



Thriving Through Tough Times

Cultivate resilience, calm, and personal effectiveness in challenging periods

FranklinCovey

Employees are working to bounce back from a tumultuous start to the 2020s, but it's taking time. [Stress levels](#) remain at an all-time high as remote and distributed work has resulted in not only greater flexibility but also greater isolation. Those returning to in-person work environments for the first time in years face more adjustments to their work routines. Economic uncertainty, the Great Reshuffle, changing business models—the list of impacts to people's work lives is long and complex.

After getting by on adrenaline for the last few years, it's easy to see why many people are feeling overwhelmed in today's constantly changing work environment. And while it's natural to fall into a mindset that says you don't have the power to change your situation, there's still a lot you can do to take action and positively impact your experience.

No matter what you or your teams are facing at work, there are factors you can control to feel less overwhelmed. The timeless principles of personal and interpersonal effectiveness can help you unlock your own potential, work with others in more productive and creative ways, and make empowered choices—as both a leader and an individual.

In this guide, we'll explore four tactics you can use to navigate the negative mindsets that can creep in during times of stress, helping you develop habits to not only thrive through tough times but also support your team members in overcoming the same challenges.

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Focus on Your Circle of Influence vs. Circle of Concern

During periods of rapid change and high stress, it's tempting to focus on your Circle of Concern—things in your work life that you don't control, but spend time worrying about anyway. Refocusing on the Circle of Influence—the things you can control in your work life—can help you feel more empowered, even during challenging times.

Identify the things within your control.

Your Circle of Concern might include worries like whether your company will have layoffs, what will happen in the larger economy, or events in the news. While these are important areas, you're not in a position to do anything about them. Your Circle of Influence includes things like the projects your team is working on, the approach you take to work relationships, and the ways you care for yourself. These are areas you can impact with your intentions and actions.



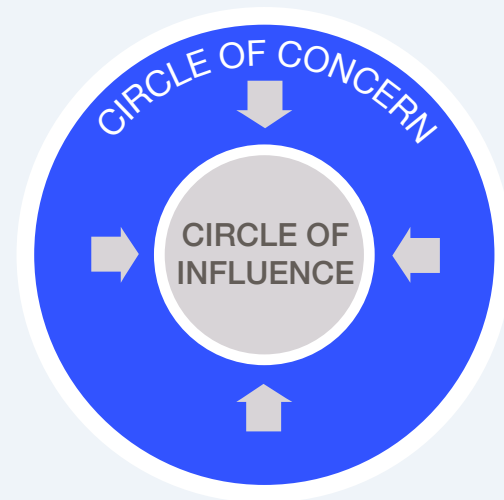
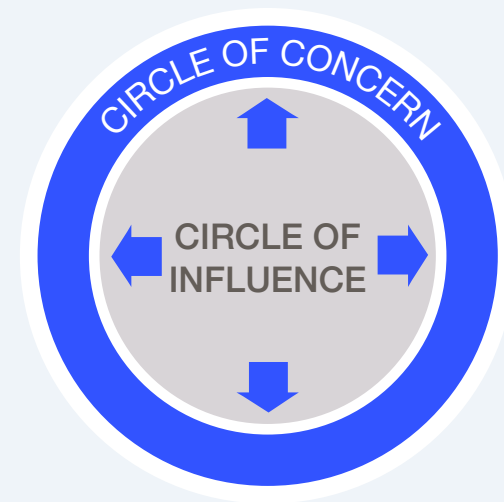
“Every human being has a space where they can do something that will make things better, if only for themselves,” says Adam Merrill, FranklinCovey’s executive vice president of market and customer intelligence. “You can’t say, oh, there aren’t problems out there. There are. But the way to address them is to say, here are the things that I can influence. Let me see how I can put the best of my creativity and potential into those.”

Start by listing the concerns most present in your mind. Identify which items on the list you have influence over, and take a moment to brainstorm additional areas where you also have some control. Map these areas onto the two circles, and use this visual image to proactively take action on the items in your Circle of Influence. As you do, that circle will grow.

Be the one to act.

Sometimes it’s easy to see problems within the organization and assume they’re above your pay grade to address. But often, you can tackle a part of the problem yourself or with your team. For example, if it seems like morale is suffering across the organization, you might not be able to change your organization’s culture across the board, but you can likely take some steps to influence the culture on your own team.

