

# LOCUS OF CONTROL

**ARE YOU IN CONTROL OF WHAT HAPPENS IN YOUR LIFE – OR IS SOMEONE ELSE? ARE YOU INVOLVED IN THE THINGS THAT HAPPEN – OR DO THEY HAPPEN AROUND YOU? DO YOU RECOGNISE THE ROLE YOU PLAY IN EVERYTHING YOU DO – OR ARE THINGS ALWAYS OTHER PEOPLE’S FAULT?**

The answers to these questions depend on whether you have an internal or external locus of control. That is, whether you believe you are in control of your life, or if it is controlled by external factors such as other people, the environment, or chance. By taking responsibility and therefore ownership of your life, you have the power to make changes to it. In contrast, people who believe others have control actually give up their ownership and their power to make changes.

**Sara used to play competitive hockey growing up. She really loved the sport and continued to play it into adulthood, but after being in a terrible car accident, her injuries meant she could no longer run without pain. She had to give up hockey, which made her sad. One day, Sara woke up and realised she was really unhappy with how things were. She lost the hobby she loved and the fitness she enjoyed when she was more active.**

**Sara realised that just because she couldn't play hockey, didn't mean she couldn't do other things. After some research, Sara signed up to a local rowing club and found she really loved it. She practiced with her new rowing team each week, improving her fitness to what it once was and made some great friends along the way. Today, Sara is part of an award winning rowing team and has found a new hobby to love! Her old hockey mates even come to watch her compete!**

**How did Sara come to be where she is today? What factors were necessary for her to progress from being injured and unhappy to finding a great new hobby that she was good at?**

**The answer is simple, yet her journey was not: she took control of what she could. She assessed her situation and accepted the realities, all the while keeping focused on the outcome she wanted to achieve. She made choices about what she could control and acted upon them.**

**WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR ME?**

We are all unique individuals who come from different walks in life and have our personal goals. Despite who you are and what you want to achieve, the recipe for success is very much the same. Recognising that you are in control of what you think, feel, say and do can be very powerful in helping you to take control of your life and achieve the goals that you set for yourself. There are decades of research <sup>1,2</sup> to suggest that taking control of our attitudes and choices is related to a multitude of positive benefits including:

- » Greater physical and mental well-being
- » Higher life satisfaction
- » Less burnout and less job stress
- » Higher job satisfaction
- » Greater job performance and career success
- » Higher levels of self-esteem
- » More favourable interpersonal relationships with co-workers and supervisors
- » Greater perceptions of social support and the ability to influence outcomes in the workplace
- » Higher internal motivation and feelings of empowerment
- » More effective coping skills to deal with challenges.

Most of us have had experiences where we have felt like there was nothing we could do about a situation or that everything was useless, and as a result felt stuck or frustrated. However, what we know is that things don't have to be that way. Here are some strategies and considerations that you can begin to implement in your life today, to become the master and commander of your life:

**1. Assess what is in your control.** Consciously assess any situation to identify what is and is not in your control. Then focus on how you choose to respond to the things in your control.

**2. Understand that you always have a choice.** Regardless of the situation, there are always choices. Sometimes the choice available may not seem ideal and at times the only choice may be to change your attitude regarding how you perceive the situation. However, you always have a choice about how you will respond.

**3. Be aware of the language you use and your self-talk.** Phrases such as, "I have no choice", "he/she made me...", or, "I can't..." often lead to feelings of frustration and anger which prevent us from taking action. It is more effective to use language such as "I can," or, "I don't like my choices, but I will...". The message associated with this language is the realisation and acknowledgement that you have a choice in the situation.

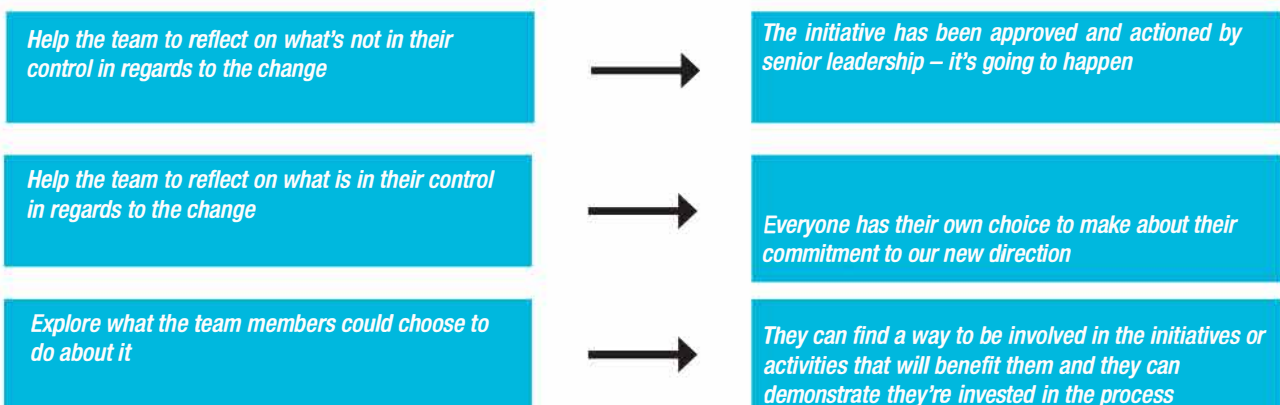
**4. Reflect on the role you take in your relationships with others.** The reality is that you are not a victim of any circumstance and you always have a degree of control in your interactions. Due to a difference in attitudes and perspectives we are not always going to see eye to eye with our work mates, supervisors, relatives or friends.

**5. Ask Effective Questions.** Questions are a powerful tool for influencing how we perceive a situation. Consider asking some of the following questions the next time you find yourself in a challenging situation:

- » "What is my portion of responsibility here?"
- » "What role do I play in this result?"
- » "What outcome am I looking for?"
- » "What can I do about it?"
- » "What are my choices?"
- » "What can I control?"

These questions can assist you to understand the situation and your role within it; accept that you have the power to control your thoughts, emotions, words and actions; help you to focus on what you are responsible for; and empower you to choose your response. It is important to recognise that our attitudes and every choice that we make, has the capacity to influence the goals that we have in life.

**HOW CAN YOU APPLY LOCUS OF CONTROL TO SUPPORT AND GUIDE YOUR TEAM DURING TIMES OF CHANGE...**



<sup>1</sup>Ng, T. W. H., Sorensen, K. L., & Eby, L. T. (2006). Locus of control at work: A meta-analysis. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 27, 1057-1087.  
<sup>2</sup>Wang, Q., Bowling, N. A., & Eschleman, K. J. (2010). A meta-analytic examination of work and general locus of control. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 95(4), 761-768.