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Book gives fresh perspective on time management

by Mike Lachance

First Things First: A Principle-Centered Approach to Time and Life Management. Stephen R. Covey & Roger A. Merrill, authors. Published by Simon and Schuster Trade, a division of Simon & Schuster, Inc., 1230 Avenue of the Americas, New York, New York, 1994. Telephone 212/698-7000. 256 pp.

"There just are not enough hours in a day."

"Everybody wants something from me. I never have time for myself."

"I'm more productive than ever. Why do I not feel more fulfilled?"

Have you found yourself thinking or speaking these, or similar, thoughts? Have you tried different time management systems but still feel your life is out of control? Rest assured, you are not alone. Perhaps we all need to look at "time management" from a fresh perspective. This is exactly what Stephen R. Covey and Roger A. Merrill have done in *First Things First: A Principle-Centered Approach to Time and Life Management*.

Covey and Merrill state that one problem with traditional time management is its focus on efficiency ("getting more things done in less time") and control ("plan it, schedule it, manage it"). This emphasis on efficiency and control appears to allow people to get more done, achieve more goals, and yet they feel less happy about their lives. It doesn't seem right, does it?

One possible explanation for this phenomenon may be found in Covey and Merrill's insights on efficiency and control. "It [efficiency] makes good sense. We get more done. We reduce or eliminate waste. We're streamlined. We're faster. We're leveraged. The increase in productivity is incredible. Yet the underlying assumption is that 'more' and 'faster' is better. Is that necessarily true? ... Have you ever tried to be efficient with your spouse

or your teenager or an employee on an emotional jugular issue? How did it go? ... While you can be efficient with things, you can't be efficient — effectively — with people. To think we are in control is an illusion. It puts us in the position of trying to manage consequences. In addition, we can't control other people. And because the basic paradigm is one of control, time management essentially ignores the reality that most of our time is spent living and working with other people who cannot be controlled."

Following the tenets of his previous national bestseller, *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, Covey recommends an approach based on life principles. His approach emphasizes effectiveness or "doing the right things" rather than doing things quicker and more efficiently. While this approach may seem very logical and simplistic, in practice it is not always easy to determine what the "right things" are. Moreover, the "right things" vary significantly from individual to individual, depending on the basic principles upon which we base our lives. While Covey proposes basic "natural laws that govern peace of mind and quality of life," from a practical perspective, not everyone is so enlightened.

Traditional time management methods focus on the clock. Covey and Merrill suggest that to put "first things first," people need more appropriate tools for the job, for example, a map and compass. To illustrate, he uses

the following analogy, "You may be driving down a highway, enjoying great traveling weather and getting terrific mileage. You may be very efficient. But if you're headed south down the California coast on Highway 101 and your destination is New York City — some 3,000 miles to the east — you're not being effective." Rather than focusing on efficiency that is based on time and things, *First Things First* emphasizes effectiveness. Relationships and results are its foundation.

If you are feeling more productive and feeling less fulfilled, I recommend you spend some time with *First Things First*. I caution you that *First Things First* is not a book to read, it is a book to experience. The ideas presented in this book are not "quick fixes"; they are life-long principles to guide you in your journey toward peace and fulfillment. To get the most value from your experience, you will need to spend some time thinking about your life and your values. If you are willing to commit some time and energy to this endeavor, this book will give you practical tools and ideas to help you get the most out of your life. **Mike Lachance is president of Disability RMS in Portland, Maine, and a member of the SOA Management and Personal Development Committee. His e-mail address is 73231.306@compuserve.com**