

Control the Controllables

Learn to Focus Your Attention & Energy on Controllables, not Non-Controllables

Many people tend to direct their attention and energy on things that are outside of their control - such as what other people think of them or on circumstances such as the weather or a referee's calls during a big game.

The "*Dichotomy of Control*" is the Stoic idea of separating things that are within our control, and things that are outside of our control. The famous stoic philosopher Epictetus says:

"Some things are in our control and others not. Things in our control are opinion, pursuit, desire, aversion...e.g., whatever are our own actions. Things not in our control are body, property, reputation, command...e.g., whatever are not our actions."

Epictetus is simply instructing us about where we should focus our attention and energy, a great lesson to learn at any age. Mastering the Dichotomy of Control concept in your life can contribute to a happier and more successful life.

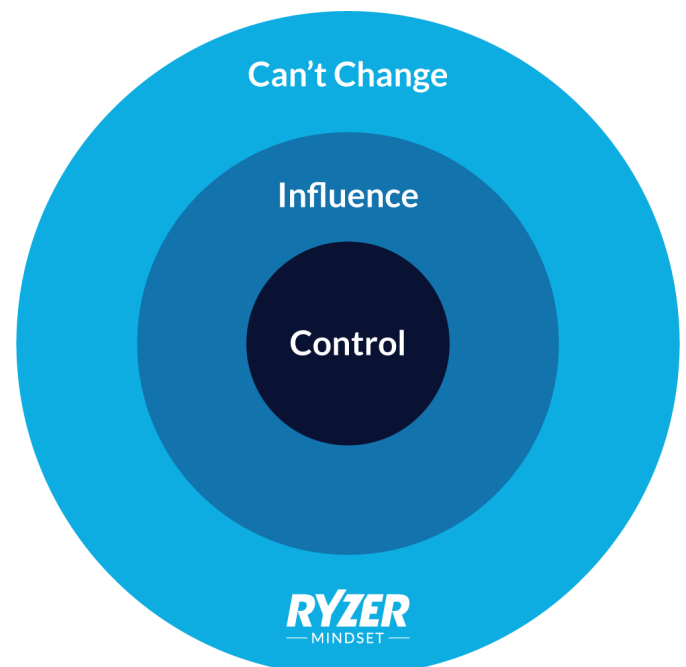
Why is it Important to Focus on Controllables?

Directing attention and energy towards non-controllables rarely helps you or your cause. In fact, it usually hurts you. That's because you are using up valuable time, mental focus and energy that you can NEVER get back and that CANNOT be used on the things that can actually help you get what you want. Simply said: when you focus too much on non-controllables, you are hurting yourself and are less likely to succeed!

But, when you direct your attention and energy towards the proper controllables - the items that you can both control AND contribute to getting you what you want - you are likely to be more effective in your endeavors and increase your likelihood of success.

How to Identify What is Controllable, Influenceable, or Non-Controllable

It is important to be able to distinguish items as either Controllable, Influenceable, or Non-Controllable so you can give them proper attention, focus, and energy.



NON-CONTROLLABLES

Non-Controllables are the things YOU CANNOT CHANGE no matter what you do - that's why they are so frustrating. Examples of common Non-Controllable categories include:

- **How Others Think** -- e.g., what someone thinks about your new haircut.
- **How Others Act** -- e.g., how your coach reacts to a bad call in a game.
- **Things That Happen** -- e.g., a storm that knocks the electricity out.
- **Situational Outcomes** -- e.g., whether you win an award or not.

CONTROLLABLES

Controllables are the things you have dominion or total control over. Common examples of Controllables include:

- **How You Think** -- your attitude or what you choose to think about (*sometimes automatic thoughts do pop into our heads without our conscious control, but we can choose how we react to those - or even choose to ignore them altogether*).
- **The Actions You Take** -- what actions you choose to take on a daily basis or in any given situation.
- **How we React to Things that Happen & Situational Outcomes** -- e.g., how we react when a storm knocks out the electricity or when we don't win the award we were hoping for.

