

Something to Talk About

A conversation guide for church leaders

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Important, but Not Urgent

Note: This is one of a series of articles intended to facilitate and guide church leaders' conversations about significant issues that often are not talked about among pastors, boards, and church leadership teams.

Prior articles can be found at <https://efcawest.efcadistrict.org/church-leadership/> or <https://efcawest.efcadistrict.org/something-to-talk-about-archives/>.

Events and things clamor for our attention. Our brains are bombarded throughout our days with advertising, electronic alerts, e-mails, crises to address, and unanticipated demands upon our attention and time. It is against this backdrop of noise urgently calling for our attention that we so often fail to do the things that are truly important because we have been distracted by all those things in our lives that seem to be, at least in the moment, so terribly urgent. Our lack of attention to things that are not urgent at the moment but are truly important over time can yield disastrous long-term results for us and for our churches. Discerning those things that are important but not urgent and how to ensure we attend to them is something to talk about.

In years gone by, I served as a facilitator for law enforcement and community training in Stephen Covey's *7 Habits of Highly Successful People*. One reason I chose to facilitate this course is because I had found its content to be of significant value when I chose to implement it in my life. One of these seven habits is the topic of this article. It's simply this:

Put first things first.

General Dwight Eisenhower, many years ago, developed a time management matrix that Covey used in his book to help us understand this principle. It divides everything we do into one of four quadrants:

- Quadrant I – Urgent and important;
- Quadrant II – Not urgent, but important;
- Quadrant III – Urgent, but not important;
- Quadrant IV – Not urgent and not important.

This is illustrated, with some simple examples, in the table that follows.

<p>I – Important and urgent</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Important deadlines with high urgency. • The building is on fire • Call from a major client • Someone is hospitalized and needs help 	<p>II – Important, but not urgent</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Long-term development and strategizing • Planning and preparing for the future • Attending to relationships and family • Exercise, personal devotions and development
<p>III – Urgent, but not important</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Distractions with urgency from someone else • Scheduled re-occurring meetings that yield few positive results • Interruptions such as phone calls and e-mails • Drop-in visitors 	<p>IV – Not urgent and not important</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Activities with little to no value • Time wasters – things done to excess • Video gaming throughout the day • Excessive media engagement • Mindless Web surfing • Mindless activity that is not genuine rest and re-creation • Programs no longer effective

The “put first things first” principle tells us to schedule and spend as much time as possible in quadrant II activities – those things that are truly important in the long-term but do not have obvious urgency at the moment. They need to be done, but don’t scream to be done. If we don’t *plan* to attend to those things that are important but not urgent, and put them first into our schedule, we likely will not get around to doing them due to the press of other things that seem urgent at the time. Sadly, when we don’t accomplish the important-but-not-urgent things, we actually hurt ourselves and our churches.

Frankly, just having thoughtful conversations among church leaders (lead/senior pastor, staff and board members, to name a few) about what’s truly important in our churches is a Quadrant II activity. I suspect that most church leaders reading this article will be thinking that this is likely important, but that you don’t have the time to do it – that’s precisely the point and proves why it is important for your team to have a conversation about this and act upon it.

Here are some questions and ideas that may stimulate your conversation.

- Review the time spent over the past several months as well as the topics discussed during staff and/or board meetings. List the subjects involved in those discussions. Identify which quadrant they belong in and make a list of them. How much time, if any, do we typically invest each month considering or doing things that are truly important but not urgent?

- Identify some issues our team had to address in recent months/years that were urgent. Discuss how these urgent things might have been better addressed or avoided completely had we dedicated more time to Quadrant II things, important, but not urgent.
- Make a list of things that are important for the long-term health and effectiveness of our church and its ministries. These things will likely be “important but not urgent.” How can we ensure that we address these important things when we come together? How can we manipulate our schedules and meeting agendas to ensure that we invest time in the things that are truly important for our personal and church’s long-term health and effectiveness?
- Moving beyond our leadership team(s), are there some Quadrant II things that we should be doing church-wide simply because they are important, even though they lack urgency at this moment?

One practical application of this principle relates to our denominational relationships. Some church leaders put little or no effort into maintaining relationships with their denomination and with other church leaders in their denomination. I’ve even heard leaders (oftentimes a lead pastor) say that they don’t have time to maintain these relationships. This is usually because we are investing our time in other areas and don’t believe denominational relationships are important.

Many pastors have relationships with other pastors and even with some national or international networks. We don’t think investing in the denomination is important enough for us as pastors. Let me suggest that these relationships may not be important to a pastor at the moment, but they will be vitally important to your church board and staff should you suddenly be taken out of the picture or encounter serious church conflict. Pastors are not immune to sudden physical death or incapacitation by accident or illness, nor of vocational death or incapacitation by schism or tumult. Denominational ties, relationships and support will be vital to your church in these difficult times and even in the days and months following the conflict or your departure. Don’t leave them in the lurch.

Let me encourage you to attend the EFCA West district conference in North Las Vegas on June 28, 29 and 30. We encourage pastors, staff, board members and other church leaders to attend and to become acquainted with other like-minded pastors, the district staff, and to learn from one another. Information and registration material can be accessed at <https://efcawest.efcadistrict.org/district-conference/>. Yes, I am suggesting that this is an important Quadrant II activity.

It’s a shame that so many important conversations are left out because of other seemingly more urgent matters. Ensuring that these important conversations occur despite these urgent distractions is something to talk about.

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*Let us know if we can help and how your conversation goes.
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