SORTING YOUR WORLD

PURPOSE

To identify what you can control, what you can influence and what you must accept, so you free up mental energy for what truly matters.

Most of us spend our energy in the wrong circle. Today you find out which of your battles are yours.

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Do Steps 1 and 2 before the lesson. Go with your gut.
2. There are no right answers yet. Getting some wrong is the point.
3. Don't change anything until Step 3.
4. After the lesson, check every one and count what you got wrong. That number is the lesson.

Why this works. Stress grows when you push hard on things you can't change and give up on things you could. People who act where they can and accept where they can't cope better. Sorting first and checking after shows you your own blind spots.

CIRCLES OF CONCERN AND INFLUENCE (COVEY, 1989) · STRESS AND APPRAISAL (LAZARUS & FOLKMAN, 1984) · PERCEIVED CONTROL (CHENG ET AL., 2013, META-ANALYSIS) · COPING FIT (CHENG, LAU & CHAN, 2014, META-ANALYSIS) · DICHOTOMY OF CONTROL (EPICTETUS, DISCOURSES 2.5)

STEP 1

Write down 15 things that worry you, stress you or annoy you. ONE PER LINE

Work and home. Big and small. The person who drives you mad. The thing that keeps you up at night. The email you are dreading. Don't sort them yet. Just get them out. Then score how much each one bothers you.

	WHAT WORRIES, STRESSES OR ANNOYS ME	IT BOTHERS ME 0 to 10
1		____ /10
2		____ /10
3		____ /10
4		____ /10
5		____ /10
6		____ /10
7		____ /10
8		____ /10
9		____ /10
10		____ /10
11		____ /10
12		____ /10
13		____ /10
14		____ /10
15		____ /10

WHERE I THINK IT BELONGS

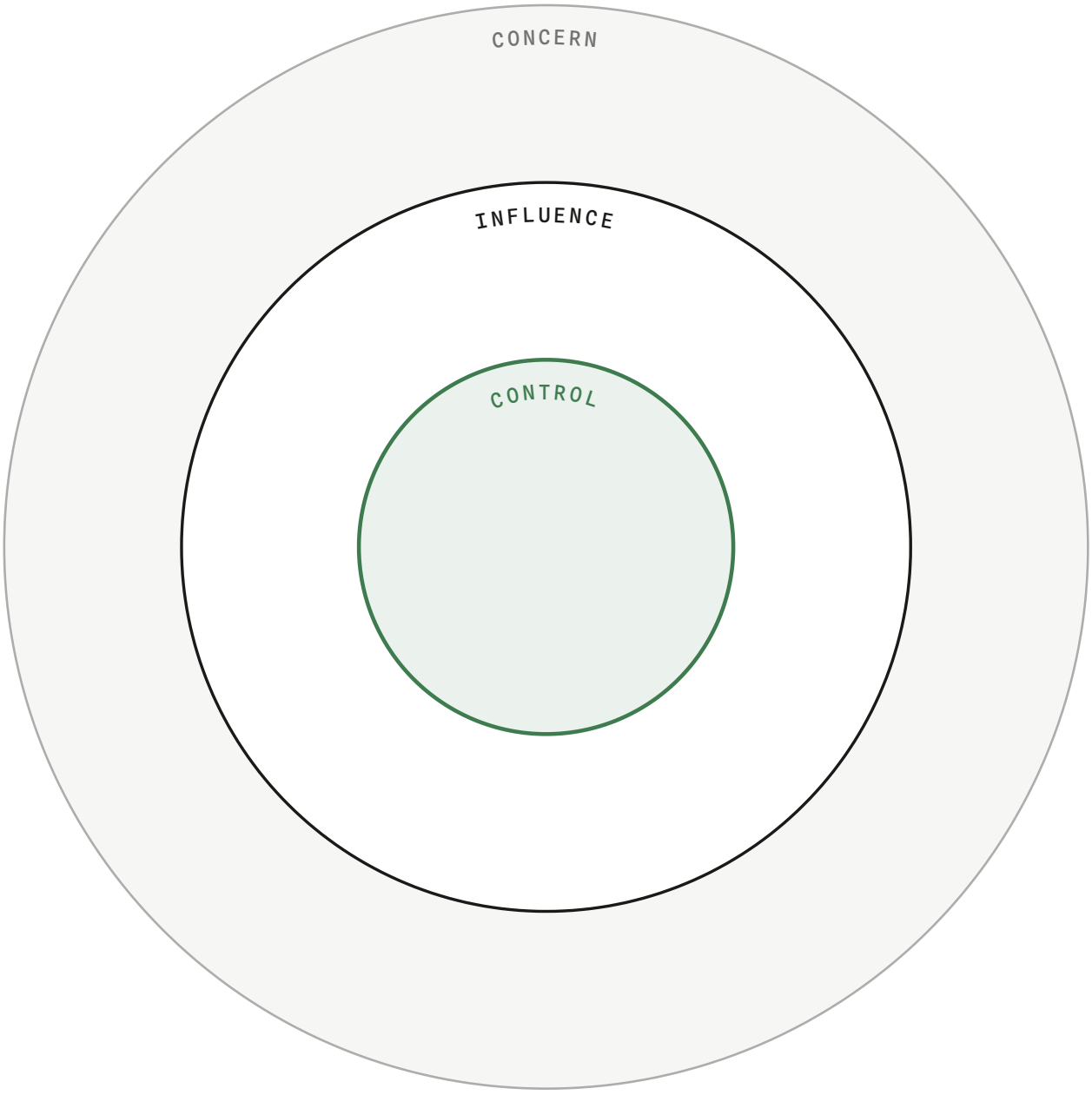
STEP 2 **Put each one in the circle where you think it belongs.** BEFORE THE LESSON

