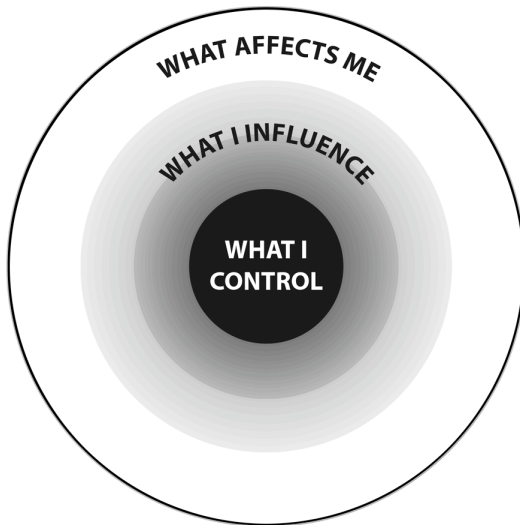


The Three Forces

In large part, Personal Accountability is about learning how to consciously direct your thoughts and your creative energy to move you forward in your life. To do this, you must understand the three forces that create results and experiences:

- The forces you can control
- The forces you can influence
- The forces that affect you



The Three Forces

What Affects Me

Laws of physics, the price of commodities, others' choices and behaviors. Literally millions of forces.

What I Influence

Everything and everyone I come into contact with in varying degrees, based on relationships, interest, effort, and willingness of all involved.

What I Control

My thoughts, feelings, and actions.

The Forces You Control

The forces we control are the easiest to define and work with, though even here there is still some debate, misunderstanding, and confusion. The forces we control—the *only* forces we control—are:

- Our thoughts
- Our feelings
- Our actions

Most of us spend far too little time learning how to control these aspects of ourselves and far too much time vainly attempting to influence and manipulate the forces that are outside our control or influence.

I understand that controlling our thoughts, feelings, and actions seems out of reach to many people. In fact, an entire industry has grown up around self-help, personal development, and the science of psychology, because so few people know how to control their thoughts, feelings, and actions.

A significant part of the purpose of this book is to help you do this. The inner landscape of your thoughts and feelings determines what actions you will or will not take in your life. The greatest leaps in personal evolution and accountability will happen by focusing on and expanding the forces that you *can* control, not by wasting time and energy on what you can't control.

The Forces You Can Influence

There are a great number of forces in life that I influence, but have *no* direct control over. These include things like the output of my team; the enthusiasm of my audiences; and the behavior of the people I elect to political office, of my loved ones, and of my dog. The difficult part of working with the forces that I influence is knowing where the line is, what I can influence and what I cannot. The Serenity Prayer is in large part about developing the wisdom and discernment to know where that line of influence is.

The Serenity Prayer

God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change; courage to change the things I can; and wisdom to know the difference.

Reinhold Niebuhr

A Story of Influence—or Lack Thereof

My dog Porsche is a perfect example. I can influence how Porsche behaves, but I cannot control all of her behaviors. With training and encouragement, I have been successful at influencing her not to jump on me and other people. I have been successful at house-training her. I have influenced her to sleep when my wife and I sleep and to do a multitude of tricks and behaviors that make her a wonderful dog.

What I have *not* been able to influence successfully is how she relates to and interacts with other dogs. She does not like other dogs and refuses to greet other dogs with the traditional mutual sniffing you know where. She expresses her displeasure in very clear and consistent patterns. Other dogs approach her in the off-leash park, and she informs them in the firmest terms that she is not interested. She turns to face them and lowers her rear end so that it is not available for the ceremonial sniff. Then she shows her teeth and emits a low growl. If the other dogs don't get the message and back off, she barks and chases them, though never biting them. As soon as they are at a respectful distance, she goes back to being her playful, trick-performing, loveable, fun, goofy dog-self. Until the next dog wants to sniff her butt.

We tried everything. We went to puppy school, super puppy school, and obedience training. We exposed her for hours on end to friends' friendly dogs and took her to the off-leash park every day to interact with other dogs. We hired dog trainers to come and work with us one on one. None of this changed her behavior. She does not want to interact with other dogs. I wonder sometimes if she thinks she is not a dog.

While we do have a great deal of influence over the behavior of our dogs (and children and employees), we obviously cannot control it.

Windows of Influence

This brings up an interesting related concept, the “optimal windows of opportunity” for influence. These exist in nearly all situations. Aware, educated, and conscientious individuals try to know and take advantage of these ideal opportunities. I suspect that our dog’s aversion to other dogs was aggravated or even caused by our ignorance of a key development stage of puppies, the socialization period in the litter which occurs approximately between the ages of six to twelve weeks. This is when dogs learn how to deal with other dogs. We didn’t know this when we went looking for a dog. We hadn’t educated or prepared ourselves to care for a dog properly. After all, we were only looking.

