

Today and the Art of Can

Michael Wayne McDermott, 22Mar2020

There's been a lot of crosstalk about what management gurus like Covey call the Circle of Influence, a Venn diagram approach to understanding what concerns us, what we can influence and what we can control. It's a very useful model and I understand folks defaulting to it to try to bring order to the current chaos. But, rather than adding to that discussion and the frequent arguments that ensue, I prefer to shape my coping efforts along the time continuum.

It goes like this:

What will life be like in a year? Can't know; too many variables.

What will life be like in a month? Can't know; too many variables.

What will life be like in a week? Mebbe could take a guess but really, too many variables, so...

What will MY life be like today? Now, this I can influence.

I can get up instead of lying in bed contemplating dreadful maybes. Check the weather, drink the coffee and start the day.

I can check current events solely to determine if there have been developments that will help me make personal decisions and plan my activities. I can then shut down the news to avoid reading about things I can't control that will just annoy, worry or hurt me.

I can gaze at the pictures and mementoes on the walls around my writing desk and remind myself that getting up and starting the day was worth it, will always be worth it.

I can write this piece and post it so that – whether they agree with my sentiments or not – my friends know that I cared enough to reach out in a thoughtful way.

Speaking of reaching out, I can get in contact with a friend or family member on a personal level, to remind us both of the value we each bring to the other's life.

I can do some chores around the house because one thing I CAN predict about the next week, month and year is that my life on those future days will not be enhanced by squalor.

I can decide on a project for the day and get to it. Not a regular chore but also not necessarily anything massive or heroic. Just something that will make this day uniquely lived and livable. For me, on the day I write this, I will probably finally unpack the Wood River 5-1/2 hand plane, scrub it free of packing lubricant, hone the blade, file off any burrs or rough spots, and try it out. Mary plans to do some yard work before the predicted week of rain settles in. And perhaps do the touch up mudding prep to the walls she intends to paint. Either or both of our plans may change, of course, but we'll each and both do something that makes today stand out from the continuum.

And for the interim, I can assiduously follow the best advice available to me as to how to live my life without contracting a virus.

Moral of the story: The advice comes from others. Deciding how to live my life comes from me.