Write its number from Step 1 and a word or two. Go with your first answer. Don't think too hard and don't ask anyone.

CONTROL
I can do something about it myself.

INFLUENCE
I can try to affect it, but I don't decide it.

CONCERN
It matters to me, but I can do nothing about it.



STOP **Wait for the lesson.** Don't move anything yet. You will come back to every one of these on page 3.

"The chief task in life is simply this: to identify and separate matters."

EPICTETUS · DISCOURSES 2.5

CHECK EVERY ONE

STEP 3

After the lesson, check every one. BE RUTHLESS

Go back to your circles. Ask these three questions about each item. If you put it in the wrong circle, write it in the table. If you can influence it even a little, move it in.

1 **Can I truly control this?**

2 **Is there any way I can influence it?**

3 **If not, what would it look like to accept it?**

NO.	THE WORRY	I PUT IT IN	IT REALLY BELONGS IN	WHAT I'LL DO NOW Act on it, or let it go
		☐ control ☐ influence ☐ concern	☐ control ☐ influence ☐ concern	
		☐ control ☐ influence ☐ concern	☐ control ☐ influence ☐ concern	
		☐ control ☐ influence ☐ concern	☐ control ☐ influence ☐ concern	
		☐ control ☐ influence ☐ concern	☐ control ☐ influence ☐ concern	
		☐ control ☐ influence ☐ concern	☐ control ☐ influence ☐ concern	
		☐ control ☐ influence ☐ concern	☐ control ☐ influence ☐ concern	
		☐ control ☐ influence ☐ concern	☐ control ☐ influence ☐ concern	

STEP 4

Count the cost.

I had _____ of my 15 in the wrong circle. **Their bother scores add up to _____**

1 **What has worrying about the ones I can't control cost me?** Sleep, time, energy, mood, people.

2 **What did I give up on that I can actually do something about?**

3 **Where will I put the energy I get back this week?**

Acceptance isn't giving up. It frees your energy for what matters.

THE CONTROL DECISION TREE

PURPOSE

To take a problem, an annoyance or a stressor and work it all the way to the end: a clear action, or a clear decision to let it go.

Every problem ends one of two ways. You act on it, or you accept it.

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Pick two problems in Step 1. Start with the one that costs you the most.
2. On pages 2 and 3, answer each question. Tell the truth. Tick yes or no, then follow the arrow.
3. Every path ends in Take Action or Accept. Fill in the box you reach.
4. Page 4 is where you own it. Sign it.