INFLUENCEABLES

There is also a category in between Controllables and Non-Controllables. We call them "Influenceables" because although you cannot control them, you do have some degree of influence on the outcome. Common examples of Influenceables include:

- **Teammates'/Coaches'/Referees' Thinking & Actions** -- although you don't have control over them, you do have the ability to take actions to try to influence some of their thinking and behaviors. Examples include:
 - *Trying to "pump up" your teammates to get them to play harder and better.*
 - *Hustling every chance you get to try to influence your coach to give you more playing time.*
 - *Gesturing or pleading with the referee to make your case on a certain type of call, e.g., opponent stepping out of bounds.*
- **Your Execution on Tasks** -- although your focus and effort (which is controllable) can contribute and influence whether or not you successfully execute a task (such as making a basketball free throw attempt), you don't have 100% control over the outcome. Otherwise, we all could make 100% of every free throw attempted if we just gave the task our top focus and effort. Therefore, successful execution of tasks (outcomes) are not Controllable and only Influenceable.

Technique to Help Control the Controllables

The U.S. Navy SEAL QUESTION

Questions you ask yourself are highly powerful, yet under-appreciated and under-utilized by most people. Our "supercomputer" brain is programmed to strictly follow instructions from us -- both consciously and subconsciously. If you ask it a question, its focus will be on finding you an answer.

When challenging and uncomfortable situations come up, most people's minds race and they ask themselves questions such as "what can go wrong?" or "why is this happening to me?" or "what should I worry about?".

These are dis-empowering questions and your brain goes into panic-mode looking for problems and what to worry about. These types of questions usually make the matter worse.

Navy SEALs, on the other hand, know all about the importance of asking oneself questions and are taught to ask themselves this one powerful question when faced with a challenge:



U.S. Navy SEALs and Afghan commandos traverse an incline at night during a village clearing operation.

"What in this situation can I control immediately?"

When you ask yourself this question, your brain focuses on finding an answer. That answer is EXACTLY what you need to focus on to quickly determine the proper reaction to the situation. When you ask this powerful question, three things happen:

1. Your mind stops racing and worrying about the situation, and instead your supercomputer brain focuses on answering the question posed;
2. The question asks what you can control. This will result in your brain looking around and filtering out all the Non-Controllables and only focusing on the Controllables;
3. The last word of the question is "immediately" so the brain does a second round of filtering of all the Controllables to limit them to those you can control immediately.

This short, powerful question gets you to focus only on what you can immediately control to determine how you can best react. Even if there isn't much or anything you can do to change or even influence the situation, your brain will lead you to things you can control such as your *attitude* and *mindset* in helping you determine how to react to the situation.

Control the Bullseye Exercise

Use to Focus Your Attention & Energy on Controllables, not Non-Controllables

Mastering the Dichotomy of Control concept in your life can contribute to a happier and more successful life. This exercise will help you categorize all the key items relating to a particular upcoming situation or event (like a big game) to help you identify the Controllables, Influenceables, and Non-Controllables.

IDENTIFYING CONTROLLABLES

Controllables are the things you have dominion or total control over. These are the items you want to spend a large majority of your attention, focus, and energy upon in preparation for and during important events such as big games.

Although the particular Controllables for a situation or event may vary, there are 4 important ones that universally apply, especially in athletics, and are good to memorize:

Focus - on the task at hand

Attitude - be positive

Mindset - be confident and mentally tough

Effort - give 100%

An easy way to remember these is the word FAME -- If you want FAME, pay attention to these Controllables when preparing for and playing a game. You likely will be able to come up with additional Controllables that apply to particular situations and events but these four above will be a great head start for most events you prepare for.

IDENTIFYING INFLUENCEABLES

Influenceables are the topics where you can have some limited influence upon but not control over. It is often good to spend some of your attention and energy on these topics, just not too much. A balanced approach using a cost vs. benefit analysis will help you decide how much attention to give them. Again, each situation and event will have their own unique Influenceables, but there are common ones for athletics that you can repeatedly use including:

Teammates - collaborating with them, pumping them up, etc.

Coaches - coaching decisions such as strategy, playing time, etc.

Referees/Umpires - making suggestions on calls, asking ?'s, etc.

Your Execution - your effort & focus will contribute to how well you can physically execute, but you don't have total control if you will successfully execute or not.

