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First Things First: Big Rocks

I took time at the beginning of 2021 to pause, reflect, and move my rocks. Though you may think I am talking about a new landscape design project, I'm not talking about actual rocks...I'm actually talking about my priorities.

In a striking demonstration, Stephen R. Covey showed us how a paradigm shift can help us prioritize our big objectives while still managing the little things in our lives. In the demonstration Covey took big rocks and labeled them with what many consider values and priorities such as spending time with family and friends, serving others, increasing our faith or spirituality, and setting educational and careers goals. He then took a large, clear glass jar and filled it with pebbles representing the little things in life. These may be things we have to do or want to do, however they are not as crucial to our fulfillment, happiness, or the betterment of our lives and those around us. They include everyday things such as household chores and projects, grocery shopping, answering emails, and watching TV.

Often times we say yes to too many little things which end up filling our to-do lists and calendars. We may see these tasks, activities, or events in the moment as important without really thinking about the value they bring us or the order in which we should do them. And in the same way that the pebbles filled Covey's jar not leaving enough room for the big rocks, these little things can fill our lives first, not leaving enough room for our priority objectives.

So, what's the best way to ensure the big rocks fit too? Prioritize them. Put the big rocks in first and then add the pebbles. As the new year approached, and especially after last year which brought so many challenges, uncertainties, and lessons, I really thought about my big rocks - the ones that bring fulfillment, meaning, and purpose. I got very clear about the top tasks, projects, and goals that I would like to accomplish.

It's not always easy. As Covey advises, "You have to decide what your highest priorities are and have the courage—pleasantly, smilingly, nonapologetically, to say "no" to other things. And the way you do that is by having a bigger 'yes' burning inside."

Now when making decisions I am more mindful and will ask myself, "Is this related to a big rock?" If it is, I prioritize it. You may find, like me, everything else will fall into place and fit in the jar, we just have to put the big rocks first.