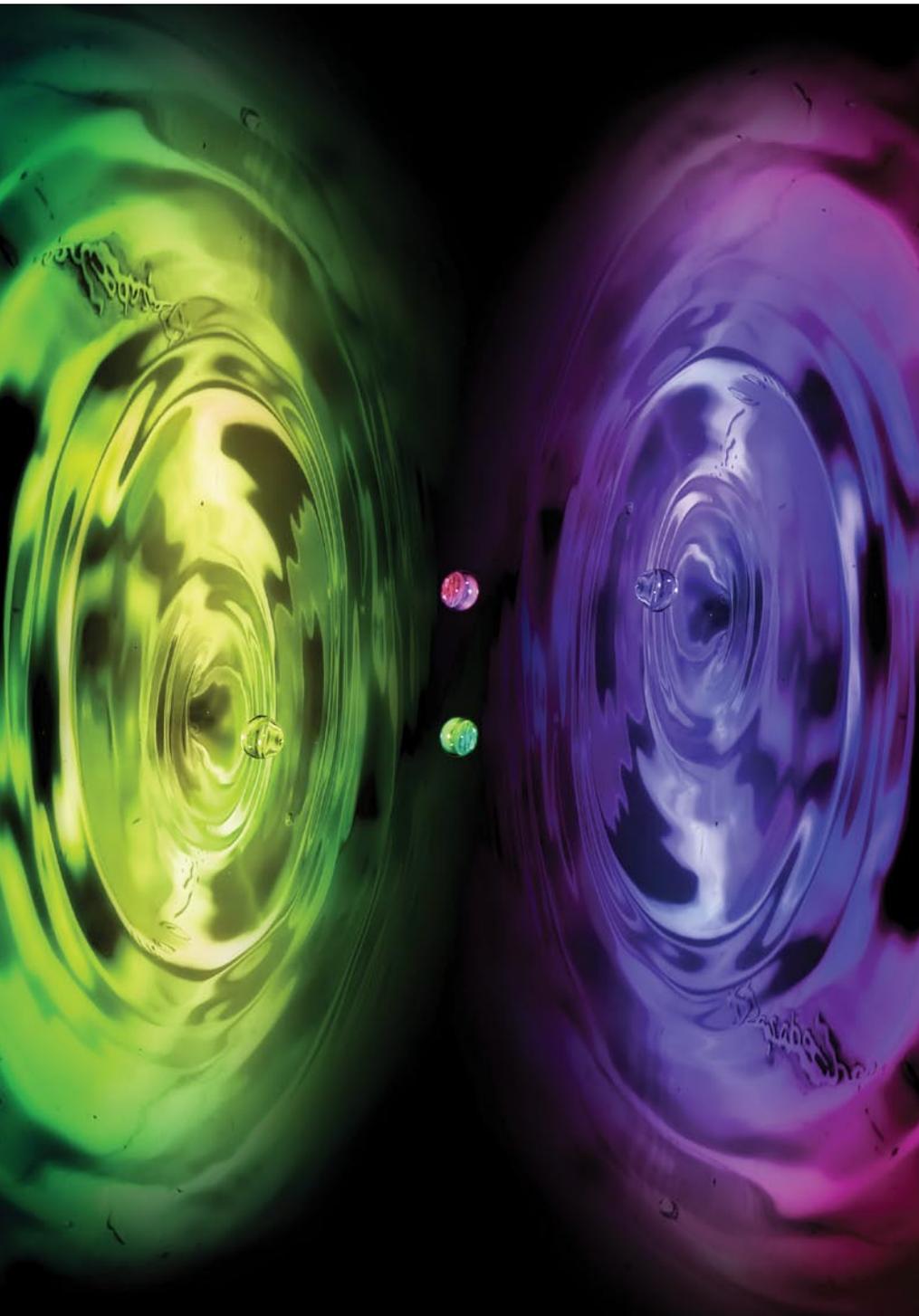




A balancing act: what is important?

In the fourth part of the series, **Jane Lelean** tackles the issue of time management



Evolution of time management systems

As I have read many books and listened to many tapes addressing time management, I have noticed that there have been several generations of thought and attitude to time management.

First generation

First generation recommend notes and checklists as a way of helping you recognise what has to be done today and this week. This time management tool, while it has its place, has its focus in the short term.

Second generation

This tranche of advice encourages us to look ahead, scheduling events in the future. Again, while this is a very important tool, there is little discrimination between the events that are being planned.

Third generation

Third generation reflects a contemporary way of thinking in the arena of management. This approach to time management encourages us to clarify our long term goals, our values and prioritise our tasks on the basis of what is of greatest importance. Using this philosophy we set short, medium and long-term goals. While this methodology to time management and planning is incredibly useful, it can squeeze out any spontaneity from our diary. This is one of the reasons why 'in time' people find diaries so difficult to use.

