

Everyone tends to focus on the things that bring happiness, joy, and meaning to them and these are called “first things”. With the help of *First Things First*, you will learn how you can balance between critical aspects of your life and this will ultimately provide you inner peace. Also, you’ll learn the reason for your failure while trying to meet your goals and the ways to do to change that.

When you do things as quickly as possible, that doesn’t mean you have a meaningful life. First, you need to do “first things”.

Let’s imagine a fairy who gives you the opportunity to do everything 20 percent faster. Would you accept? Although most people probably accept it, could they really solve their problems with this? Many of us would accept the offer because it’s our first goal to do many things as quickly as possible. This seems like the best way for time management, but it isn’t. Unfortunately, making to-do lists and crossing off items as we achieve is just the myth which came from self-help books.

This kind of thought allows us to focus only on one side: your commitments, objectives, and routes, the things we can call the “*clock* of our lives.” On the other hand, it distracts us from values, principles, and conscience which mean the “*compass* of our lives.” In fact, living a meaningful life is about using the compass of your life to describe the first things that have a long-lasting and positive effect on your happiness rather than extracting something from the list.

Most people describe the first things as their personal relationships with family and friends. Have you ever heard of anyone looking back and wishing they spent more time in the office? As an example, think that you have a good career and work hard for your company so you earn a top salary but your age is too old to have children. If your dream is to have a family, and you're too late now, your career wasn't really your first things. As long as you are not aware of your first things, you can make decisions that make you unhappy in the long-run.

To conclude, rejecting the fairy’s offer seems like a better decision. Instead, you can try to find your first things to give meaning to your life by making those things your priority.

Focusing on important things rather than urgent ones gives you more.

While making daily schedules, people tend to separate as urgent and important ones such as going to work or visiting family.

Unfortunately, the “urgent” and “important” things in our lives are not the same. So, when we have to choose one of them, we usually go towards the *urgent* tasks rather than *important* tasks.

There are several reasons. For instance, in Western societies, the urgency represents a status that a stressful person who has too much work becomes more important for us. In contrast, if a person does not seem stressful, they tend to defend themselves to be perceived as significant.

One reason comes from biology: You feel energized and alive because of an adrenaline rush when you have urgent responsibilities.

However, when we focus on urgency, we miss the really *important* issues. For instance, you've been planning a family evening because you haven't spent much time with your family lately, but your boss also wants you to attend a business dinner on the same day. What would you do? Choosing the business dinner and postponing the family night are easier and the first preference for most people. You can postpone the family evening but such decisions can cause problems in your family related to distrust and disappointment. Such distrust is difficult to fix rather than to prevent.

In the long-run, important things like spending time with family provide happiness and they are rarely urgent, so it's easier to ignore. However, you should also take into account that you may be happy not to attend the meeting. Of course, every situation is not suitable to choose your family but you shouldn't let the urgent thing stop you from doing what's really important.

If you meet your needs and focus on your principles, your life may have high quality.

Identifying the important thing in your life is the first step to focus on those things!

There are four basic human needs to increase the quality of your life. Firstly, you have to fulfill your physical needs, the "need to *live*" principle, such as having food, shelter, and good health. Secondly, you should have the "need to *learn*" mentally means that being intellectually stimulated. Thirdly, it is a social principle and represents your "need to *love*" by having people you trust and care for. Finally, you have to fulfill your spirituality, "need to *leave a legacy*", by having a sense of purpose in life.

If these needs are not met, we experience stress, anxiety or fear instead of happiness. For example, consider the difference between a homeless or lonely person and a healthy person with a meaningful purpose. The quality of life whether it is low or high depends on fulfilling these needs.

You must focus on your *principles* to fulfill and balance your needs. Your principles are your inner compass - something that guides you in the direction you want to go in life.

Although you can't stay connected to your principles, they must guide all your decisions. Also, you should consider that these principles might not bring immediate results always. For instance, you are a couch potato but you want to be a marathon runner. You should follow your principles

of dedication and good health for a long time and you have to exercise and change your diet. Remember, nothing can happen overnight, you have to let your principles to guide you.

Therefore, you should use your principles to guide you while fulfilling and balancing your needs. As a result, the quality of your life will be greater.

To know where you're going, you need to develop a strong vision for the future.

Have you ever wondered how some people can easily decide while others have difficulty in taking decisions and considering alternatives? The ability to make decisions easily depends on how *future-oriented* you are.

The best thing you can do for your future is having a clear vision to make choices easily and improve your quality of life. You will be closer to your dreams as your desire to achieve is strong and as you don't prefer negative feelings such as fear or doubt. For instance, Gandhi's life was driven by his vision of having an egalitarian society. He was a shy and nervous lawyer when he had to speak with the public before devoting himself to that goal. However, his social anxiety disappeared thanks to his desire to follow his dreams and vision.

