



DOUG SILSBEE, PCC

## Week Two: Discern Where You Have Control, and Where You Don't

I, like many of you, get paid to solve problems. It is easy for me to move quickly into a complicated situation, and to see all the challenges and constraints that are inherent in the situation.

Here's the problem. When we organize our attention around constraints, constraints are all we will see. We become immobilized when every course of action seems to lead to other problems. And, often, there is much in any given situation over which we don't have control. The sum total of seemingly immutable facts can seem paralyzing.

So, it is critical to learn to differentiate what we have control over and what we don't. In a given situation, it can be very helpful to actually list out, in two columns, what we don't control and what we have some level of influence over. In the first column, we might list the sorry state of the economy, a boss's attitude or behavior, institutional constraints, budget realities. In the latter column, we list things like our own attitude, the priorities that we set for the day, the particulars that we delegate to a team member, or an exploratory conversation with a possible ally.

When we discern the difference, we begin to relax around the givens that we have no control over. And, we begin to see that there are real actions that we can take that are, in fact, empowering. They are unlikely to solve the entire problem. Yet, they get us in motion and provide us with a sense of agency. We become more resourceful.

Practice this. Consider some situation that you face that seems intractable. Prepare a piece of paper with two columns titled "Out of My Control" and "Under My Influence." Then, simply list as many factors as you can in both columns. See what possibilities are revealed through this discernment.

Doug Silsbee is a leadership coach, author and master teacher in Asheville, NC. His most recent book is *Presence-Based Coaching*. More information on Doug's work is at <http://dougilsbee.com>. Inquire at [ds@dougilsbee.com](mailto:ds@dougilsbee.com) or 828-254-2021 for a free consultation.