

Understanding the Matrix of Self-Management

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If you lack the iron and the fizz to take control of your own life, the gods will repay your weakness by having a grin or two at your expense. Should you fail to pilot your own ship, don't be surprised what inappropriate port you find yourself docked.

—Tom Robbins

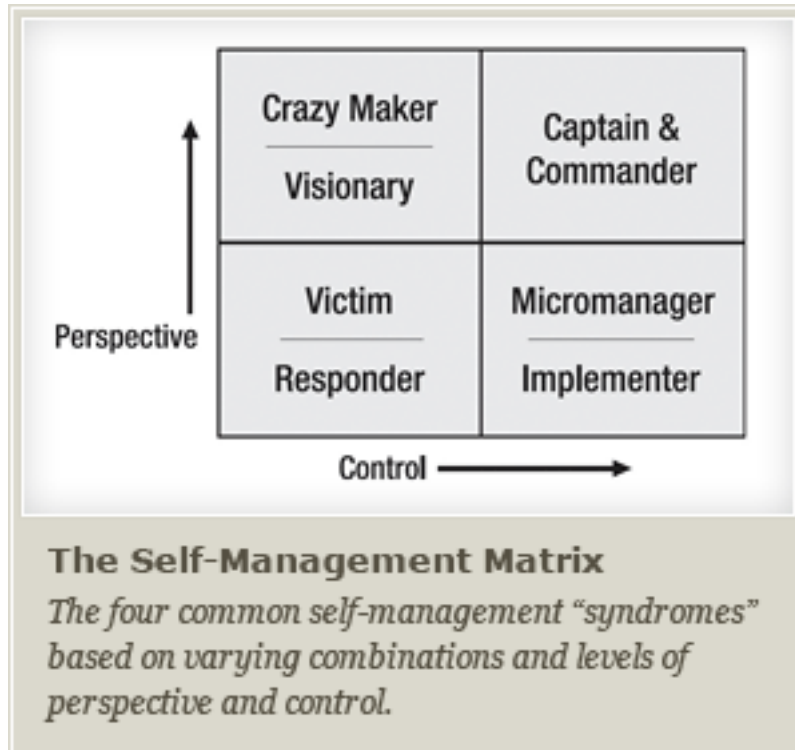
The two keys ingredients for making it all work are:

- Control
- Perspective

If you can maintain a sufficient level of each of these factors in yourself or in your organization, you probably won't find much room for improvement. Your world will be in order and you'll be focused exactly as you should be. Only when one or both of them slip away from optimal should you be concerned that something needs righting.

Control and perspective are closely intertwined dynamics, but achieving each one involves different approaches, whether the matter at hand is your teenager doing homework, your soccer team's practice, your next vacation, or your product launch. If your kitchen is a mess, for example, cleaning it up and placing all the tools and equipment where they belong will be a very different exercise from deciding what to cook and how to present it. But the two activities remain very connected, in that without an organized kitchen, it will be very challenging to stay focused on the dinner itself; likewise, an insufficient focus on the recipes, the various components of the dinner event itself, and the plan for deploying them will allow the situation to quickly get out of control again.

A matrix constructed on the axes of control and perspective can be useful, both as a map for assessing your own standing with respect to these elements (or that of another person or a particular situation) and as a guide for improvement.



The four quadrants described by these axes identify, in very general terms, the syndromes that are typically experienced with the varying combinations of low and high control, and low and high perspective. The obvious optimal state would be elevated levels of both — the sector that is labeled “Captain and Commander.” Finding oneself in any of the other three quadrants, though, is not necessarily a bad thing. Just as any high-performance vehicle frequently gets off course, the best of us often fall away from the high-control, high-perspective state. It’s the nature of human experience, which is always in some form of motion, to veer off course — sometimes in major, but consistently in minor, ways.

If, however, you tend to spend too much time in one of the less-than-optimal quadrants, you’ll probably deserve the negative labels that are attached to them — Victim, Micromanager, or Crazy Maker. But these labels are best used as warnings for a course correction, much like the lane control bumps on a highway, when you drift as a result of your exploration and forward motion. In such cases a positive aspect will more aptly describe the syndromes — Responder, Implementer, and Visionary.

*Adapted from “**Making It All Work**” by David Allen, by arrangement with Viking, a member of Penguin Group (USA) Inc.*