

Big rocks story

In the middle of a seminar on time management, recalls Covey in his book *First Things First*, the lecturer said, "Okay, it's time for a quiz." Reaching under the table, he pulled out a wide-mouthed gallon jar and set it on the table next to a platter covered with fist-sized rocks. "How many of these rocks do you think we can get in the jar?" he asked the audience.

After the students made their guesses, the seminar leader said, "Okay, let's find out." He put one rock in the jar, then another, then another--until no more rocks would fit. Then he asked, "Is the jar full?"

Everybody could see that not one more of the rocks would fit, so they said, "Yes."

"Not so fast," he cautioned. From under the table he lifted out a bucket of gravel, dumped it in the jar, and shook it. The gravel slid into all the little spaces left by the big rocks. Grinning, the seminar leader asked once more, "Is the jar full?"

A little wiser by now, the students responded, "Probably not."

"Good," the teacher said. Then he reached under the table to bring up a bucket of sand. He started dumping the sand in the jar. While the students watched, the sand filled in the little spaces left by the rocks and gravel. Once more he looked at the class and said, "Now, is the jar full?"

"No," everyone shouted back.

"Good!" said the seminar leader, who then grabbed a pitcher of water and began to pour it into the jar. He got something like a quart of water into that jar before he said, "Ladies and gentlemen, the jar is now full. Can anybody tell me the lesson you can learn from this? What's my point?"

An eager participant spoke up: "Well, there are gaps in your schedule. And if you really work at it, you can always fit more into your life."

"No," the leader said. "That's not the point. The point is this: if I hadn't put those big rocks in first, I would never have gotten them in."

In both our business and personal lives, we have big rocks, gravel, sand and water. The natural tendency seems to favour the latter three elements, leaving little space for the big rocks. In an effort to respond to the urgent, the important is sometimes set aside.

What are the big rocks in your life? A large project? Spending time with your family? Your health? Your finances? Your faith? Your personal development? Your dreams?



Make a list of your big rocks. Then make a plan to ensure that your big rocks are put first. Block out the time in your schedule for those activities. Amazingly, the other stuff still gets done.

Periodically reflect on how you are doing. Are you putting your big rocks first, or does gravel and sand and water dominate your life? If the big rocks aren't getting in, what will have to happen so that they do?

When you are planning your month, your week or your day, and even when you are making specific decisions during the day, refer back to your list of big rocks. Then, put those in your jar first.