

Things You Can't—and Can—Control

Now that we have come to the end of the semester at most colleges and our young people have processed through commencement on their way to life outside the school environment, a little common sense advice seems in order. No matter where you work, or what you do, there are things you can control, and things you cannot. It's good to get a handle on the ones you cannot, so you do not spend unnecessary brain power and body energy stressing about them. This also frees you up to handle the things that are actually within your own control and makes your life easier.

Here are some tips about what you cannot control, followed by what you can:

1. *Weather:* There will be days when the weather dictates what you can and cannot do. Storms ground airplanes, bridges wash out, and high winds knock out power lines. Frustration and anger aren't going to change the outcome. Do what you can to rearrange your schedule, then, let it go. Be prepared for the inevitable delays. If you are traveling, take a good book, your laptop, and a charged cell phone, so that you can use those inevitable delays productively.
2. *Traffic:* Getting to work on time and ready to start the workday is certainly important, but sometimes even the best laid plans come to naught. Your normal commute may be 45 minutes by bus or car, and you left your home base in plenty of time, but, whoops, there's a wreck at a major intersection. It's not going to help to sit in traffic fuming and spewing out obscene words. Breathe, and let it go. Besides, don't you think the person involved in the wreck might be having a worse day than you are?
3. *Equipment failure:* From airlines to office equipment, it always seems that the machines break down when you most need them to work. The copier gives out when you are running a 30 copies of a report due tomorrow; the computer suddenly boots you out of a document you had nearly perfected; the car refuses to start when you have exactly twenty minutes to get to an appointment. Again, railing away at the machinery will not help.

Instead, choose how to handle the situation: is there someone you can call for help? Another place to make copies? Move your mind away from fear of the problem into creating a solution. It's more likely to get resolved, and you'll feel better, too.

4. *The economy:* Yes, we are in a recession. Yes, it may be hard to get the perfect job. But, remember, everyone had to start somewhere. There are still plenty of stories about people who started at the bottom and learned all there was to know and later became a leader in their field. In this day and age, it is estimated that the new college graduate will have 8-9 different jobs, and 4-5 different careers. Own your own labor, and your attitude toward it. If you are happy with the work you have, happiness will spill over into other areas of your life.
5. *Other people's life choices:* According to the US Department of Labor, work is the place we are most likely to actually interact with people of another race or culture in the globalized world. It is not going to help to criticize your colleagues about their choice of life partner, their culture, their parenting styles, their spending habits, or their work ethic. You are only in charge of you, your own attitudes, and beliefs. Listen and learn, understand what emotions may be behind the words, and make good choices for yourself with greater awareness.
One caveat: If you are working with someone you believe is doing something illegal, you want to either report the situation immediately to someone with higher authority, or get out of the situation as quickly as possible.

If you look at this list, the biggest commonality around what you can control is *your own attitude*. It's clear that this is something within anyone's control, no matter where they are on the career path.

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