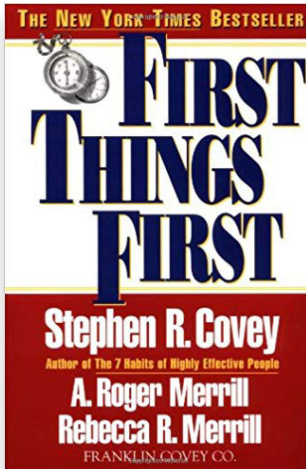


EXECUTIVE BOOK SUMMARIES

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First Things First THE NUTSHELL

Simon & Schuster 1994

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Why is it that so often our first things aren't first? For years we've been given methods, techniques, tools, and information on how to manage and control our time. We've been told that if we keep working harder, learn to do things better and faster, use some new device or tool, or file or organize in a particular way, then we'll be able to do it all. So we buy the new planner, go to the new class, read the new book. We learn it, apply it, try harder, and what happens? For most of the people we meet, the result is increased frustration and guilt.

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.

Our struggle to put first things first can be characterized by the contrast between two powerful tools that direct us: the clock and compass. The clock represents what we do with, and how we manage our time. The compass represents what we feel is important and how we lead our lives.

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The struggle comes when we sense a gap between the clock and the compass, when what we do doesn't contribute to what is most important in our lives. In our effort to close the gap between the clock and the compass in our lives, many of us turn to the field of "time management". Understanding the underlying paradigms of time management is vitally important because our paradigms are the maps of our minds and hearts out of which our attitudes and behaviors, and the results in our lives grow. It creates something of a "see/do/get" cycle.

The way we see (our paradigm) leads to what we do (our attitudes and behaviors); and what we do leads to the results we get in our lives. So, if we want to create significant change in the results, we can't just change attitudes and behaviors, or methods or techniques. We have to change the basic paradigms out of which they grow. When we try to change the behavior or the method without changing the paradigm, the paradigm eventually overpowers the change. That's why attempts to "install" total quality or empowerment in organizations are unsuccessful. They can't be installed; they have to be grown. They emerge naturally out of the paradigms that create them.

Daily planning provides us with a limited view. It's so "close up" that we're often kept focused on what's right in front of us. Urgency and efficiency take the place of importance and effectiveness. Weekly organizing, on the other hand, provides a broader context to what we do. It takes a bigger picture and lets us see the "mountains" for what they really are. The activities of the day begin to take on more appropriate dimensions when viewed in the context of the week.

As you begin to organize for the coming week, the first step is to connect with what's most important in your life as a whole. Context gives meaning. Consider what you care about, what makes the moments in your life meaningful. The key to this connection lies in the clarity of your vision around such questions as: What's most important? What gives your life meaning? What do you want to be and to do in your life?

Our next step is to identify our roles. We live our lives in terms of roles, not in the sense of role playing, but in the sense of authentic parts we've chosen to fill. We may have important roles at work, in the family, in the community, or in other areas of life. Roles represent responsibilities, relationships, and areas of contribution.

A clear set of roles provides a natural framework to create order and balance. If you have a mission statement, your roles will grow out of it. Balance among roles does not simply mean that you're spending time in each role, but that these roles work together for the accomplishment of your mission.

The next step is to select goals in each role. You'll probably be aware of several goals you could set in each role. But for now, limit yourself to the one or two goals that are most important. You may even feel, based on your inner compass, that you should not set goals in every role this week. The process

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allows for that flexibility and encourages you to use your compass in determining what's most important for you to do.

Next, effectively translating high-leverage goals into an action plan requires creating a framework for effective decision making throughout the week. The key is not to prioritize your schedule, but to schedule your priorities.

At the end of the week before you review your mission statement to begin organizing the next week, pause to ask questions such as: What goals did I achieve? What challenges did I encounter? What decisions did I make? In making decisions, did I keep first things first?

There are principles. We do have a conscience. Those two things make all the difference. They impact our thoughts and how we see everything around us. We see how vital it is to pause in that space between stimulus and response so that we can listen to our conscience and exercise the attributes of the heart to make the "best" choices. We see that there are purposes higher than self toward which we can focus our energies and efforts with passion and confidence that we can create quality-of-life results. We see the world as a place of infinite third-alternative solutions. We see the importance of creating aligned systems so that the very way we go about organizing and planning our lives reinforces the habits of the heart that create peace.

Becoming principle-centered is just that: becoming. It's not arriving; it's a lifetime quest. But the more people align their lives with true north, the more they begin to develop certain characteristics common to principle-centered people. Wherever you are in terms of becoming principle-centered, we encourage you to start exercising the attributes of your heart. Make a promise and keep it. Set a goal and achieve it. There is peace in it. As Emerson said, "Nothing can bring you peace but yourself. Nothing can bring you peace but the triumph of principles."