



There's only one thing to focus on. YOU!

Do you ever feel overwhelmed with everything going on in your life, at work, at home, and in the rest of the world? Many of us do. The dark side of a connected world is that we're constantly drinking from the fire hose. Or at least, we feel like we are. So, what can we do about it? Do we just attempt to drink faster, drink longer? Many do, but that doesn't work. What about turning down the pressure of the fire hose? Certainly, if there was less pressure, we'd feel better. Sorry to say, but that's wrong too. You see the problem isn't the fire hose, or the world, the problem is us. We're the ones standing in front of the hose, putting ourselves at its mercy. What if we just chose to step out of the stream of the hose and only lean in and take sips when we're thirsty? What would happen?

One of my favourite quotes, and also one of the hardest to live by, is:

“If you think the problem is out there; that very thought is the problem.”

Stephen Covey

The premise of this quote is that there is only one place to look, one place to focus, one place to solve, and it's you. It's the epitome of Covey's Habit 1 of the 7 Habits, be proactive. I recently discovered the 3 Principles through Jamie Smart, which originated with Sydney Banks as I understand it. The principles didn't start with Syd Banks, but rather our understanding of them did. They're principles after all, they're just there, like gravity, waiting to be discovered. The 3 Principles are rooted in the idea of living from an **inside-out** reality. Everything you are, everything you want to be, is there, inside you, it's who you really are. So, the illusion that we all fall for, that outside-in approaches are the solution, is analogous to thinking the problem is out there. It's not. There's only one thing to focus on; yourself.

Let's explore a couple examples:

- 1) **Are you having difficulty with someone at work?** Are they hard to be around, do they treat people like crap, and get away with it? Do you often think, this place would be so much better if they'd just leave? We'll all be happy then. That's outside-in. What if you went inside-out, and reflected deeply on why that person drives you crazy. Why do you give them that power over you? Between stimulus and response is a tiny space, a space where we have the freedom to choose our response. To be proactive. Think about it. What if you choose to take away that power from them? What would happen if they could no longer push your buttons? Their behavior doesn't have to change. They don't do anything different. It's you that have changed. You used your power as a proactive person to choose a different response. You might even realize that there's something going on with this person and that their behavior is a coping mechanism. You might be inclined to engage with them. Not to fix them, but to understand them. Hey, can we talk for a minute? You know we've worked together for a while and I realized I don't really know much about you. Would you like to talk? They may tell you to get lost, but that's ok, you're in control of your response and you can politely walk away. The point is, focus on you, on your responses, on your actions.
- 2) **Have you been passed over for a promotion?** Do you feel stuck? If only the higher ups could see your potential. Then you'd get promoted. So, what do you do? Wait and see, fingers crossed. Will they notice me this week? Wrong! There's only one thing to focus on: yourself. What can you do to get noticed? Can you talk to your boss about projects or committees or presentations? Yeah, but that's more work. You're right, it is work, but it's the kind of work that gets people noticed and that leads to promotions. You can choose to pursue such things or not. It's your choice. With that choice comes the realization that the problem is not out there. Maybe the commitment is too much to get that promotion, the sacrifices of time and effort may not be worth it. That could be true. Again, your choice.

You see, in the final analysis, Covey was right.

“If you think the problem is out there; that very thought is the problem.”