“Even in a toxic culture, there’s often one leader who decides they’re going to insulate their team and lead differently,” says Leena Rinne, FranklinCovey’s senior vice president of professional services and client facilitation. “One person can create around them a really positive environment through their own actions, regardless of the circumstance.”



If you wonder what actions you can take, pay attention to the things that bother you. “Imagine a mental trigger for every time you look around and think, ‘Oh, I wish we were doing this,’” says Rinne. “Any time you think, ‘I wish we were doing this,’ then right away, that should trigger the question, ‘Am I doing this?’ If that’s what I want to be a part of, I should help create that.”

Practice choosing calm.

When it feels like there’s too much to do, too little time, and too many expectations, it’s easy to feel stress levels climb, but you can still choose your reaction to your circumstance.

“If I have 46 meetings on my calendar and 251 unread emails in my inbox, that is reality,” says Rinne. “I can choose to allow myself to feel creeping panic and anxiety about it, but it doesn’t change the volume of work. Or I can choose to feel calm in the storm, and that yields a different experience.”

Choosing calm doesn’t mean ignoring your responsibilities. It’s a discipline that allows you to step back and decide how to focus on driving results rather than simply plowing through a high volume of stressful tasks in a fruitless effort to keep anxiety at bay. “When you choose calm, you feel better at the end of the day—it’s an upward spiral you can tap into,” says Rinne.



Find Opportunities to Make a Positive Impact

Channel energy into solving problems.

“Innovation is most powerful when it’s directed toward a challenge,” says Merrill. Rather than putting innovation on the back burner when your organization is facing difficult times, seize the opportunity to solve current challenges in unconventional ways. “How can we simplify? How can we reduce costs without laying off a bunch of people? How can we increase our value to clients when their budgets are tighter? All of those are marvelous innovation challenges,” Merrill says.

Uncertainty can feed anxiety and cause people to freeze up. Solving problems empowers them to be creative and engaged, alleviating feelings of helplessness and infusing new energy into their work and relationships—all while having a meaningful impact.



Look for new areas to step up.

Quiet quitting may seem like a logical response to a difficult boss or a work environment that isn't thoughtful about its employees, but it can also have the effect of further alienating you from your work—and yourself.

“I don't think anyone feels great contributing a bare minimum,” says Rinne. “But if you show up with your whole self and do your best work under the circumstances while protecting your boundaries and caring for yourself, it feels different and brings better outcomes in your life overall.”

Instead of disengaging from work, look for ways you can use your talents and strengths to make a unique contribution to your organization's mission and goals. Finding new areas where you can take ownership of execution and results can not only help you feel the satisfaction of personal growth and impact, but it can also change a challenging environment.

Forge stronger connections.

Remote and hybrid work can erode people's sense of connection to something larger than themselves, making it more important than ever to help them find purpose in their work. A vision statement of where the organization is going and why links people to an aspirational purpose that inspires them to think bigger and find meaning in their daily tasks, especially during difficult times or change.

Another way to help people feel more engaged is to help them connect not just to the “why” of their work, but to the people they're working with. “Work is a lot more rewarding when you realize you're making a difference, and you're making a difference with people that you like and are connected to,” says Merrill.



Manage Your Time and Energy Effectively

Define (or redefine) your priorities.

When there's too much to do, some things on your task list will inevitably remain undone. You can frantically try to do everything and wait to see which things fall through the cracks—or you can give yourself a reprieve by deciding ahead of time what to prioritize.

When you know which tasks are most important to your organization's mission and values, you can **put first things first**. Take the time to determine both the importance and the urgency of action items on your list, and then **proactively carve out time** for tasks that are most important—especially those that are less urgent and prone to fall off your radar. Other tasks can be delegated, postponed, or deprioritized altogether.



Clarify goals and expectations.

Some leaders worry that if they can't see their people working, nothing is getting done. But even when there is a clear line of sight and people are working hard, there's no guarantee that they're working effectively.

