

FIRST THINGS FIRST

THE INTERACTIVE EDITION



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Introduction

If working harder, smarter, and faster won't solve it, what will?

IF you were to pause and think seriously about the “first things” in your life—the three or four things that matter most—what would they be?

Are these things receiving the care, emphasis, and time you really want to give them?

Through our work at the Covey Leadership Center, we've come in contact with many people from around the world, and we're constantly impressed with what they represent. They're active, hardworking, competent, caring people dedicated to making a difference. Yet, these people consistently tell us of the tremendous struggles they face daily while trying to put first things first in their lives. The fact that you picked up this book indicates that you can probably identify with what they're feeling.

WHY IS IT THAT SO OFTEN OUR FIRST THINGS *aren't* FIRST?

- I NEED MORE TIME!
- I WANT TO ENJOY MY LIFE MORE!
- I'M ALWAYS RUNNING AROUND!
- I NEVER HAVE TIME FOR MYSELF!

• WHY DO I PROCRASTINATE?!

• THERE'S TOO MUCH STRESS!

• THERE'S TOO MUCH TO DO!

TRADITIONAL TIME MANAGEMENT SUGGESTS THAT BY DOING THINGS MORE EFFICIENTLY YOU'LL EVENTUALLY GAIN CONTROL OF YOUR LIFE AND THAT INCREASED CONTROL WILL BRING THE PEACE AND FULFILLMENT YOU'RE LOOKING FOR

WE DISAGREE!

Basing our happiness on our ability to control everything is futile. While we do control our choice of action, we cannot control the consequences of our choices. Universal laws or principles do. Thus, we are not in control of our lives; principles are. We suggest that this idea provides key insight into the frustration people have had with the traditional “time management” approach to life.

In this book, we present a dramatically different approach to time management. This is a principle centered approach. It transcends the traditional prescriptions of faster, harder, smarter, and more. Rather than offering you another clock, this approach provides you with a compass—because more important than how fast you’re going, is where you’re headed.

In one sense, this approach is new; in another, it’s very old. It’s deeply rooted in classic, timeless principles that represent a distinct contrast to the quick-fix, wealth without work approach to life promoted by so much of the current time management and “success” literature. We live in a modern society that loves shortcut techniques. Yet quality of life cannot be achieved by taking the right shortcut.

There is no shortcut. But there is a path. The path is based on principles revered throughout history. If there is one message to glean from this wisdom, it is that a meaningful life is not a matter of speed or efficiency. It’s much more a matter of what you do and why you do it, than how fast you get it done.

We’d like to let you know what you can expect from First Things First:

In Section One, “The Clock and the Compass,” we’ll look at the gap many of us feel between the way we spend our time and what’s deeply important to us. We’ll describe the three “generations” of traditional time management that comprise the current paradigm of efficiency and control, and discuss why this traditional “clock only” approach essentially increases the gap instead of closing it. We’ll look at the need for a new level of thinking—for a fourth generation that’s different in kind. We’ll encourage you to examine the way you spend your time now to determine if you’re doing what’s merely “urgent” or what’s really “important” in your life, and we’ll look at the consequences of “urgency addiction.” Finally, we’ll take a look at “first things”—our basic human needs and capacities to live, to love, to learn, and to leave a legacy—and how to put them first by using our inner compass to align our lives with the “true north” realities that govern quality of life.

In Section Two, “The Main Thing Is to Keep the Main Thing the Main Thing,” we’ll introduce the Quadrant II organizing process—a thirty-minute weekly process that subordinates the clock to the compass and empowers you to shift the focus from “urgency” to “importance.” We’ll go through the process once to give you a sense of the immediate benefits; then we’ll go through each part of the process in depth to show you the richness of what it can do in your life over time. We’ll look at:

- how to detect your mission and create an empowering future vision that gives meaning and purpose and, in effect, becomes the DNA of your life.
- how to create balance and synergy among the various roles in your life.
- how to set and achieve principle-based goals that create quality of life results.
- how to maintain a perspective that empowers you to keep first things first.
- how to act with integrity in the moment of choice—to have the wisdom and judgment to know whether “putting first things first” means sticking to your plan or changing ... and to be able to do whichever you decide with confidence and peace.
- how to turn your weeks into an upward spiral of learning and living.

In Section Three, “The Synergy of Interdependence,” we’ll address the problems and the potential of the interdependent reality in which we spend 80 percent of our time—an area essentially ignored or inadequately dealt with by traditional time management. We’ll look at the difference between transactional and transformational interactions with others. Instead of seeing other people merely as resources through which we can get more done through delegation, we’ll see how to create powerful synergy through shared vision and synergistic agreements. We’ll look at empowerment—the ultimate “moving the fulcrum over”—and offer insight into things you can do to nurture personal and organizational empowerment and become a change catalyst for your family, work group, or other organization.

In Section Four, “The Power and Peace of Principle Centered Living,” we’ll look at some real life examples, and show how the fourth-generation approach will literally transform the quality of your day and the nature of what you do. We’ll conclude the book by focusing on the principles of peace and how to avoid the main obstacles to a life of fulfillment, meaning, and joy.

To get the most out of this material requires that you become involved with it in a deep way—to be willing to examine your life, your scripts, your motives, your “first things,” and what you represent. This is a highly introspective process. As you work with the material, we encourage you to pause frequently and listen to your own mind and heart. It’s impossible to get deeply absorbed in this kind of profound self-knowledge and not emerge unchanged. You’ll see the world differently. You’ll see relationships differently. You’ll see time differently. You’ll see yourself differently. We are convinced that this material can empower you to close the gap between what’s deeply important to you and the way you spend your time.

We thank you for being willing to consider what we believe to be a better way. We're convinced from our own experience that principles produce both personal peace and dramatic results.

The power is in the principles.

It's our belief that the material in this book can help you escape the tyranny of the clock and rediscover your compass. This compass will empower you to live, love, learn, and leave a great and enduring legacy ... with joy.