

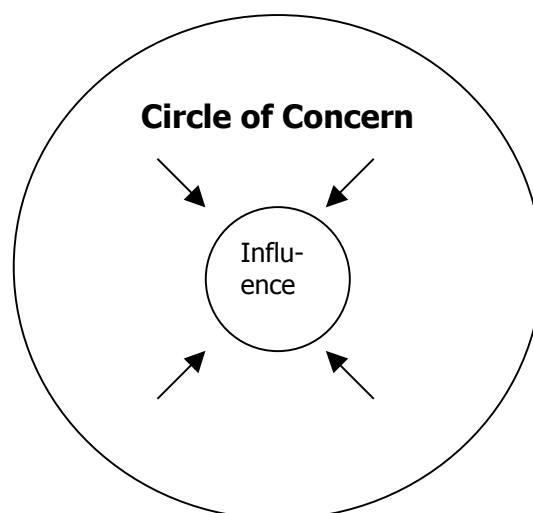
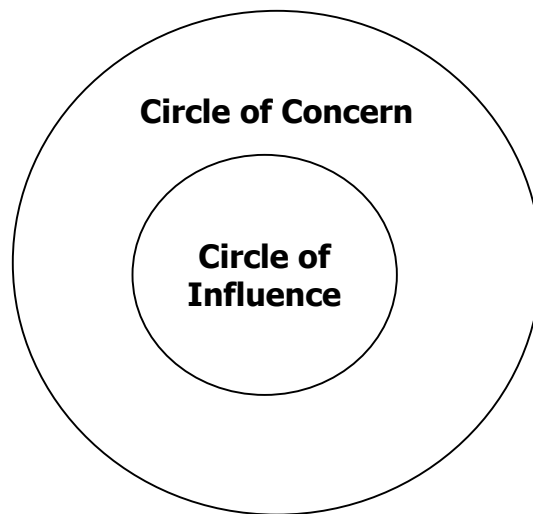
# The Circle of Influence

All of us have a wide range of concerns in our lives – our housing, our health, our friends and family, the environment, the price of a pint of beer, how to lose weight, animal rights, how to put on weight, sex and drugs and rock and roll, third world debt...

Within this whole universe of our concerns, there are some things we can influence and some things we can only stay concerned about.

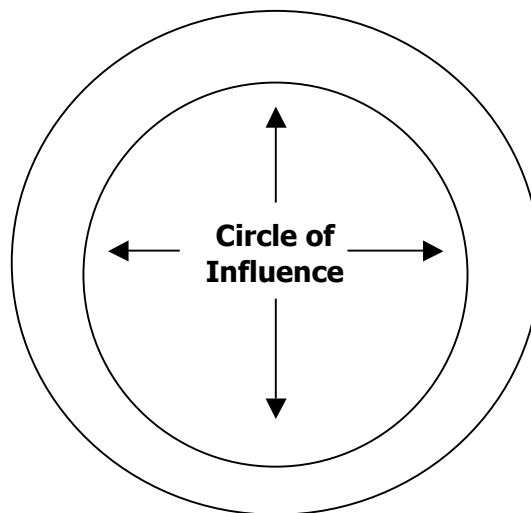
Now we have a choice about where we focus our attention and energy.

We can choose to focus all our attention on the area that is outside our influence. We can get annoyed about the shortcomings of other people, we can blame the government, global capitalism, the weather, a rotten childhood, bad luck, or fluoride in toothpaste. This focus leads to more and more blaming and accusing, to feelings of victimisation, 'poor me'. This negative way of thinking, accompanied by inaction to change things, results in the circle of influence shrinking.



Alternatively we can choose to focus on things that we can influence. This does not mean just the more immediate or 'trivial' concerns. It might mean focusing on those *aspects* of really huge problems that we can exert some influence over. And 'influence' does not mean direct 'control'; we can influence things in an indirect way, for example in our own personal, daily behaviour.

By focusing attention and energy on our circle of influence, we become increasingly proactive. The energy we expend is enlarging; each little victory motivates us to find new ways of exerting influence. We don't waste energy on things we can do nothing about, but direct it towards what we can change. With each step we feel stronger and more creative. And so our circle of influence expands.



It often happens that, in widening our circle of influence, we also widen our circle of concern. It becomes worth caring about some of the really challenging things in our world if we learn we can influence them.

It can be incredibly liberating to realise that, in choosing how to respond to circumstances, we affect those circumstances.

This model is taken from Stephen Covey's *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People* (1989)