

"Too much to do! Not enough time!"

How many times have you said this to yourself in the last month? Week? Hour? Whether it's because there are less people and more work or you're an over-achiever all on your own, you're in good company. In recent informal market research, this was the most common refrain. The first thing most folks think about is time management. This might provide some relief. But most of us have been Franklin-Covey'd to death. So what else can you do? Before I answer that (and to build a little healthy anticipation) let's list some reasons people say they're overburdened:

- | | |
|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| 🕒 Insufficient resources | 🕒 Unclear/(Changing) direction |
| 🕒 Too many/conflicting demands | 🕒 Steep learning curve |
| 🕒 Lack of focus/no priorities | 🕒 Poor planning |
| 🕒 Inadequate coordination | 🕒 Not leveraging efforts |
| 🕒 Can't push back | 🕒 Need for lots of buy-in |
| 🕒 Excessive politics | |

You can probably add your own. For me, I most clearly remember one organization in which I worked where people spent a lot of time "getting others on board" and "responding to the flavor of the month". These and other corporate maladies point us in the direction of some cures.

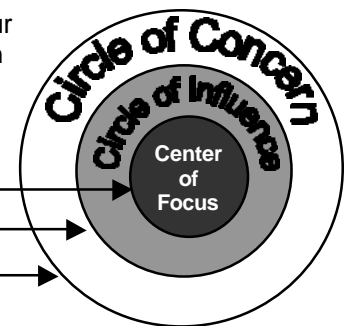
Most of us think of "Too much to do! Not enough time!" as an individual thing. There are things each of us can do to get ourselves more time. Often, however, you can get a bigger bang for your timesaving buck by looking at the system you're a part of.

The first step is to look into "root causes". A simple way to do this is "The Seven Whys." It works like this...

<u>You say...</u>	<u>I ask...</u>
<i>We never plan.</i>	<i>Why?</i>
<i>Because things change too frequently.</i>	<i>Why?</i>
<i>We're not clear on what really has impact & what doesn't.</i>	<i>Why?</i>
<i>We don't really collect data on what we do.</i>	<i>Why?</i>
<i>People are afraid of not meeting their targets.</i>	<i>Why?</i>

You get the idea. When you don't have an answer to a why, you've probably found your "root cause". The next step is to figure out which causes you should deal with. Stephen Covey suggests a way to do this in his book **First Things First**. Once you've got your "root causes", put each in one of the following circles. Doing this helps you to focus your energy and attention to those things you can do something about.

- In the inner circle go those things you have direct control over.
- The middle circle is for those causes you can influence, but don't directly control.
- Things you need to be aware of but can't affect right now go in the outer circle.



The last step is to figure out where you'll start. You can do this by mapping the root causes you've put in the inner two circles onto a simple matrix such as the one below. I've found that sorting causes by impact and effort required usually points up some "low hanging fruit" that you can have a lot of impact on, with little effort.

Impact	Hi		
	Lo		
		Little	Lots
		Effort Required	