

Big rocks first: Make room for what really matters

Adaptive module

~20 min

"I don't have time" often means "it's not my priority." This module starts from Stephen Covey's big rocks experiment and applies it at three levels: the calendar, where priorities are booked before the sand arrives; the team, held to three rocks per quarter, with AI taking on part of the rest; and the meeting point between individual and collective priorities, which is what makes engagement last, so much so that younger generations turn down jobs that ignore it.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- 01 Draw the real lesson from the big rocks experiment: what you don't put in first will never fit in later.
- 02 Block your three big rocks in your calendar each week before anything else, then protect them against requests.
- 03 Clarify the quarter's three rocks as a team, and hand part of the sand to AI: repetitive tasks, reports, first drafts.
- 04 Bring organizational and individual priorities together through regular one-on-ones between managers and team members.

WHO IT'S FOR

Anyone who wants their real priorities to show up in their calendar, and managers who align their team's priorities.

- **Prerequisite:** none

HOW THE MODULE WORKS

Self-paced, with practice tailored to each learner.

- 1 **Self-assessment:** on 9 dimensions, to gauge current habits and guide the practice.
- 2 **Expert video:** 10 minutes, with 3 pauses for reflection.
- 3 **Practice scenarios:** the first 2 chosen from the self-assessment, then 16 optional ones. Every answer gets feedback: what it leads to, and one way to improve.
- 4 **Dated commitment:** one action to try, written by the learner or picked from the suggestions.
- 5 **Memo to download:** key takeaways, questions, commitment, personal notes and checklists.

A SAMPLE PRACTICE SCENARIO

Gunnar has set aside his Thursday afternoon for the test plan the client expects on Monday. At 2 p.m., his manager asks him for a comparison of suppliers for the meeting she is leading tomorrow at 9 a.m.: "two hours, no more." Gunnar has an AI agent. What does Gunnar answer?

ASSESSMENT AND COMPLETION

Pass mark: 80%

The score takes into account your answers to the practice scenarios, your commitment and, where relevant, any additional learning activities. Passing requires a commitment and a score of at least 80%.

METHODS & MODELS

- Big rocks metaphor (gravel / sand / water) – Stephen Covey, popularized in *First Things First*
- The quarter's three big rocks – Afthonios method
- Handing the sand and gravel to AI – Afthonios method

SOURCES & REFERENCES

- Deloitte, "Gen Z and Millennial Survey" (2024), of nearly 23,000 young workers in 44 countries – 50% of Gen Z and 43% of millennials have already turned down an assignment that conflicted with their values
- Stephen Covey, *First Things First* – the "big rocks" metaphor: putting your essential priorities in before the gravel, sand, and water
- Patagonia – purpose statement "We're in business to save our home planet," used as a filter for strategic decisions
- Locke & Latham (2002) – goal setting and motivation at work