

THINK

*INSIDE*

THE BOX

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# Think Inside the Box

By Lisa Kardos, Ph.D.

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## Connect With Me

As always, if you would like to get in touch with me, feel free to use the contact form on <http://optimizebooks.com> or send me an email at [lisa@optimizebooks.com](mailto:lisa@optimizebooks.com)

Other ways we can connect:

Twitter ([@lisakardos](https://twitter.com/lisakardos))

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## Introduction

Thank you for downloading my ebook, *Think Inside the Box*. This originally started out as a companion flow chart to accompany my first book [Optimize for Victory: A Simple Approach to Overcome Challenges and Achieve Your Dreams](#) (due to a fan's request for more!), but it has evolved to this short ebook!

If you did not have a chance to read my first book, that's ok. But I would like to give you some background on the book and why I started <http://optimizebooks.com> -- to help people overcome challenges and improve their lives.

Why?

Because I had noticed a pattern over the years. Somehow, no matter where I worked, people gravitated toward me and relayed their problems -- work or otherwise. I would listen very closely, and in the end, my friends or colleagues would walk away thanking me for helping them.

I always felt so honored that people felt comfortable enough and truly trusted me to speak so openly in my presence. Further, it astounded me that they felt I could help them.

In hindsight, the main thing I did during those sessions was ask critical questions and in doing so, I would try to reframe or provide various perspectives with regard to the issues in their respective situations.

As this pattern continued, and I found myself essentially giving career/personal coaching, while also preferring job opportunities where I could assist others, I started to think that I should try to widen my circle (hence [Optimize for Victory](#) and now this little ebook, *Think Inside the Box*).

Therefore, I sincerely hope *Think Inside the Box* may be of some help to you. It means a lot to me to help you, more than you know. It's what fulfills me the most. I also feel very strongly about ensuring that others do not "suffer" as much; we go through a lot of hard lessons in life. If we can share tools and tips to help others endure less pain, we would collectively have more energy and resources to advance our lives and improve the world (I don't mean this to sound trite – it's true and logical!)

In terms of this ebook -- *Think Inside the Box* consists of some main themes that I have observed over the years, the ones that have helped me succeed; they have helped me feel content with my life. These themes have also helped some of my students and friends.

We will review the following concepts:

1. Draw the Box and Identify the Location of an Issue.
2. Engineer What is Inside the Box and Invest Your Time.
3. Challenge Yourself.

So let's get to it!

## 1. Draw the Box and Identify the Location of an Issue

Many times we go through the day feeling upset and angry at the various situations that arise – someone cuts us off in traffic; our manager is unhappy with how we did a project and is condescending to us; someone in a position of power bullies us. It's easy to fall into the trap of “venting” about those situations at length (and to a certain extent, it is healthy to express ourselves).

But there comes a point where we are *choosing* to allow those situations to get the best of us. We are incorporating them into our lives to the point where they are inhibiting us from performing our best. We are letting them use up our valuable time and energy.

Why does that happen? Because we include them in our lives as if they are *part of us*. ***As if we are responsible for those other entities.***

But...

We are not responsible for the person who cut us off.

We are not responsible for our manager's behavior and approach.

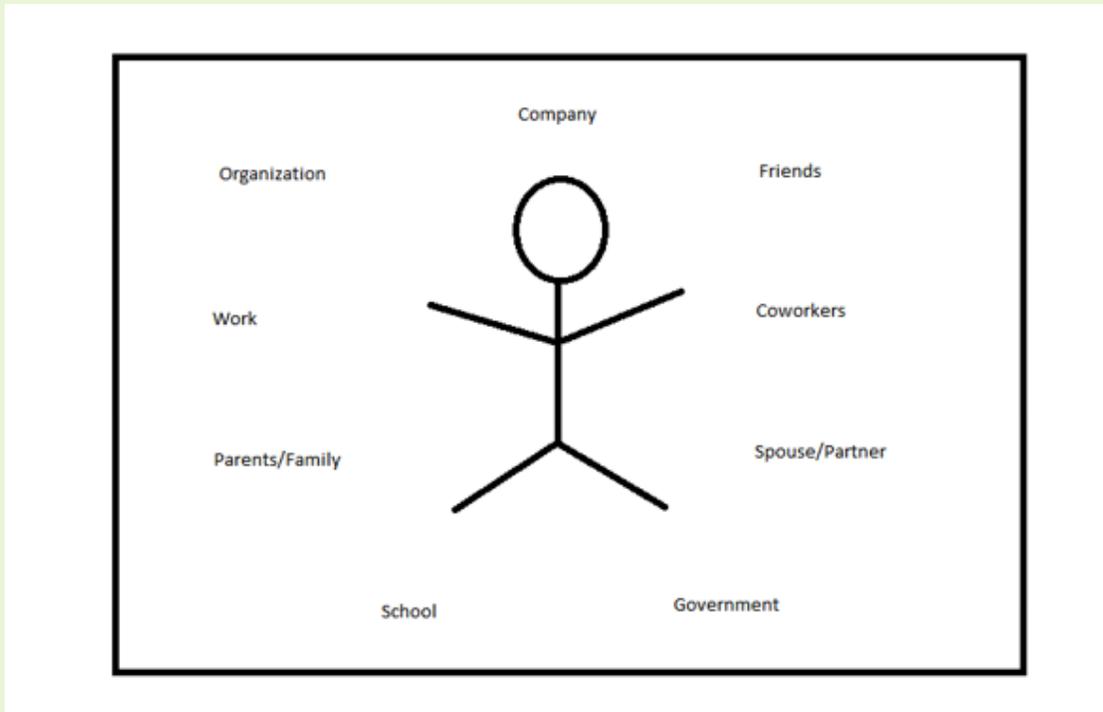
We are not responsible for the people who bully us.