But at our first stop, my wife, Cory, fell in love with this beautiful little puppy. The breeder assured us that the puppy was old enough to leave the litter and come home with us. Taking his word, we brought her home when she was a day shy of seven weeks old. So during her critical socialization period, she was sitting in our laps instead of playing with other dogs. Is it any wonder that she doesn’t know how to interact with other dogs?

Think about results in your life when you have used a window of influence and it has supported the results and experiences that you wanted to achieve. Also consider the times when you missed the opportunity to influence and its outcome. I always smile when I hear parents talk about how, now that their kids are teenagers, it is time to lay down the law. A great idea, but about twelve years too late. The parents’ window of opportunity to influence has already closed.

The job of teenagers is to rebel, define who they are, and move toward independence. This is a very difficult time for parents to try to begin influencing behavior. Only if the foundation of values and beliefs has been consistent from the beginning will the parents have an opportunity to support, participate, and guide their

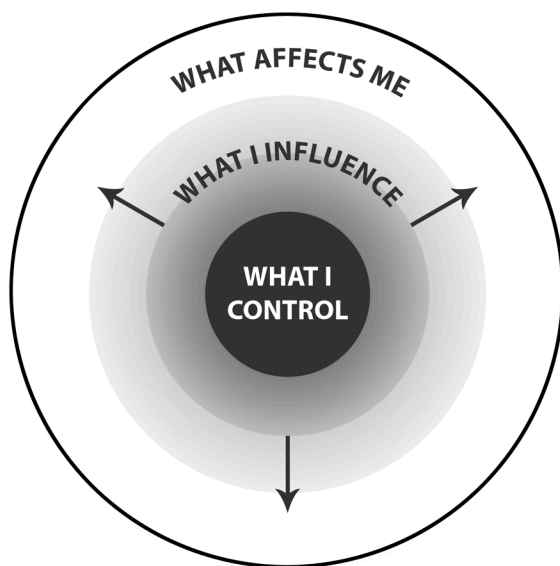
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children through the teen years. If it hasn't, their odds of influencing will be slim at best.

So, the line between what we can influence and what we cannot is a moving target, based on timing, context, and knowledge.

The statement that "knowledge is power" is another way to say that the more we know, the greater our capacity to influence. Clearly if Cory and I had known about the vital stage of socialization development for puppies, we would never have removed Porsche from her litter so early. With this knowledge, we could have positively influenced her interactions with other dogs for the rest of her life. Ignorance is costly.

Still, the force of influence is a complicated area, full of grey patches. For example, is the intention of influence to support ["positive"] or to manipulate ["negative"]? How far do I push my influence? When am I guiding and when am I imposing my beliefs and values on other people? Each of us must answer these questions for ourselves, consistently and compatibly with our purpose.



Where Do I Direct My Energy?

The Forces That Affect You

In our world, the countless forces that affect us are the largest area of our experience. The laws of physics and gravity, the turning of the earth, the heat of the sun, the weather, an accident, a natural disaster, the actions and choices of other people, the price of gas, the state of the economy—the list is endless.

What happens to us is important, but how we choose to cope with these forces is *more* important. Our *choices* are what affect our emotional states and well-being.

In dealing with the forces that affect you, the foundation of personal power is learning to tell the difference between what you influence and what you control.

The perfect way to reinforce powerlessness and helplessness is to focus your energy on things that affect you, but over which you have minimal or no influence. This wastes your precious life energy and creates victim experiences.

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Activity – Your Strongest and Weakest Areas

If you are not actually going to do the Activities in this book, you might as well stop reading right now. Put the book on your bookshelf and prepare yourself to cope with your next victim experience in exactly the same way that you have in the past.

If you are still reading and you didn't complete the first Activity, Benefits of Accountability, on page 11, go back and do it now. It won't take long.

Now to *this* Activity.

What is the life area in which you are most personally accountable? Is your energy directed toward what you control, what you influence, or what affects you? Write a line or two about what you notice.

What is the life area in which you decided you are most often victimized? Is your energy directed to what you control, to what you can influence, or to what affects you? Write a line or two about what you notice.

The Conscious Framing of a Life

Here is an example of the impact of living life at the different levels of victimization and Personal Accountability.

Recently Cory and I have been blessed to adopt our first child, our son Wyatt. We have chosen an open adoption because we want him to know that his adoption plan was made out of love, that his best interests were the motivation, and that he simply has more family to love him than most children do. (In an open adoption, there is complete disclosure of all information between the biological and adoptive parents, both parties choose one another, and contact is negotiated between the parties. That contact ranges from sending photos and letters to getting together for special events and more.)

We have just celebrated our first annual family-day gathering, having Wyatt's birth mother and birth grandmother over for brunch. At this point, we are in contact about twice a month. In truth, we did not adopt a baby. We adopted an entire extended family.

