

# Tough at the Top

Resource #10

10

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## Learning to accept inevitable failure.

### Chapter 10: The Accident

So, who gets up in the morning and says to themselves “I’m going to try really hard to make a mistake today”? Hopefully, none of us. However, we’re all human - so of course, sometimes we make mistakes. We can take precautions, plan, communicate, mitigate... but there’s a limit to what we can control, and it’s inevitable that sometimes, things will go wrong.

In Chapter 10, we see Adam learning two lessons. First, he realises that as leaders, our acceptance of failure is vital. In fact, we have a responsibility to ensure mistakes can become learning and growth opportunities. Second, he accepts that he can’t stop mistakes from happening - and in fact, refusing to allow failure can be far more damaging.



***“I can’t believe I never realised before just how – how crazy dangerous all the stuff we do here really is. I mean, what are they all thinking? How do we even get away with it? But I’m in charge now, I’ll sort it out. No more failures ever. It’s too hideous for everyone.”***

***“I want to run a circus where we can take risks safely. The problem wasn’t that they fell. The problem was that we didn’t have a good enough safety net to catch them...I don’t mean the actual safety net,” Adam said hastily. “I mean the safety-net where we look after each other.”***



# Accepting failure

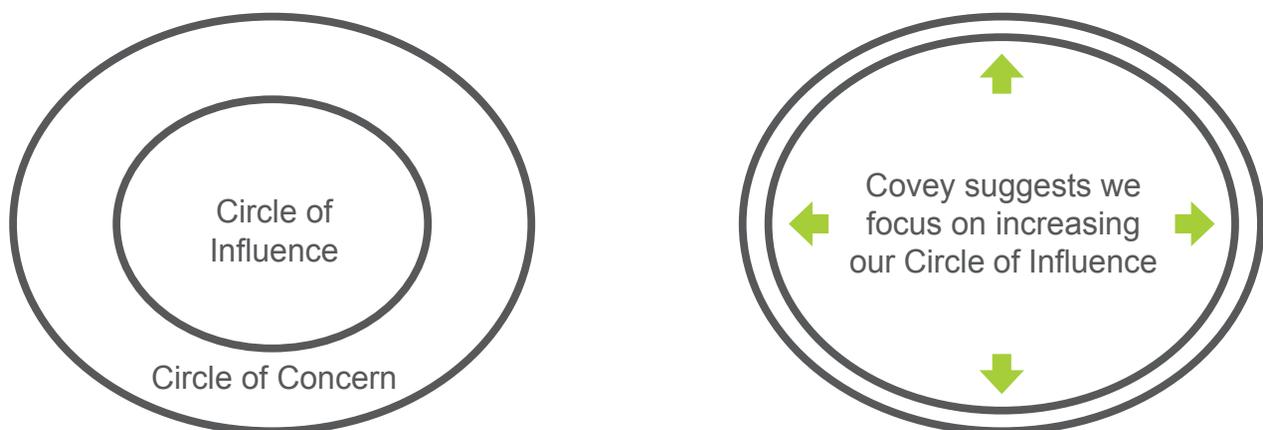
NLP theorists teach the school of thought that failure provides useful information. We can learn something from everything that does not go according to plan. This outlook is captured in the phrase, “There is no failure, only feedback”.

So, think about the last mistake you’ve made (even a tiny one is fine). Now, imagine taking the approach that ‘There is no failure, only feedback’. How much better would you feel about making that mistake? What information could you glean from it to improve things moving forward?

Now imagine if you took this approach with your teams. What would the difference be to them? Would they try new things? Become more effective? Be better communicators? How would they feel? Braver, valued, respected?

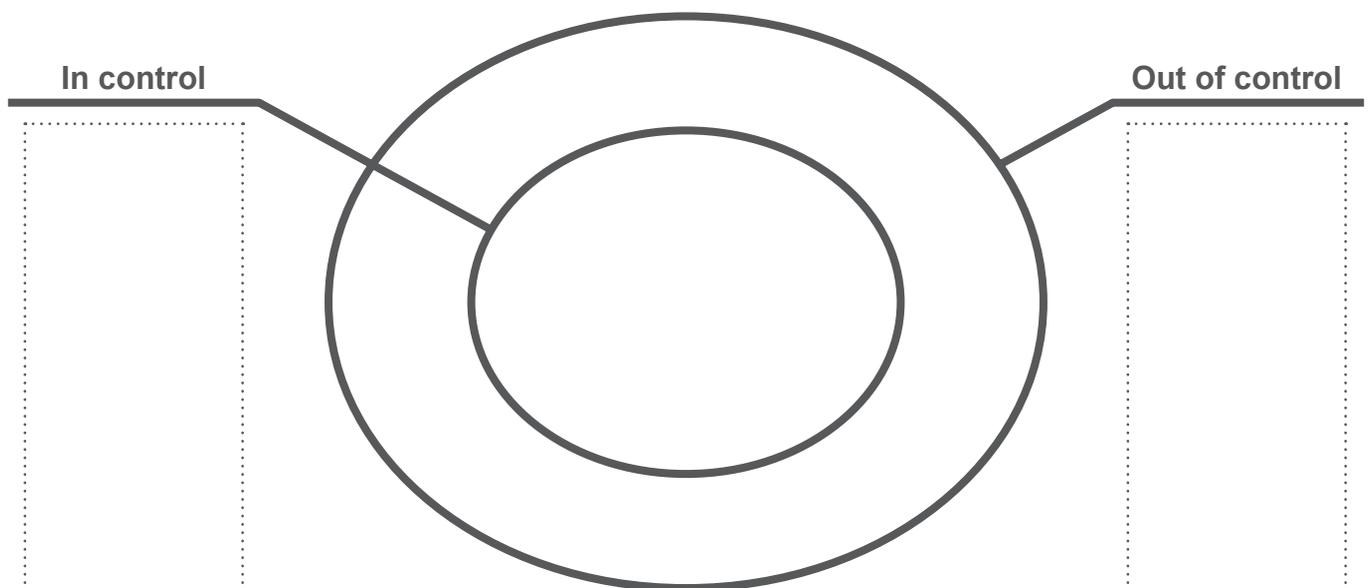
We can’t stop mistakes happening; we can only create environments and cultures where mistakes are reduced and risks highlighted. But how do we do this? And why can’t (or shouldn’t) we set up rigid control procedures, as Adam initially tried to? The answer, as Adam learned, is simple. Controlling work environments restrict empowerment, stifle innovation, prevent evolution and hamper engagement.

In his book “The 7 Habits of Highly effective people”, Steven Covey discusses a concept called the Circle of Influence. Within our wider Circle of Concern (which contains all things we worry and are concerned about), there are things that we can’t do something about, and things we can. The things we can do something about he calls our ‘circle of influence’ - suggesting that we should focus our efforts on what’s contained within the circle of influence, and ideally widening that circle as much as possible.



***“Proactive people focus on their circle of Influence. They focus on the things they can do something about... Reactive people, on the other hand focus their efforts in the circle of concern. They focus on the weaknesses of other people, the problems in the environment, and circumstances over which they have no control. Their focus results in blaming and accusing attitudes, reactive language, and increased feelings of victimization” Steven Covey, The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People, 2004.***

So, what things that bother you are in, and out, of your control? Plot them in the circle of concern (the stuff you have no control over) and the circle of influence (the stuff you do have control over).



Now, let's think about widening your influence. What could you do to affect those risks and problems that fall outside of your circle of influence (without trying to make it within your control)? Perhaps you can do something that allows people to be empowered, or to make important decisions more effectively, or to improve their skillset - so they can help the organisation achieve what it needs to?

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