Fourth generation

Fourth generation, developed by Steven Covey in his books *Seven habits of highly*

successful people and *First things first*, suggests that if we focus relationships and results rather than time and tasks, we can achieve greater balance.

Time management matrix

In his books, Covey recommends that we categorise our activities and how we spend our time into 'urgent versus not urgent' and 'important and not important'. What he has found is that there are common characteristics to each of the quadrants.

When we are spending time doing urgent important work, we working in quadrant 1, dealing with pressing problems, like the dental emergencies, patients who just turn up and want to be seen, deadline driven projects such as filling in grant applications and crises such as staff sickness or medical emergencies.

When we are in quadrant 2 we are spending our time on important things that are not urgent. These types of activities include constructive staff

	Urgent	Not urgent
Important	Quadrant 1 Crises Pressing problems Deadline-driven projects	Quadrant 2 Prevention 'Production capability' activities Relationship building Recognising new opportunities Planning Recreation
Not important	Quadrant 3 Interruptions Some calls, mail and email Some reports Some meetings Proximate pressing matters Popular activities	Quadrant 4 Trivia Busy work Some mail and phone calls Time wasters Proximate pressing matters Pleasant activities

Table 1: Categorized activities according to quadrants

meetings, where you develop strategies and contingency plans that ensure your

day runs smoothly. You build relationships spending time talking to

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	Urgent	Not urgent
Important	Quadrant 1 Stress Burnout Crisis management 'Fire-fighting'	Quadrant 2 Vision Perspective Discipline Control Few crises
Not important	Quadrant 3 Short-term focus Crisis management Reputation-chameleon character See goals and plans as worthless Feel victimised and out of control Shallow and broken relationships	Quadrant 4 Total irresponsibility Fired from jobs Dependent on others or institutions for basics

Table 2: Common outcomes of spending time doing the activities from each quadrant

suppliers and funders, and in this place you can recognise new opportunities to develop your business and plan the implementation.

When in quadrant 3, you are dealing with urgent and not important activities – phone calls, interruptions while you are in surgery that can wait, and some meetings that generally don't have agendas.

Finally, quadrant 4 activities are not urgent and not important and are characterised by trivia – junk mail, spam emails, time-wasting activities that are often pleasant.

Covey has also identified the common outcomes of spending time doing activities from each of the quadrants. What he recognised is that people who spend their time in quadrant 1 doing urgent and important activities are constantly crisis-managing, 'fire-fighting' and not getting on top of things, so they are stressed and burn out.

Those who spend time in quadrant 2 have vision and perspective; they know where their business and life are headed. They tend to be disciplined, in control with few crises and the activities in turn have those characteristics.

Quadrant 3 activities tend to be of

short-term focus, managing crises that are not really that important. People who spend time in this quadrant tend to change their mind to fit with the popular opinion, often see goals as worthless, feel out of control and victims of circumstance. People who spend time in quadrant 3 often have shallow broken relationships, change their friends frequently to be in with who they perceive to be most popular.

People who spend their time in quadrant 4 doing non-urgent and unimportant activities, are generally dependent on others, irresponsible and frequently fired from their jobs.

The value of quadrant two

Covey encourages us to organise our time and activities so we are spending time in quadrant 2, dealing with the important and non-urgent things on our to-do lists. Spending time with our staff in meetings and performing staff reviews, building our relationships really understanding what motivates other people. Spending time working out our personal values and the values of the business, incorporating it into our branding and marketing so everyone, patients and staff alike, know

what our practice represents.

Planning and developing practice handbooks and protocols are in quadrant 2, and by spending time here in the long-term you are able to 'see off at the pass' those crises like persistent sickness, lateness, inconsistency in service. You have developed systems that prevent these problems and nip them in the bud if they do occur, so you no longer spend time in quadrant 1. Exercise, good nutrition and meditation are in quadrant 2, so we are healthy and vital and able to enjoy our work without resorting to alcohol and recreational drugs to make it through to Friday.

Which quadrant do you reside?

Consider your last couple of weeks – which quadrant are you spending most of your time in and what is the consequence of that?

If you were able to spend your buffer time doing quadrant 2 activities, what difference would it make to you and your business?

What can you do now to enable you to spend more time in quadrant 2?

In the next part of the series, which will be published in the January issue of *Private Dentistry*, I will turn the attention to how we can organise our thoughts, and then ourselves, to what is important to us as individuals and incorporate these aspects into our weekly lives. [PD](#)

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