief, we get addicted to pain relief because it feels good. And even though the more we do it, the more pain relief it takes to get to the same place, it still feels good to do it, and people want to do it, so they get actually addicted. And many folks out there in the construction world are addicted to urgency. So why does urgency then become a cycle?

Well, it's really very simple. The more time you spend doing the urgent, doing crisis management problem solving, the more that delays the required planning and strategic activity, which would obviate the crises, the problems in the urgency that you're dealing with on a day to day. In a sense, you're constantly working on the symptoms of the problem versus solving the problem, which you can do. When you get into the planning strategic mode, you can solve the big picture problems that are causing all the urgent activity. So, it really does tend to become a cycle because you tend to spend your time in quadrants one and three on Covey's matrix, and you fail to get up there in the quadrant of planning, which is quadrant two.

And as a leader, as most of you are that are watching this, if you're not spending enough time in quadrant two, you will constantly be drawn to the quadrant one and quadrant three activities. So, it does become a cycle. But the interesting thing is planning also becomes a cycle. Once you plan effectively, you eliminate the crises, you address the core issues, you get them solved so that then there are less urgent issues coming into your life and less that need to be solved. So, you're allowed to spend more time again, thinking strategically and doing the big picture things, which in the long run are more important. So how do you get somewhere from where you are today? If you feel like you're in this cycle of urgency, what can you do about it?

Well, first of all, if you really feel like you're kind of addicted to this, I would get an intervention. And in terms of an intervention, get with your manager and get their help, prioritizing the things you need to prioritize. And it may be that you really have created so many little things that are leaking that you really can't get away from the crisis mode, and you might need some help with that to get away from the crisis mode so you can move to a more planned mode. And that may be bringing in an additional person or having them reorganize your activities, at least temporarily to get you someplace better.

And then make sure that you also get their assistance in planning. And I would get together with your boss on a weekly basis and lay out what your priorities are, what you think they are, and get their help to make sure both that you're prioritizing correctly, but also you might need their help to get some things done that aren't hitting the priority list. But you've got to get into the planning strategic mode to break that cycle and get out of it so it really, in a sense needs an intervention.

Then of course, use Covey's matrix. Do your to-do list, rank your activities, whether they're a quadrant one activity, quadrant two activity, quadrant three activity, quadrant four activity, see what they are, and then prioritize by doing the quadrant two, the quadrant of planning activities. Set aside time for those set aside time where you're going to be uninterrupted, when you can get those activities accomplished and completed, and set aside enough of your day to do that so that you do then get the things done that prevent the crises in the future.

And then finally, figure out how much time you're spending in quadrant four, which could be affectionately known as the quadrant of waste. And unfortunately, we have so many distractions in today's world, the internet, perhaps the worst of them, we could be doing a very legitimate important activity on the internet. And the next thing you know, you get sidetracked by something you see there, or you're diving in looking for a product that's going to replace something else on the construction site. And the next thing you know, you're reading about this and that and it's two hours later and you've missed what you had to do and you've wasted all this time. But more importantly, don't get caught in your fantasy football shopping, looking at photos because something blinks up, returning all of your emails every minute and interrupting good work that requires concentration by doing those urgent activities. But if you can stay out of the quadrant of waste, that, of course, is going to give you more time to move back up into that planning area.

So, think about planning versus urgency, the dynamics of it, and highly recommend using Covey's four quadrants to make you more effective as a manager. Thank you, Dennis Engelbrecht, Digging Deeper.