Why this works. Worry feels like doing something, but it changes nothing. Asking "Can I do anything about this?" and then "When and how?" turns a worry into a plan or a decision to let go. People who decide exactly when and how they will act are far more likely to do it.

THE WORRY TREE (BUTLER & HOPE, 1995) · CIRCLE OF INFLUENCE (COVEY, 1989) · COPING FIT (CHENG, LAU & CHAN, 2014, META-ANALYSIS) · IF-THEN PLANS (GOLLWITZER & SHEERAN, 2006, META-ANALYSIS)

THE CONTROL METHOD · 5 STEPS

The tree on pages 2 and 3 is these five steps drawn out.

1. Is it in my control?
2. If not, can I influence it?
3. If yes, what can I do about it?
4. If no, let it go.
5. If it's in my control and I'm not acting, accept and own the outcome.

STEP 1

Pick two problems to put through the tree.

A problem, an annoyance or a stressor. Take them from your Sorting Your World sheet, or from today. Write each one as one clear sentence. Not "work". "My manager keeps changing the deadline."

PROBLEM 1 _____

_____

IT COSTS ME ☐ sleep ☐ time ☐ mood ☐ people ☐ money

PROBLEM 2 _____

_____

IT COSTS ME ☐ sleep ☐ time ☐ mood ☐ people ☐ money

? **How long have these been on your mind, and what has the worrying changed?**

_____

_____

ONE WALKED THROUGH

THE PROBLEM	IN MY CONTROL?	CAN I INFLUENCE IT?	AM I GOING TO?
My manager keeps changing the deadline.	No. I don't set the deadlines.	Yes. I can ask for the final date in writing.	Yes.

TAKE ACTION

When the next change comes in, I will reply the same day and ask for the final date in writing.

AND ACCEPT

I accept that dates will still move. When it comes back into my head, I will check what's mine and get back to work.

PROBLEM 1 · WALK IT THROUGH

STEP 2 **Put problem 1 through the tree.** TICK, THEN FOLLOW THE ARROW

Start at the top. Be honest at every box. "No, I'm not going to" is a real answer. Just own it.

PROBLEM 1 · MY PROBLEM, ANNOYANCE OR STRESSOR — COPY IT FROM PAGE 1

_____

_____

IS IT IN MY CONTROL?

Can I do it myself, without anyone else saying yes?

☐ Yes ☐ No

YES

WHAT CAN I DO ABOUT IT?

Every option. Even the small ones.

_____

_____

_____

AM I GOING TO DO SOMETHING ABOUT IT?

☐ Yes ☐ No

WHEN AND HOW?

Day, time, place, first step.

_____

_____

_____

TAKE ACTION ↓

ACCEPT ↓

It's mine, and I'm choosing not to act. That's allowed. But own the outcome.

RADICAL RESPONSIBILITY

NO

CAN I INFLUENCE IT?

Who could I ask, tell, show or help? Even a little.

_____

_____

☐ Yes ☐ No

HOW, AND WHEN?

What will I say or do, and when?

_____

_____

_____

AM I GOING TO?

☐ Yes ☐ No

TAKE ACTION ↓

ACCEPT ↓

My choice. Own it.

ACCEPT ↓

Not mine to control or influence. Let it go.

EVERY PATH ENDS IN ONE OF THESE TWO BOXES. FILL IN THE ONE YOU REACHED.

TAKE ACTION

When _____

I will _____

_____

I start on _____

ACCEPT THE OUTCOME · NEVER WORRY AGAIN

I accept that _____

_____

When it comes back into my head, I will

_____

PROBLEM 2 · WALK IT THROUGH

STEP 3 **Now put problem 2 through the tree.** SAME RULES

This time, notice where you want to skip a box. That's usually the box that matters.

PROBLEM 2 · MY PROBLEM, ANNOYANCE OR STRESSOR — COPY IT FROM PAGE 1

IS IT IN MY CONTROL?
Can I do it myself, without anyone else saying yes?
☐ Yes ☐ No

YES

WHAT CAN I DO ABOUT IT?
Every option. Even the small ones.