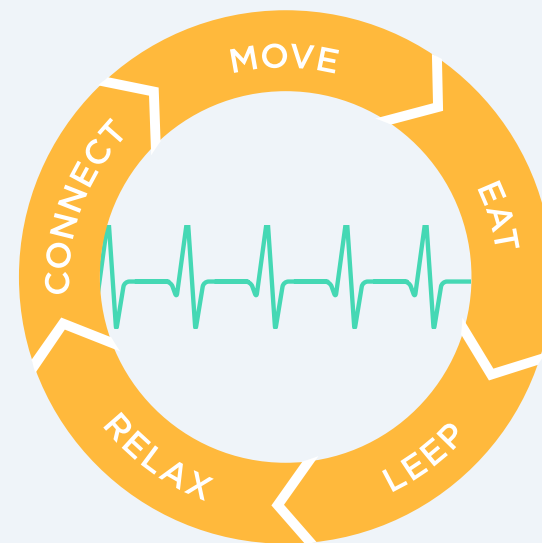
"There's so much to do," says Rinne. "If a leader hasn't set really clear goals and expectations, then I might be working really hard, but that's not the same thing as productivity." The goal is not to work hard but to make progress toward specific goals aligned with your organization's mission.

When goals and measures are clear, leaders don't need to monitor or control people to know whether they're getting things done. They can simply follow up on objectives and performance indicators regularly to gauge progress. Individuals can also initiate conversations about prioritization and take ownership of their own effectiveness, empowering them to organize their work in more productive ways.

Take responsibility for your well-being.

When your office is your home and you have little in-person interaction or downtime associated with a commute, it can be easy to constantly work without noticing when your energy is being depleted. Self-care is the foundation for productivity and satisfaction—but it can also be challenging to prioritize consistently, especially during times of high pressure and rapid change.

"Remote work gives individuals greater freedom and yet greater responsibility to care for themselves," says Merrill. Each person needs to identify boundaries, whether that means not checking email in the evenings, taking a lunch break, or saying no to side projects. The [Five Energy Drivers](#) also provide a helpful framework for ensuring your body and brain get the things they need, such as food, exercise, sleep, and time to relax.



THE 5 ENERGY DRIVERS



Contribute to a Healthy Work Culture

Be intentional about building relationships.

Interpersonal relationships can be more complicated when you aren't able to catch up at the water cooler or chat on the way out of a meeting to clarify a comment. It takes more effort to create human connections and find out how people are doing in a hybrid or remote work environment.

“To intentionally create the moments that might have happened live, a leader has to be really observant,” Merrill says. “They have to watch to make sure everyone’s voice is being heard and follow up afterwards any time they think not everybody understood.”

In hybrid situations, leaders and individuals can also take full advantage of in-person moments by using them to connect and build relationships in ways that are more difficult from a distance.



Assume positive intent.

When an individual feels disengaged or stressed, they sometimes assume the problem is in other people. But most people don't come to work looking for ways to destroy a meeting or make others feel disrespected. Assuming positive intent can contribute to an organizational culture of trust and empathy.

“We can choose to look at those interpersonal challenges as skill gaps, not character gaps,” says Rinne. “Most people do the best they can with the tools they have, and they’re not trying to make life miserable for others.”

To take control of building healthier interpersonal relationships and managing your own stress levels, assume others are showing up the best they can, and look for ways to navigate around their gaps in knowledge or self-awareness with generosity.

Cultivate empathy and emotional intelligence.

Tough times call for showing up with empathy and paying attention to colleagues who might feel underrepresented at work or stressed because of events outside of work. Watch for signs of burnout in the people you work with, and take a sincere interest in their needs and lives. For example, showing compassion when someone experiences a loss and being willing to listen during difficult times can go a long way toward creating a better work environment.

Whether you're a leader or an individual contributor, you can foster a supportive organizational culture by noticing and reaching out to others. The result will not only benefit your team, but it will also connect you more deeply to people and purpose.



Thrive at Work With Powerful Personal Habits

Economic and workplace conditions can change at any time, but fundamental principles like choice, responsibility, and empathy can help you succeed in any circumstance. These principles have the potential to transform productivity and work experience on an individual and organizational scale.

“You have more power than you think you do,” says Merrill. “You can change the way you experience stress, experience work, and connect with others. It doesn't mean the world will suddenly, magically be better. But when you intentionally and consistently adopt the principles and paradigms of human effectiveness, you will have better outcomes. That's the promise.”



Unlock the Potential of Everyone in Your Organization

The capacity for greatness exists within every individual. Helping them see this potential and build the power skills of personal and interpersonal effectiveness empowers them to bring their best selves to your organization's biggest challenges.

Give individuals the tools to collaborate more creatively with others, manage their time, and make a distinctive contribution to help build a culture of success.

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