Cory and I have had many conversations about how Wyatt may choose to interpret his adoption. For example, we have a friend who, to this day, is victimized by his adoption—so much so that, when he and his wife were having difficulty conceiving, he would not consider adopting because he felt he would not be able to love an adopted child as much as a biological one. I do not pretend to understand that, but I did not live his life. All I can tell you is that it is real for him.

Wyatt, on the other hand, will have at least six choices about how he chooses to frame the event of his adoption. Let's consider them. (See *The Evolution of Personal Accountability* chart on page 14.)

Choice – External-Blame Victim

Wyatt may say or think, “There is or was something wrong with my birth mother or she would not have given me up for adoption.”

This framing will lead to a belief something like, “People hurt me and cannot be trusted.” The long-term implications of such a belief are challenging at best—a life of being on guard, protected, and ultimately disconnected and lonely.

Choice – Self-Blame Victim

Wyatt may say or think, “There is or was something wrong with *me*, which is why my birth mother gave me up for adoption. I was rejected because, for some reason, I am incomplete, not good enough, or some version of not worthy.”

[NOTE: “Not worthy” is one of the most common core negative beliefs that exists in North American society. It is directly related to the experience of the Self-Blame Victim.]

If Wyatt chooses to frame his life at this level of victimization, his experience of life will be that of never measuring up. Whenever something doesn’t go as well as hoped for, he will interpret this as his fault. He will be extraordinarily hard on himself. Over time, he will diminish his own self-confidence, self-respect, and self-esteem so much that he will be unable or unwilling to risk. Then, he will settle for a life far less than what he is capable of because he believes at a conscious or unconscious level that he deserves no better.

Choice – Self-Righteous Victim

Wyatt may say or think, “I understand that my birth mother made an adoption plan with my best interests in mind. I will do my best with the situation, but how a mother could reject her child is beyond me.”

Notice that, at this level, he intellectually gets what happened, but there is still a wound of rejection and blame aimed at his birth mother. He will project this into every relationship he has, sabotaging what he intellectually knows to be true with the pain of perceived rejection and denial.

It must be obvious to you that if Wyatt or anyone else chooses to live life from the Victim frame, each new experience will bring more victimization, more rejection, and more separation. Over time, all Victims become “drainers.” Drainers are people who consume more energy than they create, take more than they give, and ultimately have few or no relationships that work.

Yes, it is easy to see how these Victim interpretations could affect his life just as they could affect all our lives. Cory and I can't *control* how Wyatt chooses to see his life. However, we believe that we can *influence* his view with love, honesty, and openness so that he will choose to see his adoption experience from an *accountable* perspective as follows.

Choice – Emotional Response Accountability

Wyatt may say or think, “The simple fact is that my birth mother made an adoption plan for me. I will consciously choose to be thankful for my adoptive family as they are thankful for me. I choose to accept, share, and participate in life as it is, with love and appreciation, knowing my birth mother made the best possible choice she could at the time.”

This accountable framing will support Wyatt to be present in his life; to develop an attitude of gratitude; to know that he was and is and always will be wanted, loved, supported, and the highlight of Cory's and my life.

Just this level of accountability will transform his life—as it could yours—but there is more.

Choice – Practical Accountability

Wyatt may say or think, “I have co-created the experience of having additional family (a birth family and an adoptive family), of being loved and cherished by even more people than most. I know there is a lesson in this about acceptance, love, and the definition of family, I will learn it and apply it in my life and with my own children.”

Imagine for a moment what this would mean. Wyatt’s energy is focused on who loves him and on the fabric of his unusually large family. The lesson is about applying love, redefining what family means, and deciding how he will give of himself to his family. What a marvelous supporting and empowering interpretation of an adoption experience.

Yet there is still one more step!

Choice – Spiritual Accountability

Wyatt may say or think, “As a spiritual being, I co-created coming here in human form to share my life and love in an unconventional way. In my transition from spirit to human form, I co-created healing the relationship between my birth mother and birth grandmother. Together, we chose the perfect family who love and accept us for who and what we are, divine sparks of God. We love and accept them on the same basis.

“I chose to come to the physical plane and have more parents than the norm, and to experience greater love, intimacy, connection, and contribution for all involved.”

At this level of Personal Accountability, Wyatt believes that he chose both his sets of parents, that he participated, and that he did so with purpose. Clearly, this will lead to a life of purpose, one free of blame. This approach to life says that the event was not random or an accident. He will ask and answer the questions:

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*The Three Forces – An Excerpt from Reframe Your Blame:
How to be Personally Accountable, by Jay Fiset*

What does it mean? What can I learn? How does it relate to my life mission?

Think for a moment about how Personal Accountability will impact Wyatt's life. And think also about how Personal Accountability will impact yours.



Consciousness Clue

The hallmark of Personal Accountability is absence of blame.