IDENTIFYING NON-CONTROLLABLES

Non-Controllables are the things YOU CANNOT CHANGE no matter what you do. Again, each situation and event will have their own unique Non-Controllables, but there are common ones for athletics that you can repeatedly use including:

Environmental Factors - game facilities, weather, etc.

Competition - who they are, what they do, etc.

Outcome - ultimately whether you win or lose.

It should be noted that although you should not worry about who your competition is and what they do, we DO think it is important to take account of and be prepared for what actions your opponents take during the actual competition (e.g., the offense they choose to run against your team) so you are prepared to react accordingly.

USING THE BULLSEYE

The bullseye image helps us visualize where we should focus our attention and energy. The large majority of our focus should be on the dark blue topics we can CONTROL. A small minority should be on the blue topics we can INFLUENCE. And none of our focus should be on the light blue topics we CAN'T CHANGE.

In the blank worksheet on page 7, you are asked to **(i) identify all the important topics / factors / people relating to a specific upcoming event.**

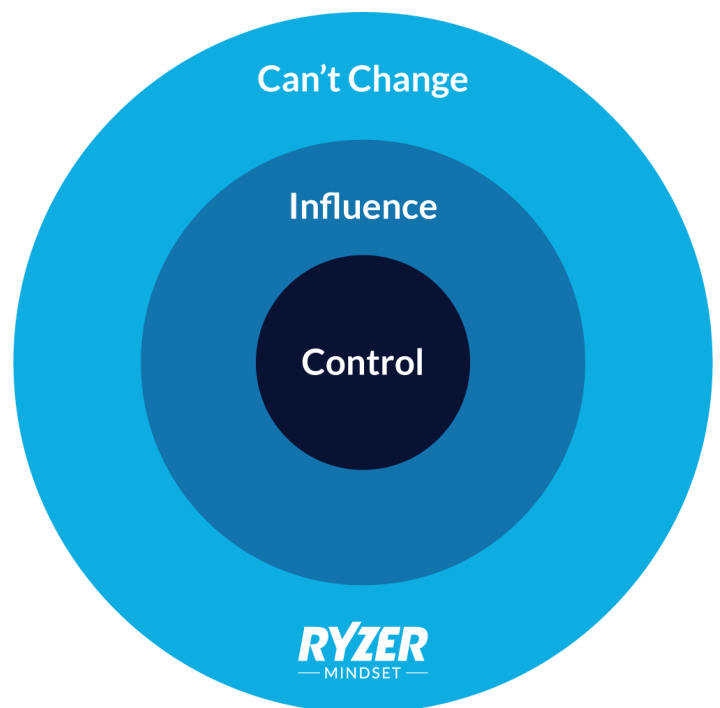
Then, you are to **(ii) categorize those** as either a CONTROLLABLE, INFLUENCEABLE, or NON-CONTROLLABLE.

Finally, you will be asked to **(iii) identify the most important** CONTROLLABLES and INFLUENCEABLES that will lead to your success to help you prioritize your attention and energy.

See the example worksheet on Page 6.

We recommend you continually use the worksheet as new situations and events come up. Once you use it a few times, the expectation is that you will naturally decrease your focus on Non-Controllables. This is because this exercise will help you train your brain to focus on the most important Controllables, and somewhat on the important Influenceables.

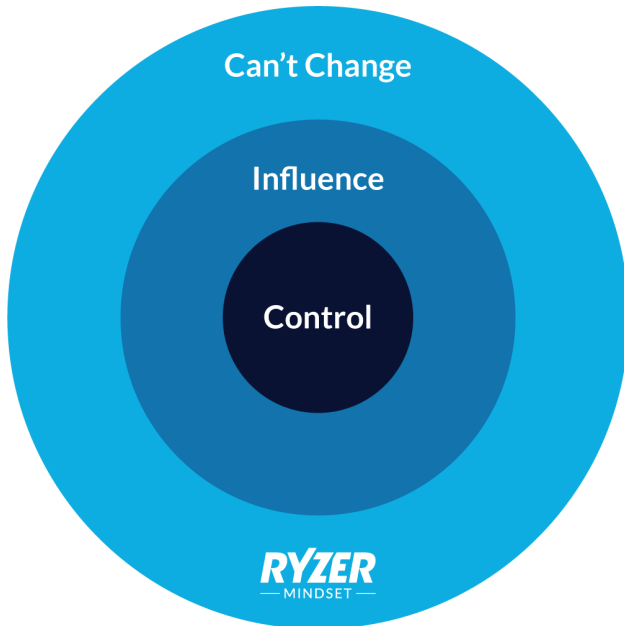
Take notice if your execution and success changes upon focusing more attention and energy on the Controllables in your important situations and events.