You never forget what you're fighting for when you face with struggles as you have a future-oriented vision. Victor Frankl, a famous Holocaust survivor, provides an extreme and poignant example came from his observation: The Holocaust survivors' common characteristic was their sense of purpose for the future rather than their health, intelligence or family. He noted that "they had a mission to perform, some important work left to do." That desire gave them the strength to move on.

So how do you develop a strong vision for the future? A good way is to write a personal mission statement for yourself.

When you imagine yourself on your eightieth birthday, what do you see? A big family or a successful business? What have you achieved by then?

You can imagine what you want to achieve in your future to find the goals you need to focus on in your future. Once you know what you want to achieve, start taking steps for it and don't waste your time with short-term, unrelated concerns. You know what you want, so go ahead!

If only you have goals with principles and a vision for the future, you can reach them.

Have you ever taken a New Year's decision you didn't complete? Many people in the New Years are simply putting personal goals, such as more work or more exercise to return quickly to their old habits.

It doesn't have to be New Years; people always tend to set goals that they wouldn't reach. Sometimes, even they reach, the result may cause dissatisfaction. For instance, the Soviet government wanted to decrease alcohol consumption so put the restriction on sales in the 1980s. As a result, alcohol consumption decreased, but narcotics consumption increased. The goal was reached with a high cost.

So what is the difference between goals that are reached, and goals that are reached in a positive way? First of all, you need to identify the *what*, *why*, and *how* to make your goal consistent with your principles. Here is the right thing (*what*), for the right reasons (*why*), and in the right way (*how*).

For example, imagine *what* the meaning of maintaining a healthy body for you is. In this case, while your *why* may come from feeling good and being an example for your children, your *how* may be changing your eating habits and exercising regularly.

You have to make sure your goal is yours and you have control over it in addition to finding you what, why, and how. You can't have the ability to change the president's foreign policy but you can have control over your body and personal habits.

Finally, you should give importance to your goal instead of rushing for it. Sometimes, your goal might take years to complete like in the example of the fact that you're overweight and want to become fit. The important thing is that you are dedicated because you understand that your goal, like being healthy, will have an impact on your life and that you really want to work for it.

You need to find the right perspective and act with integrity to make the right decisions.

You need to use the right perspective when making important decisions. For instance, a good photographer uses different lenses to get the right perspective for each one with the purpose of taking nice pictures.

When people make decisions or plans, they tend to use one perspective. A "close-up view" is used for immediate decisions like deciding what they eat in dinner or "wide-angled view" is used for long-term goals like planning their five years.

The best solution is to combine these two perspectives by planning in *weekly terms*.

You can determine a time for things that are important to you such as work, family or leisure by creating a weekly calendar which provides proper attention throughout the week without certain specific hours for your activities.

Also, you can try to combine your goals whenever you can. For instance, let's think you have to cook dinner, meet your neighbors, and prepare a new recipe for an upcoming reception. How the situation is stressful! You need to have good perspective here and combine these activities: Make the new recipe for tonight's dinner, make extra to give to the neighbors, and take to the reception.

You should also follow your principles while using the right perspective. As an example, your friend calls you with a serious problem but you planned to stay home and read that night. What would you do? You'd probably prefer going to your friend rather than staying and reading because of the value of friendship and reliability. Sometimes, staying with your principles which is called having "integrity in the moment of choice" may be more important than your plan. Thanks to this integrity, we are able to make good choices.

So make good decisions by finding the right perspective on them and letting your principles guide you.

You should prefer interdependence and cooperation rather than independence and competition.

Life always offers us competition in many areas such as getting the best grades and the best job or being smarter and prettier. This approach is unhealthy and causes focusing on independence and competition which impact us negatively.

People rush to get things done because they have to achieve everything alone so it causes competition. They do not spend the time to eat healthily but they run to an appointment by getting fast food that proves us their "rush to live". Others "rush to love" by jumping into one relationship to another and run away when things become difficult instead of working through it.

Unfortunately, there are many negative effects of this lifestyle. For instance, a bad diet causes health problems or couples who choose easy way rather than working through difficulties lead to divorce.

We need to focus on *interdependence* and *cooperation* instead of being driven by independence and competition.

We need to accept interdependence as a good thing and that comes from the four basic human needs: Living, loving, learning, and leaving a legacy. These are all related to relationships with

others. So, we can say that everyone needs others to stay alive, healthy, and happy. This explains why the concepts of interdependence and cooperation are important particularly.

For instance, when we work independently, we focus on our winning and someone's losing. However, focusing on cooperation provides win-win situations which are much easier. As a result, interdependence and cooperation are more positive in compared to the perception of everything as a competition.

For example, consider two people working through their marriage. Many couples face with the serious problems when their honeymoon stages are over and they even get divorced. However, if couples succeed in working together, sharing a vision, and valuing cooperation; their marriage even comes stronger when the problems appear.

So you should focus on the long-term and immediate benefits of working cooperatively with the people in our lives instead of seeing them as competitors.

Being a strong personal leader goes through strengthening what's around you.

