

Control Divide Exercise

Tim Howey – 2/17/2025

This is the "Control Divide" Exercise from the book *Boundaries for Leaders*.

I use this process from time to time personally, but I adjust it to align with Scripture (see below).

[Control Freaks Make Great Leaders – Boundaries Books](#)

Regain Control Through the “Control Divide”

What I am about to tell you is going to sound so simplistic that you might miss the profound value that it has. But you have to just trust me that its effects can be incredible for your business (not to mention other dimensions of your life).

First, take a piece of paper and draw a line down the middle of the page, creating two columns. In column number one, write down all of the things that you have no control over that are making your business difficult, such as the economy, the stock market, your customers’ finances, the banks, your boss, the parent company, the health care cost increase, the company’s overall budget, the board, the elections, the newscasts that hurt your business, etc. Those are the things that you have no control over that truly are affecting you. Get everything in that column that you can think of.

Next, I want you to REALLY worry about these items, even as a group. Obsess over them. Ruminates. Dwell. Think it through over and over . . . FOR ABOUT FIVE OR TEN MINUTES. Then, I want you to set the list aside until the next day when you can do the same thing all over again. The reason I suggest that you do this is that you need to! You need to worry about this stuff, and get into “ain’t it awful!” for a few minutes because it is! It is really bad stuff. I do not want you to be in denial. Besides, your brain needs to complete the loop of making sure that you know how bad it is. Otherwise, it will continue to remind you of it, probably in the middle of the night or every time you have some good idea. So, focus on it. BUT. . . only for about five or ten minutes.

Next, after you have had your “worry time,” I want you to draw a circle around that time block and stop thinking about that column. Quarantine it. Put a boundary around it. If you find it helpful, put a red STOP sign on it. No more thinking about those things.

Next, and most important, let’s go to the second column. In this column I want you to write down everything that you DO have control over that can drive results. This need not be a final list. You can always add more activities as they occur to you and your

team, as they probably will change as time goes on. But once you have the list in the initial form, I want 5 you to focus on it every single day. Make prioritizing and doing those activities the primary focus of every day. Work the list.

What makes this simple exercise so powerful is that it speaks directly to our brains' executive functions and our desire to have control. The brain begins to "attend" to the actual activities that it can control (hold on to the football), and it "inhibits" the thoughts, behaviors, and information that interfere with positive actions (worrying and focusing on stadiums and voodoo ladies). The process of doing this, individually and collectively, builds up working memory and creates those positive, action-oriented behaviors that lead to better results, new products, new partnerships, new customers, and a lot more fun. The brain begins to get out of the mud.

The adjustment I make to this process is to (a) pray about both columns, (b) then I mentally treat the side I cannot control as my prayer list in the Spirit (i.e., God's job), and (c) the side I can influence as my to-do list in the Spirit.