

URL: <https://stvp.stanford.edu/clips/know-your-big-rocks>

Lisa Alderson, co-founder and CEO of Genome Medical, demonstrates the "big rocks" approach to prioritizing what's most important, made popular by bestselling business author Stephen Covey. Knowing what matters most, whether that's reaching the next milestone at your startup or securing more funding, will prevent you from wasting time on the many distractions that can fill up a day.



Transcript

- Stephen Covey, I know has talked about this, but I think the original author is a bit unknown.. But if I take this and I say okay, Does that look pretty full?' Think that's full? It's got about six rocks in there.. Alright? So now I'm going to add just a few more.. That's a little big.. And I'm gonna add some more pebbles.. Okay, now is that full? Yeah, pretty full.. Well, not done.. So now we'll try not to spill on the computer.. Kinda need to shake it up.. Okay, now we're looking pretty full..

Oh, got a little pocket in there.. Right? We now say that this is full? Wait, there's more.. I'm just gonna pour a little water in there.. That's gonna fill up the rest of the crevice.. Wow, takes quite a bit of water.. Alright.. How about now? Can we get anything else in that jar? Yes, okay, what else are we gonna put in there? - [Audience member] Depends - What's that? - [Audience Member] Depends - So, okay, what's the lesson of... this? - [Audience member] Break it down in steps.. - That's a good lesson.. Always good to break it down in steps..

- [Audience Member] Focus on the big things more than the steps.. - Focus on the big things.. - [Audience member] Think first things first.. - If I put all of that water and sand and pebbles and gravel in first, it'd probably get to about here.. In which case, I'd never actually fit the big rocks in the jar.. So, in this analogy, the big rocks are the things that matter most to you.. I use this in my company.. Every quarter we have a management or a quarterly business review.. It's like okay, what are our three big rocks? What are the three things we absolutely have to do this next quarter? What are the three things we're gonna get done for this year? Keep the eyes on the prize.. Big rocks..

If you can move those big boulders up the hill, that's what's gonna drive your value creation.. That's what's gonna help you get to the next milestone.. That's what's gonna help you demonstrate you know, the opportunity to raise more capital because you've now sort of, shown your proof point.. This holds in your personal life.. Right? If it's about family or it's about spirituality or it's about, like, know what matters most to you.. Because if you just let your jar be filled up for you, it will be full, I can assure you.. But you might not be doing what you wanna be doing.. You might not be focused on the things that matter most to you.. Other people ask things of you.. Right? You put pressure and things on yourself..

Unless you can be very deliberate about this is what I have to get done, this is what matters most.. It's very easy to see people, particularly in a small company but even a large company, like, very busy.. They have a lot to do.. But unless you're focused on the result, I need to get from point A to point B and here's how I'm gonna do it, you might not have much to show for it.. In my company, I don't really care if you work from Hawaii, I don't really care where you are or how much you're working, I really don't care.. We, in fact, have an open vacation policy.. Unlimited.. What I do care about is, are you driving results? Are we getting to where we need to go? Are we doing that as efficiently and as effectively as we can? And that's hard.. Back to, you know, myself.. I find myself just running the marathon at the sprinter's pace and it's because I realize I gotta get more focused..

I have to pare back.. I have to really think about what those big rocks are...