

Chapter 1

The Circle Blueprint

What is the Circle Blueprint? The Circle Blueprint is a framework that illustrates the conscious and unconscious factors that determine the quality of a person's life. Your Circle encompasses values, dreams, character traits, causes, people—what truly matters to you. It determines who you will become and what you will accomplish. It defines your purpose and ultimately your happiness and satisfaction.

Everyone has a Circle. Your Circle probably includes people you love, such as family members and friends, or causes you care about, like saving the whales, defending your country, or taking a stand for the rights of others. It might include character traits such as honesty, responsibility, or self-discipline. You may have personal hopes, dreams, or goals in your Circle: finishing your undergraduate degree, working for a certain company, writing a novel, or running a marathon.

In terms of human development, everyone starts off with a small Circle that includes only self-centered values: comfort, safety, pleasure. Infants are exclusively focused only on the comfort of a full stomach, a dry diaper, and a warm bed. As we grow, life challenges us with opportunities to expand our world that require adding new things to our Circle. The “terrible twos” are noted for a push for independence that shows up in endless questions and persistent defiance. Going to school requires following rules, forming friendships, and

learning new skills. Adolescence brings the challenge of breaking away from your family to find your unique place in the world. Each stage of life changes the composition of your Circle. New content is added that changes the mix and balance, and other times, content has to be removed to bring balance. Imagine an adult wearing a diaper and having a pacifier in his or her mouth—these items were long discarded, and much as we remove these items from our lives as we grow, we also have to remove items from our Circle at times if they unbalance our Circle. How we negotiate these challenges of adding and subtracting significantly impacts the quality of our adult lives.

By the time we have reached young adulthood, most people—but not all—have expanded their Circle with activities beyond pleasure, self-protection, and other self-focused values. Those whose development has been stunted by trauma or neglect will still prioritize values that are life-limiting. A person whose Circle is filled with activities limited to pleasure, for example, may take drugs or steal without concern for the future or other people. Even those who grew up in healthy and happy homes can fail to fully develop their Circle and, so, they limit their success and life satisfaction. They may have not completed a fundamental developmental challenge, stopped adding new and more meaningful content to their Circle, or failed to keep the elements of their Circle in balance.

Self-focused values such as pleasure and self-protection are not inherently bad. You might listen to music or read classic novels because they give you pleasure. A healthy degree of self-protection will enable you to set appropriate boundaries and avoid dark alleys. But self-focused values are inherently limited in the degree to which they allow your Circle to grow—and when your Circle stays small, your accomplishments stay small. In the same way a child's world expands when she learns to walk, the quality and impact of our lives expand as we increase what is in our Circle and as we balance our Circle.

The ways you choose to spend your time is the starting place to understand the size and richness of your Circle. Everyone fills every

24-hour day with some mix of activities that range from self-centered to other-centered, wasteful to meaningful, and pleasure-centered to cause-oriented. By keeping track of how you allocate your time over a month, you will have a good approximation of the activities you have included in your Circle. But knowing the activities that are important to you isn't enough to determine the true value of your Circle.

People engage in the same activities for a variety of reasons. One person might serve in his community watch program because he wants to make sure his neighbors are safe. Another person might serve because it makes her feel important or for a sense of adventure. The purpose behind our choices can vary from being extremely significant to being petty or even devious. There may be those who serve in their community watch program only to ease the neighborhood for burglary opportunities. Hence, not only what is in the Circle but also the values in your Circle are critically important to understand.

The values in your Circle are not wishes or actions, but motivators that lead to actions. The people and causes in your Circle as well as the values you place within your Circle keep your attention, focus your energy, and direct your activity. They are not merely pipe dreams, but dreams that lead to action, expand your Circle, and impact your life and the lives around you.

How you enlarge and balance your Circle makes all the difference in the world.

Many of the people the world considers to be great were ordinary people who created a very big and masterfully balanced Circle. Mahatma Gandhi began his adult life working as a lawyer, but his career was unremarkable at best. He was so self-conscious and shy that he could barely speak in court. People made fun of him and it was difficult for him to find work. When he found a job in Africa, he was deeply troubled by the mistreatment of his people by the white ruling class. His concern for others forced him to expand and balance his Circle leading to new choices. Rather than dressing and behaving like an Englishman, he began wearing clothing from his native country. He regularly tended to his countrymen in the hospital. His Circle

expanded further when he realized that he needed to do something that would permanently change the political and social landscape of India. Liberating India from British rule was now the focus of his life. This rather inept lawyer now led a nation in a resistance movement and became a man people traveled the world over to learn from.

Similarly, Martin Luther King Jr. was a gifted preacher, but when he expanded his Circle to include the cause of civil rights for all African Americans, he earned a place in U.S. history as an influential leader. Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr. are not alone—men and women whom the world might view as just ordinary people impact their lives and the lives of others by enlarging and balancing their Circle.

What Is in Your Circle?

Determine the content of your Circle by asking yourself two questions. What do you spend your time on, and why do you make those choices? If you choose to spend 10 hours each week working out in the gym, it demonstrates that something about your physical well-being is important to you. If you spend 60 hours each week working, you have placed a high priority on work.

However, it is not enough to only know how you allocate your time. It is also necessary to know why you make some activities important. Working out at the gym because of vanity is quite a different motivation from exercising in order to promote and protect your health. It is not that one is good or the other bad, but we believe the latter motivation to be richer and more meaningful. Similarly, if you are working 60 hours each week because it is demanded of you, that is far different from putting in those long hours because your work is meaningful to you and you believe it has great benefit to others.

Our assessment—which we will walk you through in later chapters—will assist you in understanding the size and quality of what's in your Circle and the balance of the values in your Circle. If you are interested in using the assessment, we encourage you to

do so. It will help you understand where you are now in various areas of your life. Are you hanging on, eroding, treading water, growing, or thriving? We offer steps in each chapter that can help you move forward as you begin your journey to make your Circle bigger, more balanced, and richer. It is only by knowing where you are that you can take the next step toward building an even better and more meaningful life.