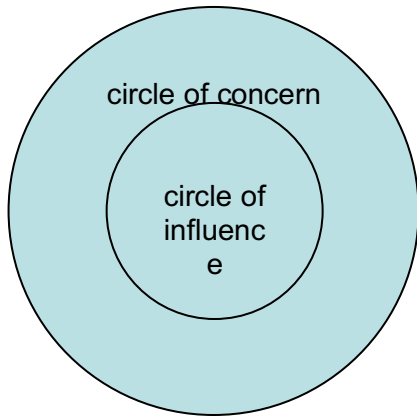


"Circle of Concern and Circle of Influence"

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In *Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, Stephen Covey describes a beneficial model--the "Circle of Concern" and the "Circle of Influence" (pages 81-94).



The larger circle represents all the things in life for which we have any mental or emotional attachment--our areas of distress. Outside the circle are all the other potentially troubling items in which we have minimal interest.

The smaller circle represents all the things in life where our actions create some beneficial effect.

Effective people focus their time and energy on things they can do something about. Because they can accomplish productive outcomes, other people come to them seeking help--and their circles of influence expand over time.

Many individuals, however, focus their time and energy on circumstances beyond their control--the choices of others, problems in the environment, etc. Repeated attention in this area leads to a sense of victimization. By expending energy in the circle of concern, opportunities to expend energy in the circle of influence are lost. Over time, fewer people come to those individuals when they need help and the circle of influence contracts.

Leaders are aware that there are two types of behaviors within the circle of influence:
--those over which the leader has direct control--these are personal choices and habits.
--behaviors that influence the choices that others make, such as listening with empathy, generating and evaluating options, confronting inappropriate behaviors, and serving as a role model.

As John Maxwell, an esteemed authority on leadership, describes in his books, "Leadership is influence, nothing more, nothing less." Effective leaders focus their interactive energies with individuals on activities that have a high probability of productive outcomes.

As leaders, we should continually remind ourselves that the only things that we can really control in this world are our own choices. It is seductive to bark orders believing that others will carry them out without hesitation, without question, and with total commitment. It is better to respect the choice-making power of others, creating an environment that is consistent and predictable, where they can forecast the probable outcomes of their actions.

Stephen Covey's model of the circle of influence and the circle of concern is very similar to the well-known "Serenity Prayer":

"Lord, give me courage to change the things which can and ought to be changed,
the serenity to accept the things which cannot be changed,
and the wisdom to know the difference."