

Elena Aguilar ([00:01](#)):

Hi everyone. I'm Elena Aguilar, and this is The Bright Morning Podcast.

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All right, friends. Today, I've got an episode for you that is a coaching tool episode. And I'm going to go a little bit more in depth into one of the tools that I used in the coaching conversation I had last week with Adam Morales. And I'll tell you a little bit about what the tool is, why we use it, when to use it, and so on. So if you haven't yet listened to that coaching conversation with Adam, you might want to listen to that one first. However, you'll still get a lot out of this, even if you haven't.

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All right. Before we dive into this coaching tool episode, I want to quickly thank friends of the podcast. Simone H., from Seattle, and Yazmine M., from Colorado. Your support makes this show possible. And to learn more about becoming a friend of the podcast, please check out the link in the show notes for this episode. All right, let's get into it.

([01:10](#)):

All right. So the coaching tool that I am going to focus on today is the spheres of influence and control, which you may already be familiar with through my books and my work. The spheres of influence is ... I think of as one of the key tools in a transformational coach's toolbox. And the basic idea of it is that there are things that you can control, there's things you can influence, and then there's everything else that's outside of your influence and control.

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Now, what is truly within our control is worth exploring and unpacking and reflecting on. You could say that your emotions, your mindset, your disposition is closest to being within your control, or something that you can influence strongly. And it's still worth holding a little bit of spaciousness around really, what does it mean to control something? And so I would say it is also very possible that there is absolutely nothing we can control in life, really. And maybe what we can most influence, right on the border in between influence and control, is our emotions, our disposition, our mindset.

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But you know what, I'm still holding some porousness around that idea. And if you look at the graphic that's linked in the show notes, you'll see that the image for the spheres of influence is porous. There's some space in between the different spheres. In some ways, I would like to revise this graphic right now and say that that inner circle of control actually should have a porous boundary into what we can influence. So take a look at that, to see what I'm talking about here. What we can influence is a really interesting category. And I think also deserves reflection for everybody. Everybody has a different sense of what they can influence. Ultimately, I think the question for us to reflect on is, what do we want to influence?

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So for example, as a teacher, there was very little I could do about teachers' salaries in Oakland, which were frustratingly low. And which did lead to significant numbers of teachers leaving the school district. There was nothing I could do. It was totally out of my control. But I reflected on that and realized that actually, if I wanted to influence teachers salary, there probably were things that I could do. Starting with getting involved with my union, and then perhaps lobbying or working in different places, including on the state level. So if I had made the decision that I wanted to influence teachers' salaries, there were things that I could have done to influence that otherwise frustrating fact of life as a teacher.

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Everyone has a different sense of how much they can influence. I have worked with people who feel like that sphere, that band is really narrow. That there's very little they can influence and that almost everything is outside of their influence and control. This is a worthwhile reflection to engage your clients in and to engage in yourself, in the sense that you want to have a sense of understanding about what someone's perception of their own power is.

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So let me shift into talking about how this tool can be used, and then I'll loop back to this. Because this is a tool that is really useful to engage in, for you as a coach to have in your mind. Or even to explicitly engage your client in when someone is feeling powerless. Often, using this tool comes to my mind when I hear someone complaining, because when someone's complaining, they're talking about all the things that they have no control over, no influence over. And in my mind, I start thinking, hmm, all right. So you are feeling powerless. You're feeling like you don't have agency, or you don't have a say about what's happening. So how can I use this tool, either to inform the questions I ask you, to help you explore this sense of powerlessness? Or how can I literally introduce the concept to you and have you engage in a reflection more explicitly?

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And in *The Art of Coaching*, in *Onward*, and in *The Onward Workbook*, I describe more about how you can engage someone explicitly in exploring this tool. But when I hear someone is feeling really powerless, I want to help them, first, explore what it is about their mindset and about the situation that is leading them to think about this. But this is where I come back to what I originally posed to you, which is, it's worth having a reflection with a client about their feelings, about their sphere of influence. Because I have met a lot of people who feel like the sphere of influence that they have is very narrow. That it's a very small band.

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And so asking someone very explicitly, let's unpack this. Where do you feel like you can influence the situation that you're in? Where do you feel like you have some sense of, perhaps control where you can strongly influence? I suppose the influence band is along a continuum, right? We want to help people recognize there's places where they can have more influence, perhaps less influence. Maybe if we understand or accept that nothing is in our control, then all we need to be talking about is influence.

