

# EVERY SECOND COUNTS IN BUSINESS

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**About the Author**  
Carole's credibility is rooted in 20 years success as CEO of a leading UK stress management consultancy, working with equal success both in the UK and the Gulf. She is a world authority on corporate stress and BBC Guest Broadcaster.

Carole is an international motivational speaker, and a weekly columnist for prominent newspapers. Carole's new book 'Show Stress Who's Boss!' is available <http://www.showstresswhosboss.co.uk> where you will receive a signed copy of the book + FREE stress test card. In UAE, you will find the book in all good bookshops.

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One of the paradoxes of time management is that there are always going to be 24 hours in every day and 60 minutes in every hour. But, while time itself cannot be managed, what you do with it can.

**‘Controlled’ time and ‘response’ time**  
If you plan to do something, you can estimate the amount of time you will need, and if you manage to complete it within that time, then you had ‘control’ over it. If you’re interrupted, however - for whatever reason - then you are in ‘response’ time.

The trouble is that the real length of an interruption is typically far longer than the time you were called away – you have to recover your chain of thought and concentration; perhaps the person you were working with is no longer available, etc.

Research into time management in the UK and US has shown that managers are interrupted, on average, every eight minutes. The trouble with this figure is that there aren’t many things that managers can do in just eight minutes!

One of the purposes of time management is therefore to make people aware of the disruptive nature of response time, and see what can be done to try to improve the ratio of controlled time to response time.

The sum of our controlled and response time is all the time we have during the working day, so one way of more effectively managing time is to find ways of getting

increased controlled time and reduced response time - so giving us ‘extra’ time. However, there can also be problems with controlling one’s time too strictly, and in the process becoming an unapproachable manager, which is why it’s important to strike the right balance between taking control and the need for availability and communication.

**PRIORITISING: IMPORTANT V URGENT**  
Another way of looking at time is the distinction between important tasks and urgent ones.

‘Important’ tasks are those which will either lead to the effective outcome of an important objective, or slow it down or worsen it if they are not achieved. ‘Urgent’ tasks are those which present themselves to be done in a very short timescale.

We live in a state of constant tension between the important and the urgent. The problem is that the important task rarely needs to be done today, or even this week. Urgent tasks call for instant action, and their endless demands pressure every hour of every day. And, of course, coping with the urgent reinforces the notion of being ‘busy’ –a deceptive virtue in every organisation.

When assessing work priorities, time should be allocated to tasks in order of their importance, not their urgency. As an example, choose ten tasks/activities in which you are/should currently be involved and list them. Some may be short-term and others longer term, but all will require time allocated to them.



- AS A GENERAL GUIDELINE:**
- If a task is urgent and important action it now.
  - If it’s urgent but not important action it soon but don’t spend long on it.
  - If it’s important but not urgent commit to doing it when you have time to do it justice.
  - If it’s neither urgent nor important, consider delegating it, ‘dropping’ it or leaving it until you have some ‘down time’.

**THE INEFFECTIVE ZONE:** If a task is neither urgent nor important it should only be done if there is nothing else to do. To do

tasks in this zone when you have tasks in other quadrants would be an ineffective use of time. (It’s often in this area that we spend time when we are procrastinating.)

**THE ACTION ZONE:** These tasks are urgent, so have to be done quickly. They are however lower down on the importance scale and so are likely to be easy, probably routine and repetitive tasks. If they’re kept up-to-date, they’ll pose little problem. If they’re put-off or ignored they’ll build into crises.

**THE PLANNING ZONE:** These tasks are important, but as yet are not urgent. They therefore need to be planned for and a strategy to undertake them has to be worked out.

**THE CRITICAL ZONE:** This is where many of us operate most of the time. Tasks have to be done to the highest standards, and finished yesterday. In this zone there is pressure, stress and greater likelihood of error.

- THE IMPORTANT THING IS TO LEARN TO THINK IN TIME TERMS:**
- Do I have to do that right now?
  - If I do, what else stops?
  - Do I have to do it at all?
  - Could someone else do it?
  - What is the most important thing I am trying to achieve?
  - Is everything being directed towards that?

**PRIME TIME**  
Although all jobs are different, in most jobs you tend to find particular times of the day when you are most likely to be interrupted. ‘Prime time’ is a combination of the time when you’re most likely to be able to concentrate free of interruptions, and when you’re personally most alert or ‘tuned-in’. By analysing the peaks and troughs in your day and understanding your personal preferences, you’ll be able to identify where your prime time is. That is when you should be scheduling-in tasks from your Planning Zone.

- TOP 12 TIME MANAGEMENT TIPS**
- Set up a simple ‘to do’ list
  - Plan your day, set yourself targets
  - Use gaps in the day to catch up with simple tasks
  - Say up-front whether now is a good time or not
  - Create regular, planned meetings for those who are always requesting unplanned meetings
  - Determine the need for every meeting you attend
  - Always start and leave meetings on time
  - Tackle important tasks during your ‘prime time’
  - Try to find a quiet time to think each day
  - Note how long things take to complete
  - Learn to say ‘no’
  - Ask yourself, ‘should I be doing this, and should I be doing it now?’