

Play the Ball Before It Plays You

When a kid is first learning to field a ground ball, his natural inclination is to stand still until the ball rolls to him. But baseballs do funny things once they hit the grass and dirt. They change direction; they slow down. What they don't do is go right into your glove. If a player passively waits for the ball to come to him, nine times out of ten, he's going to come up empty-handed.

"Play the ball before it plays you made me a better fielder. Whenever I attacked the grounder, things usually turned out better compared to when I just waited for the ball to roll to my feet.

Be Proactive; Not Reactive

Being proactive is a posture you take towards the world. It requires an individual to accept responsibility for his situation and take the initiative to make things better. Instead of letting their conditions and circumstances be the driving force of their decisions, proactive people allow their values to determine the choices they make. Proactive people act rather than being acted upon.

Proactive people play the ball before it plays them.

Even when circumstances limit choices, a proactive person will find where he can still exercise his agency.

Psychiatrist Viktor Frankl is a supreme example of being proactive even when it seems you've been stripped in every bit of your autonomy. As a Jew living in Austria during WWII, he and his family were put into concentration camps where they were subjected to systemized, soul-crushing cruelty. Except for him and his sister, everyone in Frankl's family was either directly executed in the gas chambers or eventually died from the camp's punishing conditions.

"Between stimulus and response there is a space. In that space is our power to choose our response," wrote Frankl in his book, *Man's search for Meaning*. The stimuli Frankl encountered daily were death, deprivation, cruelty. The seemingly inevitable response to such stimuli would be to give up and lose hope. But there in the concentration camp, Frankl realized that stimulus and response weren't welded together. There was a gap. There was choice.

Frankl consequently chose a different response than the default. He chose hope. He chose to help his fellow prisoners. He chose not to hate his captors. He chose to find the meaning in his suffering.

The opposite of a proactive person is a reactive person. Reactive people let their circumstances and conditions control them. Reactive people think that stimulus and response are connected. They don't see the gap between the two and believe that one determines the other. So, if the weather is foul, a reactive person will be in a foul mood, too. When a reactive person gets negative feedback, they become defensive and bitter. When a reactive person finds himself on the short end of the stick, he gripes about it instead of finding ways to get more stick.

Reactive people don't act, they're acted upon.

Reactive people let the ball play them rather than playing the ball.

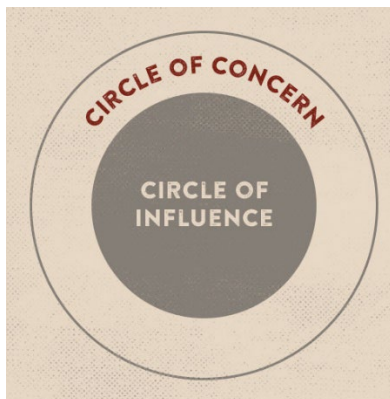
"The pessimist complains about the wind; the optimist expects it to change; the realist adjusts the sails." William Auer Ward, MadJeff Group are realists!

Stephen Covey's Circles of Concern and Influence

Covey has a mental model to help individuals who tend to be reactive start thinking and acting more proactively. It's called the Circles of Concern and Influence. Anything and everything that causes you to worry or keeps you up at night. Even the little stuff. This is your Circle of Concern.



Imagine a circle, and within that Circle of Concern. Inside that circle, you put the concerns that you have some or complete influence on. This is your Circle of Influence.



Some things won't make it to your Circle of Influence and will remain just in your Circle of Concern. You can't influence the weather; you can't influence your luck. You can't tell your body to not get cancer, and you don't have much control over other people's decisions.

According to Covey, what separates reactive people from proactive people is which circle they spend the most time, attention and energy in. Reactive people pay more attention to the items in their Circle of Concern – the stuff they have little or no control over. The results of this are psychologically debilitating.

Not only does focusing solely on your Circle of Concern make you feel like garbage, but the resulting sense of helplessness also actually makes your Circle of Influence shrink. You waste so much energy and time worrying about things that you can't control, that you become paralyzed and fail to act on the things you can.

Proactive people, on the other hand, spend more time focusing on their Circle of Influence. When you focus on things you have control over, you see that your actions affect the world, which is empowering.

That feeling of empowerment impels you to take more action, which causes you to feel more empowered, which cause you to take more action.

Focusing on your Circle of Concern causes it to expand and your Circle of Influence to shrink. The stress that comes from spending your energy and attention on your Circle of Concern primes your brain to see more problems than solutions, reduces your ability to figure out what is and isn't in your control, and blunts motivation to act on the things you do have influence over.

Watch your language

Take a more proactive and less reactive posture towards life is to watch your language for reactive or proactive phrases. How you speak guides how you see the world.

Some reactive phrases to look out for:

- There's nothing I can do.
- That's just the way I am.
- He makes me so mad.
- They won't allow that.
- I have to do that.
- I can't.
- I must.
- If only.

Replace reactive phrases with proactive phrases:

- Let's look at our alternatives.
- I can choose a different approach.
- I control how I respond to this.
- I choose.
- I prefer.
- I will.

Try these ideas:

Play the ball before it plays you.

Act; don't be acted upon.

Be proactive; not reactive.