Control the Bullseye Plan

EXAMPLE

Fill out this worksheet for the various events and situations where mastering your ability to focus on the Controllables will help you succeed. Identify and categorize all the important topics/people for your event.



CONTROLLABLES

Things you have total control over and should spend a large majority of your attention, focus, and energy upon. These 4 important Controllables apply to nearly every situation or event:
FAME - Focus Attitude Mindset Effort.

- Focus on my positioning
- Keep Attitude positive
- Stay Mentally Strong in Mindset
- Give 110% Effort while playing
- Ignore referee bad calls
- Communicate with teammates
- Keep hydrated

INFLUENCEABLES

Things you can have some limited influence upon but not control over. Okay to spend some of your attention and energy on these topics, just not too much. Common examples in sports include Teammates, Coaches, Referees/Umpires, and your Execution.

- Encourage teammates to play harder
- Let Coach know when I am ready to go back in the game
- As captain, let referee know when opponents are playing dirty
- Ask parents to cheer positively
- Use Instructional Self-Talk on my shots
- Keep Coach updated on opponent's defense and suggest plays
- Befriend referee to help team

NON-CONTROLLABLES

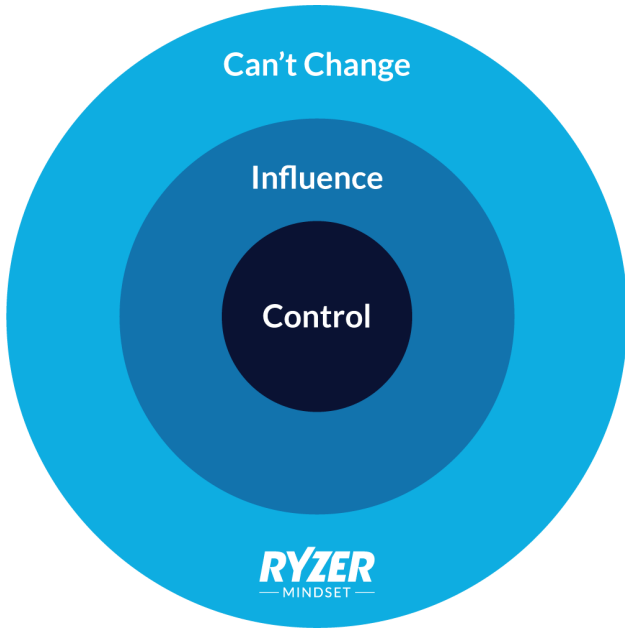
Non-Controllables are the things you have no control over and cannot change no matter what you do. Common examples in sports include Environmental Factors, the Competition, and the Outcome.

- Opposing coach complaining
- Defenders playing rough
- Slippery turf
- Rain & wind
- We might lose
- My playing time
- The plays we run

Next, circle the top 3 most important CONTROLLABLES that will contribute to your success. Spend most of your focus on those. Circle the 1 most important INFLUENCEABLE that will contribute to your success to ensure you spend a little focus on that item. Only focus on other CONTROLLABLES or INFLUENCEABLES if the time and circumstances allow. Now you have your mental game plan!

Control the Bullseye Plan

Fill out this worksheet for the various events and situations where mastering your ability to focus on the Controllables will help you succeed. Identify and categorize all the important topics/people for your event.



CONTROLLABLES

Things you have total control over and should spend a large majority of your attention, focus, and energy upon. These 4 important Controllables apply to nearly every situation or event: **FAME** - Focus **A**ttitude **M**indset **E**ffort.

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- _____
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