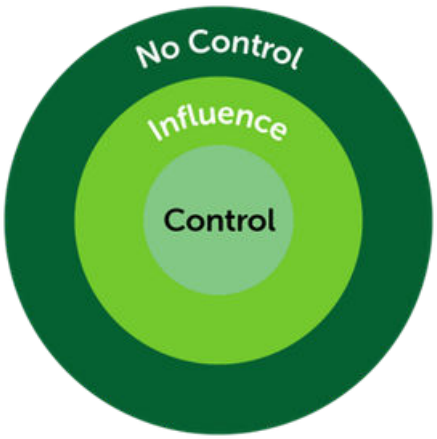
The Circle of Control

Stephen Covey's Circle of Control is a concept from his book "The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People." It's a model that helps individuals understand and manage their reactions to situations by categorising them into three circles: the Circle of Concern (no control), the Circle of Influence, and the Circle of Control.



Covey's main idea is that focusing your time and energy on things within your Circles of Control and Influence leads to greater effectiveness and personal growth, rather than worrying about things in the Circle of Concern that you can't control. By focusing on what you can control, you can become more proactive and better able to deal with challenges and achieve your goals

Understanding and applying the Circle of Control can be incredibly helpful when dealing with stressful life events and for building a plan to focus on

So how is this useful?

Clarifies focus

Stressful events often bring about feelings of being overwhelmed and helplessness, as we may feel like so much is out of our control. By using the Circle of Control, you can identify what aspects of the situation you do have control over. This clarity helps shift your focus away from what you can't control towards what you can influence or directly control.

Reduces anxiety

Worrying about things outside of our control can significantly contribute to anxiety and stress. By acknowledging that some things are beyond our control we can consciously choose to let go of unnecessary worry and redirect our energy towards actionable steps within our control. This can lead to a reduction in overall anxiety levels.

Empowers action

Recognising the areas where you do have control or influence can empower you to take action. Instead of feeling like a victim of circumstances, you can proactively address the situation by making decisions and taking steps towards solutions. This sense of agency can be very motivating, even in the face of adversity.

Promotes resilience

When faced with stressors, resilience is key to bouncing back and adapting. By focusing on what you can control, you build resilience by actively problem-solving and seeking solutions, rather than feeling overwhelmed or defeated by external factors. This resilience helps you navigate through difficult times more effectively.

Encourages self-reflection and growth

Stressful life events often provide opportunities for self-reflection and personal growth. By evaluating how you respond to different situations within the Circle of Control and Influence, you can identify areas for improvement and develop strategies to enhance your coping skills and resilience over time

Some examples

Anxiety

Circle of No Control: Future uncertainties, global events, potential triggers.
Circle of Influence: Stress management techniques, therapy, self-care practices.
Circle of Control: Breathing exercises, mindfulness, setting boundaries.

How to apply: Focus on implementing coping strategies within your control, such as controlled breathing exercises, mindfulness practices, and setting boundaries to manage stressors, while letting go of worry about future uncertainties or global events.

Depression

Circle of No Control: Past failures, negative thoughts, societal stigma.
Circle of Influence: Therapy, medication, building a support network.
Circle of Control: Daily routines, self-care activities, seeking professional help.

How to apply: Concentrate on establishing supportive daily routines, engaging in self-care activities, and seeking appropriate professional help, while letting go of dwelling on past failures or societal stigma surrounding mental health.

Low self-esteem

Circle of No Control: Others' opinions, societal beauty standard, past criticism.
Circle of Influence: Positive affirmations, therapy, supportive relationships.
Circle of Control: Self-talk, self-care practices, personal achievements.

How to apply: Focus on improving your self-talk, practicing self-compassion, and surrounding yourself with supportive individuals, while letting go of seeking validation from others or dwelling on past criticisms.

Burnout risk

Circle of No Control: Workload, organisational culture, societal expectations.
Circle of Influence: Setting boundaries, time management, seeking support from colleagues or managers.
Circle of Control: Work-life balance, self-care routines, prioritising tasks.

How to apply: Prioritise self-care activities, set boundaries to maintain a healthy work-life balance, and seek support from colleagues or supervisors when needed. Let go of trying to control external factors such as culture or societal expectations.

What is on your mind?

What is in the Circle of No Control?

What is in the Circle of Influence?

What is in the Circle of Control?

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