AM I GOING TO DO SOMETHING ABOUT IT?
☐ Yes ☐ No

WHEN AND HOW?
Day, time, place, first step.

TAKE ACTION ↓

ACCEPT ↓

It's mine, and I'm choosing not to act. That's allowed. But own the outcome.

RADICAL RESPONSIBILITY

NO

CAN I INFLUENCE IT?
Who could I ask, tell, show or help? Even a little.
☐ Yes ☐ No

ACCEPT ↓

Not mine to control or influence. Let it go.

HOW, AND WHEN?
What will I say or do, and when?

AM I GOING TO?
☐ Yes ☐ No

TAKE ACTION ↓

ACCEPT ↓

My choice. Own it.

EVERY PATH ENDS IN ONE OF THESE TWO BOXES. FILL IN THE ONE YOU REACHED.

TAKE ACTION

When _____

I will _____

_____

I start on _____

ACCEPT THE OUTCOME · NEVER WORRY AGAIN

I accept that _____

_____

When it comes back into my head, I will

_____

OWN IT

RADICAL RESPONSIBILITY

If it's in your control, the outcome is on you.

That includes your health habits, your learning, your effort, your preparation and your attitude. No one else is coming to do them for you.

STEP 4

Destroy your common excuses.

Write the excuses you use most. Then write what is really in your control. Then what you'll do instead.

Like this. "I don't have time." → "I decide what goes in my diary." → "Twenty minutes at 6am, before anyone else is up."

MY FAVOURITE EXCUSE	WHAT'S REALLY IN MY CONTROL	WHAT I'LL DO INSTEAD

? **Where in my life am I waiting for someone else to fix something that is mine to fix?**

COMMIT

Look back at your two trees first.

I'm taking action on... _____

I'm letting go of... _____

If-then. When _____ , I will _____ .

Pick a moment that happens every day. "When I sit down at my desk, I will send the email first."

I will check back on this on _____

Signed _____ Date _____

If it's in your control, the outcome is on you. So is the win.

WHAT AM I TRYING TO CONTROL?

PURPOSE

To find all the things you are trying to control that you simply cannot. In here is the source of a vast amount of your frustration.

You can't win a fight with something you don't control. You can only stop fighting it.

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Go wide in Step 1. Aim for 15 or more. Most people find twice what they expect.
2. Be specific. Not "my family". "Whether my son does his homework."
3. Steps 2 to 4 go deep on your top 6.
4. Page 4 is where you let go. Say it out loud, then sign it.

Why this works. Fighting what you can't control keeps your mind and body stuck in stress, and it rarely changes the thing. People who let go of what they can't change, and put that energy where it works, are happier. Letting go is a skill, and you can learn it.

WORRY AND RUMINATION (OTTAVIANI ET AL., 2016, META-ANALYSIS) · LETTING GO OF GOALS (WROSCH ET AL., 2003 · RIDDELL ET AL., 2025, META-ANALYSIS) · ACCEPTANCE (GLOSTER ET AL., 2020, REVIEW OF META-ANALYSES) · ILLUSION OF CONTROL (LANGER, 1975) · DICHOTOMY OF CONTROL (EPICTETUS, ENCHIRIDION 1)

STEP 1 List everything you are trying to control that you can't. EVERYTHING

If you check it, chase it, replay it, nag about it or lie awake over it, it goes on the list. Use the map to look in every corner.

THE PEOPLE CLOSEST TO ME
My partner's mood. My kids' choices. My parents. Whether they change. Whether they call.

WORK
My boss. My team. Decisions above me. The promotion. Clients. Whether the deal closes.

HOW I'M SEEN
What people think of me. Being liked. Being understood. My reputation. Being judged.

TIME
The past. The future. How fast things happen. Waiting. Getting older.

THE WORLD
Traffic. The economy. Prices. The news. Politics. Crime. The weather.

MY BODY AND MIND
A feeling showing up. My heart racing. Blushing. Sleep. Illness. Thoughts I don't want.

THE SNEAKY ONES
Outcomes. Being right. Being certain. Things being fair. Nothing going wrong. Other people doing it my way. Other people seeing what I see.

