

Jericho High School

"THE PARENT CORNER"

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first things first
greater equilibrium
positive impact

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The 7 Habits of Happy Kids Habit #3: Put First Things First

The Parent Corner is a professional publication designed to provide Jericho parents with practical tools and effective strategies that will serve to strengthen family ties and protect our children from making unhealthy life choices.

The toolbox skills presented in this year's *Parent Corner Newsletters* are based on the work of Steven and Sean Covey, a father and son team, who have authored a series of books which highlight healthy habits and character building strategies.

HABIT #3: Put First Things First

Understanding how to *be proactive* and to *begin with the end in mind* set the stage for this action-oriented habit. Habit #1 posits that "you are in control of your destiny, while Habit #2 directs you to "map your destination before you embark upon your journey." Habit #3 calls for "Putting first things first."

TOOLBOX SKILLS
★ Be Proactive
★ Begin with the End In Mind
★ Put First Things First
★ Think Win-Win
★ Seek First to Understand
★ Synergize
★ Sharpen The Saw

The idea behind *putting first things first* is to prioritize "important" things before "urgency" emerges. This habit suggests that what is important may, in fact, be very different from what we call urgent. One way to distinguish important from urgent has to do with the end goal. Issues that are urgent seem to demand your immediate attention, and need to be dealt with swiftly. However, urgency is generally rooted in the demands or goals of others, often in opposition to your own professional, family, or personal goals. Important activities are those that, once completed, help you achieve your goals.



Life is often a juggling act as we try to keep three balls in the air with only two hands. Unlike the professional jugglers whom we watch with great awe, we may not be quite as talented. Our work is performed at a very fast tempo. When we drop one of our balls, there is a feeling of frustration and anxiety. Without *planned equilibrium*, it is very difficult to keep our priorities in focus. The negative consequences of so much activity-driven stress may affect our families, our health, and our work. If we're not careful, urgent activities will monopolize our time and push the important things to the back burner.

Steven Covey suggests that one of our jobs as parents is to help move our children (and ourselves) from what he calls the *Procrastination Phase* to the *Prioritization Phase*. The Procrastinator is addicted to urgency. He tends to put things off until it morphs into a crisis. The Procrastinator easily gets lost in daily

distractions, impulsive behaviors and misses the big picture. He may sabotage himself by putting obstacles in his path, thereby compromising his own performance.

The Prioritizer, on the other hand, takes a long look at what needs to be done and plans ahead. By doing his homework on time and writing papers in advance, the teen Prioritizer does his best work and avoids the stress and burnout that comes from cramming. The adult Prioritizer changes the oil in his car regularly, stops at the gas pump before the gauge reaches empty and has learned how to say “no” to people and things that will ultimately only distract him from his true goals.

How to Be a Prioritizer

Use a Weekly Planner: A weekly planner is critical to the Prioritizer. Research tells us that human beings tend to think in blocks of weeks, not days or months. Therefore, a weekly planner is an excellent tool for academic and personal success. Covey suggests acquiring some sort of weekly planner and following these three steps:

Step 1: Identify Your Big Rocks



At the beginning of each week, brainstorm the things that you want to accomplish in the upcoming week. You may ask yourself, “What are the most important things I need to do this week?” Covey calls these your *big rocks*. The big rocks are smaller goals, once accomplished will help you achieve your desired outcome.

Reflection: Think about some big rocks that you would like to place in your weekly planner, e.g., finishing a book you started, calling an old friend, exercising this week. Try to be realistic, narrow your focus to include two or three big rocks for the week.



Step 2: Block out Time for Your Big Rocks

During your weekly planning, block out time for your big rocks. If you decide that the best time to get started on your new exercise routine is on Sunday morning and the best time to call your old friend is on Monday night, make the “reservations,” i.e., mark your planner.

Try the following experiment, entitled, “**Charlie’s Dilemma,**” with your children. Get a bucket and fill it half full of small pebbles. Then try to put several big rocks in the bucket, on top of the small pebbles.

Let’s imagine that the big rocks won’t fit. Now, try putting the big rocks in first, followed by the pebbles. The pebbles neatly fill in the spaces around the big rocks. The difference then is the order in which the rocks and pebbles were placed in the bucket. By putting the big rocks in first, everything fits. The big rocks represent your most important goals for the week, while the pebbles represent your daily chores.



<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j6m9WnNdpSw>



Reflection: Think about a time when small avoidable situations or distractions caused you to miss or near miss an important deadline. How might you have managed your time more efficiently?

Step 3: Schedule Everything Else

Once your big rocks are in place, begin to schedule your daily tasks and appointments. Remember, pebbles fit nicer in your bucket when they are surrounded by your bigger, value-driven goals.

Next time you or your child feels stressed about a time-constraining related issue, there are three critical questions to ask:

1. *Does this activity need to be done at this exact moment? Are we **putting first things first**?*
2. *Does this activity offer my family and me **greater equilibrium**, or will it be all-consuming?*
3. *Will the activity we are about to participate in make a **significant positive impact** in our lives or the lives of others?*

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HABIT # 3 SUMMARY- All time hockey scoring champion Wayne Gretzky once said, “You miss 100 percent of the shots you never take.” So, go out there and *put first things first*. Have a little faith in yourself and in your *outside shot*.



The next issue of *The Parent Corner* will presentHabit #4: *Think Win-Win!*