All of us have leadership roles for others in our lives such as parents in parent-child relationships or employees in employee-colleague relationships. In such situations, you have to *empower* those you lead to be a good personal leader. Although empowerment is not possible to be instilled directly to anyone, you can allow them to strengthen by providing appropriate conditions such as trust, respect, and honesty that naturally lead to empowerment in others.

You can include others in the process of decision-making to foster those conditions. For instance, imagine that one of your subordinates at work comes to you with a problem. You firstly try to ask them what they can do and direct them to find their solutions instead of trying to fix it immediately. As a result, their creativity becomes valuable and they feel respected and empowered to perform better in the future.

There need to be mutual trust and accountability when you lead someone. Strict supervision and control might seem easier in the short-term to get immediate results, but in the long-term, it isn't productive. Results of the studies done with companies show that a "high-trust-culture" provides employees feeling trusted by their employers and these companies perform better than companies with a "low-trust-culture."

There is a good way to build a "high-trust-culture" and that is getting feedback regularly from those you lead. This shows that their opinions are important and respected. Also, you will explore which areas you need to work more.

For example, consider a CEO who listens to his employees' feedback. As he considered those feedbacks, he values their judgments and proves his humility. His performance doesn't have to be perfect and he can change always.

You'll find personal leadership roles in every aspect of your life. It can be family, work or friends. So you need to base your relationships on trust, respect, and honesty to be a strong leader.

Your different roles and tasks are parts of a whole rather than being separate pieces.

Strong principles provide you improving with your quality of life by guiding you about how you spend your time. It also directs you in a fulfilling direction.

Most importantly, principles provide guidance and *balance* is a result of that guidance. Most people tend to separate their lives as work, family, free time, etc. The roles they play and the tasks they perform are in independent categories but this type of perception may cause limiting of your life. If you have only a good sense of balance in your life, you can get rid of your borders as being more productively.

When people see their lives as divided into sections, they have difficulty transferring their skills between compartments. For instance, researches showed that a successful person in academia may have difficulty in the area that's not academic even if the task is similar because they aren't used to thinking along the boundaries they just imagined.

In reality, we have all related tasks and roles. If you only focus on one, it will cause frustration. Imagine that an executive only focuses on her timetables and duties and if her employees interrupt her with questions, she becomes easily annoyed. However, if she uses her employees' questions and interruptions to strengthen her relationships with them, performance in the company will get better. The executive needs to be more balanced by combining her work and social roles.

It may seem hard but combining your roles in life is much easier. For instance, you are stressful because you are under pressure of exercising more and spending more time with your children. However, your schedule is so full to do both of them. Here is the point: You can combine them by playing tennis together with your children. As a result of understanding the connectivity in your life, you will have new opportunities like this, and you will be able to use your time more efficiently.

So don't compartmentalize your life. Keep a balanced view and don't forget that everything is connected.

To have an inner peace: Try to improve your quality of life and put “first things first”.

Do you consider yourself to have inner peace? Does your life have balance, joy, and meaning?

If you have problems related to discouragement, pride or unrealistic expectations in your life, you probably feel dissatisfaction because these are the most common preventers to have inner peace which provides you a high-quality of life.

Sometimes all three of them happen at the same time. Think of yourself as skilled in your work, but when your supervisor retires, you are not elected as the successor. When someone else gets promoted, you'll feel discouraged and embarrassed because of staying in your position.

What you can do in here is that you try to focus on humility and courage instead of shaming and you give up unrealistic expectations. Remember, someone else getting the promotion does not show that your performance isn't good enough so you should also give up competing with others to prove your worth. In fact, you can think that your performance is really good so your company wants you in that position. This kind of thinking provides you peace and improvement.

The biggest key to reaching inner peace is putting “first things first.” A professor gave a good example to his students. He presented an empty jar first, then he filled with rocks and asked the students whether it was full or not. They said it was full. In response, the professor poured in gravel, which filled in the gaps between the rocks. Next, he poured in the sand, finally, he poured in water to completely fill even the tiniest gaps.

Here is what can we learn from this: If we think that jar as the time in our lives, the rocks are the important things and the sand, gravel, and water as the rest. If we put in the sand and gravel first, which are unimportant daily chores, there won't be a place for the rocks. However, when we put in the important things first, everything will fall into place.

First Things First by Stephen R. Covey, A. Roger Merrill, Rebecca R. Merrill Book Review

In general, people tend to focus on the wrong things in life that cause stress and disharmony. However, we need to identify our priorities, replace urgency with importance, and strike a balance between all the tasks in order to increase the quality of life. If you have a future-oriented vision, you can set effective goals. You can reach happiness and inner peace by putting your “first things” first instead of putting the urgent or smaller things first.

Imagine your deal 80th birthday.

What do you see? Who is around you, and what have you achieved? To identify your most important goals, the imagination of your life when you are 80 will help you. After you determine your goals and “first things”, you can start working for them.

<https://goodbooksummary.com/first-things-first-by-stephen-r-covey-book-summary/>