What do you keep fixing that never stays fixed? Write that one down too. Then circle the 6 that take the most from you.

1 ◯ _____
2 ◯ _____
3 ◯ _____
4 ◯ _____
5 ◯ _____
6 ◯ _____
7 ◯ _____
8 ◯ _____
9 ◯ _____
10 ◯ _____
11 ◯ _____
12 ◯ _____
13 ◯ _____
14 ◯ _____
15 ◯ _____
16 ◯ _____

HOW I TRY, AND WHAT IT COSTS

STEP 2

Your top 6. How do you try to control each one, and what does it cost you?

Tick how you try. Guess the hours a week, including the hours in your head. Then the hard question: has it ever worked?

	WHAT I'M TRYING TO CONTROL	HOW I TRY	HOURS a week	WHAT IT COSTS ME Sleep, mood, people, money	HAS IT EVER CHANGED IT?
1		☐ checking ☐ nagging ☐ worrying ☐ replaying ☐ avoiding ☐ over-planning ☐ people-pleasing ☐ arguing	___ hrs		☐ yes ☐ a little ☐ no ☐ made it worse
2		☐ checking ☐ nagging ☐ worrying ☐ replaying ☐ avoiding ☐ over-planning ☐ people-pleasing ☐ arguing	___ hrs		☐ yes ☐ a little ☐ no ☐ made it worse
3		☐ checking ☐ nagging ☐ worrying ☐ replaying ☐ avoiding ☐ over-planning ☐ people-pleasing ☐ arguing	___ hrs		☐ yes ☐ a little ☐ no ☐ made it worse
4		☐ checking ☐ nagging ☐ worrying ☐ replaying ☐ avoiding ☐ over-planning ☐ people-pleasing ☐ arguing	___ hrs		☐ yes ☐ a little ☐ no ☐ made it worse
5		☐ checking ☐ nagging ☐ worrying ☐ replaying ☐ avoiding ☐ over-planning ☐ people-pleasing ☐ arguing	___ hrs		☐ yes ☐ a little ☐ no ☐ made it worse
6		☐ checking ☐ nagging ☐ worrying ☐ replaying ☐ avoiding ☐ over-planning ☐ people-pleasing ☐ arguing	___ hrs		☐ yes ☐ a little ☐ no ☐ made it worse

Add up the hours: _____ a week. × 52 = _____ hours a year on things I can't control.

THE SOURCE OF MY FRUSTRATION

STEP 3

Find the link.

Think of the last three times you lost your temper, snapped or felt helpless. Look for them in your top 6.

1 **Which of these is behind my biggest frustrations?**

2 **What do I keep demanding that it does? Finish the sentence.**

It should...

3 **If I keep fighting this for five more years, what will it cost me?**

STEP 4

Find the part that IS yours inside each one.

Every one of these has a part you control. It is almost always one of these:

MY RESPONSE | MY EFFORT | MY WORDS | MY BOUNDARIES | MY ATTENTION | WHEN I WALK AWAY

Like this. Can't control: my boss's mood. Can control: how prepared I am, what I say, and what time I leave.

	I CAN'T CONTROL	BUT I CAN CONTROL
1		
2		
3		
4		
5		
6		

LET IT GO

STEP 5 **Let go of your top 3.** OUT LOUD

Pick the three that cost you the most. Write each line in your own words. Then read it out loud. Letting go is not giving up. It is putting your hands on the part that is yours.

1

I can't control _____

I can control _____

I'm letting go of _____

What would I stop doing tomorrow if I truly accepted this?

_____

2

I can't control _____

I can control _____

I'm letting go of _____

What would I stop doing tomorrow if I truly accepted this?

_____

3

I can't control _____

I can control _____

I'm letting go of _____

What would I stop doing tomorrow if I truly accepted this?

_____

COMMIT The old habit will come back. Decide now what you'll do.

If-then. When I catch myself _____ , I will _____ .

"When I catch myself checking if she's read my message, I will put the phone face down and go back to what I was doing."

The hours I get back each week: _____

I will give them to _____

Signed _____ Date _____

Most of what you fight to control was never yours. Put it down.