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So here is a way that you might think about the spheres of influence that's relevant to us right now. Okay. By right now, I mean, almost exactly one year into a global pandemic. One year into a whirlwind of a year for educators. Now we are doing distance learning. Now we're doing hybrid learning. Now we're back to distance. Now we're doing some kind of in-person, but it has been a constant ride of uncertainty and anxiety. And I have to say, I am not feeling confident that that is going to let up anytime soon. I think that we're in for more uncertainty as the vaccine rollout continues to have bumps and unpredictability. As there are new strains and new variants of COVID 19, I think we're in for a lot more uncertainty. And uncertainty is really, really hard for us. And this is coming after a year of exhausting change, grief, anxiety.

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And so the spheres of influence, I want to suggest can be engaged right now as a resilience boosting strategy. And as a key, critical resilience boosting strategy. When I was talking to Adam last week in that coaching conversation, and when I really took into account everything that he was facing and dealing

with as a new principal in a challenging situation, I sensed in my coaching mind, the spheres of influence arising, surfacing as a way to help guide him into his own power. Back into a place where he could feel like he had some agency and say over what was going on. And from which he could make some decisions about how to spend his time, what to focus on, where to put his mental energy.

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And it arose in my mind as a place to ... or a tool to guide him through. Because I know that being able to focus in on where you feel like you have influence helps you to feel more energy. Helps you to feel like, okay, at least, this. At least I can make decisions about getting up in the morning and exercising. That is something I can make decisions about right now, because right now that's within my influence. Or at least I can make decisions about how to engage with my son and how to engage a conversation with him about his schooling.

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And so, as you heard in that conversation with Adam, he was actually thinking about the spheres of influence, really I would say, by himself. Either consciously or unconsciously, he was going to the places where he can have most influence. And again, consciously or unconsciously, recognizing that that would allow him to feel better. It would allow him to feel more energized. More grounded and anchored and clearheaded.

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And so I want to encourage you to think about using the spheres of influence with folks that you're coaching, and perhaps with yourself as a resilience building strategy right now. I have spoken to so many teachers and coaches and school administrators who are saying, I'm exhausted. I don't know how we're going to get through this year. And I have to start planning for next year soon. Try using the spheres of influence if you are feeling that way. Or if someone you are coaching is feeling that way.

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All right. Right now, today, where can you focus? What can you direct your attention to that would be within your sphere of influence? Now, you may have heard in that conversation with Adam, that I led him into ... or that we went into this conversation about celebrations and bright spots. And I think about that actually as connected to the spheres of influence, because where we put our focus and our attention is a choice we can make. That's within our influence. Again, that's probably on that border of influence and control. And we can choose to focus on bright spots and celebrations. And doing that will help us also to feel more energy.

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And so when I think about the key tools in the transformational coach's toolkit, focusing on strengths is one of those key tools or key habits, key approaches, as is the spheres of influence. And this is where I think they intersect. It is a choice that we can make to focus on our strengths, our successes, someone else's strengths, their bright spots. And doing so is within our influence and it boosts our resilience. It helps us feel better.

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And so there's a suggestion for how to use the spheres of influence. And tangentially, the focusing on the bright spots or focusing on strengths, as a way to respond to the overwhelm, exhaustion, fatigue, despair of being a year into the pandemic. Of even most recently, for folks going through the deep freeze and the climate change in our country. Coming on the heels of an intensified upsurge in anti-Asian racism, coming at the end of another surge of racial reckoning or awareness about racism in the United States and in other countries as well. We are tired. A lot of people are tired. How can we use the

spheres of influence to help people see where they can take action that will have an impact on their own energy, on those around them? And how can part of that be focusing on the bright spots?

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So I'm leaving you with those questions, really. As well as a suggestion that, of course, that is a place for us to focus on. But those are questions for you to keep reflecting on. How could this be useful right now? For you, for the folks that you coach, how could the spheres of influence be useful? How can you craft questions and invite folks into reflecting on what they can influence that will help them ultimately feel more empowered?

[\(15:47\)](#):

All right, friends. That is this coaching tool episode on the spheres of influence, with a little intersection in there for coaching around strengths and bright spots. If you enjoyed the show, would you please take a couple of minutes to hop over to Apple Podcasts and rate and review it so that more people will find our community of listeners. And you'll find links to everything mentioned in the show notes. The Bright Morning Podcast is produced by LesLee Bickford and Stacey Goodman, and Stacey Goodman does the sound engineering. All right. Be well, everyone.