

Use The Big Rocks First

A while back I was reading about an expert on the subject of time management. One day this expert was speaking to a group of business students and, to drive home a point, used an illustration those students will never forget.

As the man stood in front of the group of high-powered overachievers he said, "Okay, time for a quiz."

Then he pulled out a one-gallon, wide-mouthed mason jar and set it on a table before him. Then he produced about a dozen fist-sized rocks and carefully placed them, one at a time, into the jar.

When the jar was filled to the top and no more rocks would fit inside, he asked, "Is this jar full?" Everyone in the class said, "Yes."

Then he said, "Really?" He reached under the table and pulled out a bucket of gravel. He dumped some gravel in and shook the jar, causing pieces of gravel to work themselves down into the spaces between the big rocks.

He asked the group once more, "Is the jar full?" By this time the class was onto him. "Probably not," one of them answered. "Good," he replied.

He reached under the table and brought out a bucket of sand. He started dumping the sand in and it went into all the spaces left between the rocks and the gravel. Once more he asked the question, "Is the jar full?"

"No!" the class shouted. Once again he said, "Good!" Then he grabbed a pitcher of water and began to pour it in until the jar was filled to the brim. Then he looked up at the class and asked, "What is the point of this illustration?"

One eager beaver raised his hand and said, "The point is, no matter how full your schedule is, if you try really hard, you can always fit some more things into it."

"No," the speaker replied, "that's not the point. The truth this illustration teaches us is: If you don't put the big rocks in first, you'll never get them in at all."

What are the big rocks in your life? A project that you want to accomplish? Time with your loved ones? Your faith, your education, your finances? A cause? Teaching or mentoring others? Remember to put these big rocks in first or you'll never get them in at all.

So, tonight or in the morning, when you are reflecting on this short story, ask yourself this question: "What are the big rocks in my life or business?" Then put those in your jar first.

—Ray Helfer, in the *Reno Specifier*