I fully understand what it is to feel overpowered by people – where people abuse their positions of power to ensure you do not get ahead, to try to limit your success. In many cases they are not even as conscious of it as you may think – they are just worried about themselves and we happened to get in the way somehow.

Though it's easy to feel angry at them, we actually can find ways to feel compassion for them (more on that in [\*Optimize for Victory\*](#); however, it's not the focus of this ebook).

In this ebook, however, the takeaway message is that you can reframe the situation – you can put them outside of the box, while drawing the box around yourself.

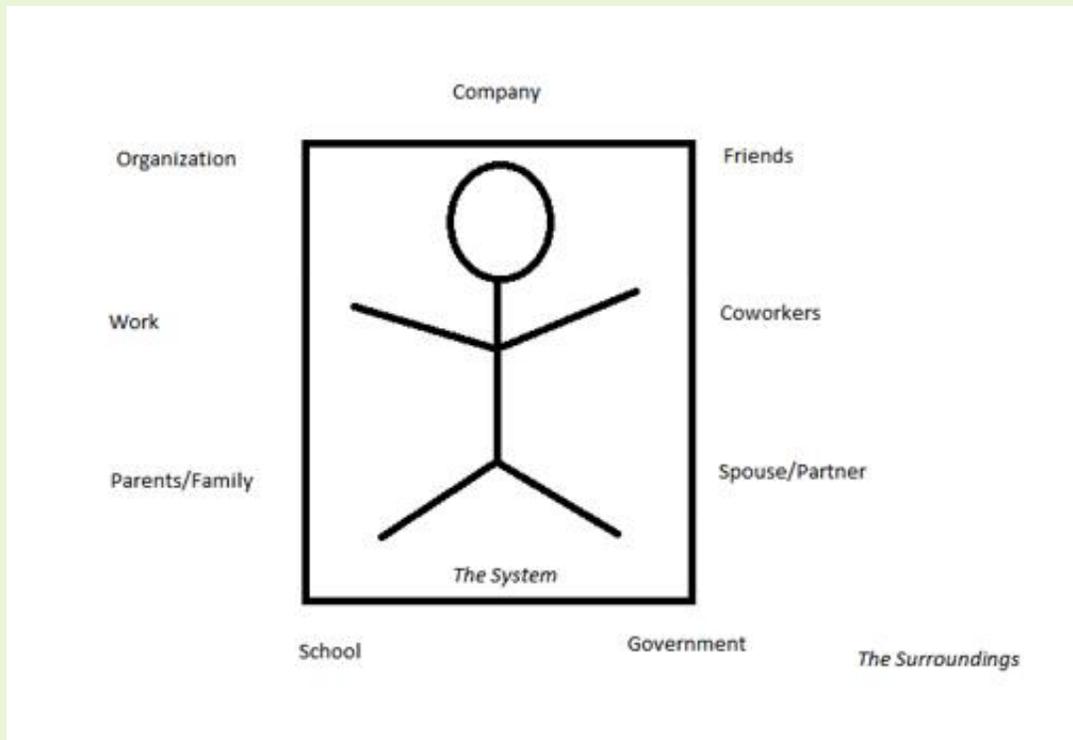
To explain this visually, this is how we operate typically (Figure 1):



**Figure 1** Person in stick-figure form with other aspects of life. The box defines the system.

We often talk about the other aspects of life – the company we work for, our government, etc. – as if we have control over them. While there may be some things that we can do to improve things (thinking in the context of how we can make a difference), complaining about those things does not really get us anywhere.

Therefore, I have found the optimal way to live is to redefine my life in terms of Figure 2:



**Figure 2** Person in stick-figure form with other aspects of life. The box defines the system.

When I physically draw myself inside the box (even as simply as drawing a stick-figure!), and actually put the name of someone or identify the situation outside of box, it does something for me inside. I often feel a sense of peace – it somehow makes it more “real” that I really should not concern myself with that, but instead redirect my energy.

This is why you may notice the labels in Figure 2; I identify myself then as a “system” to work on, to optimize (engineer; more on this in the next section). The items in the surrounding are not part of my system; I don’t have to engineer them because they are not part of my control. The only thing I can do is figure out how I may be the best

version of myself and perhaps indirectly help others by doing my best, but I have to let go of the idea that I have any control over anything else.

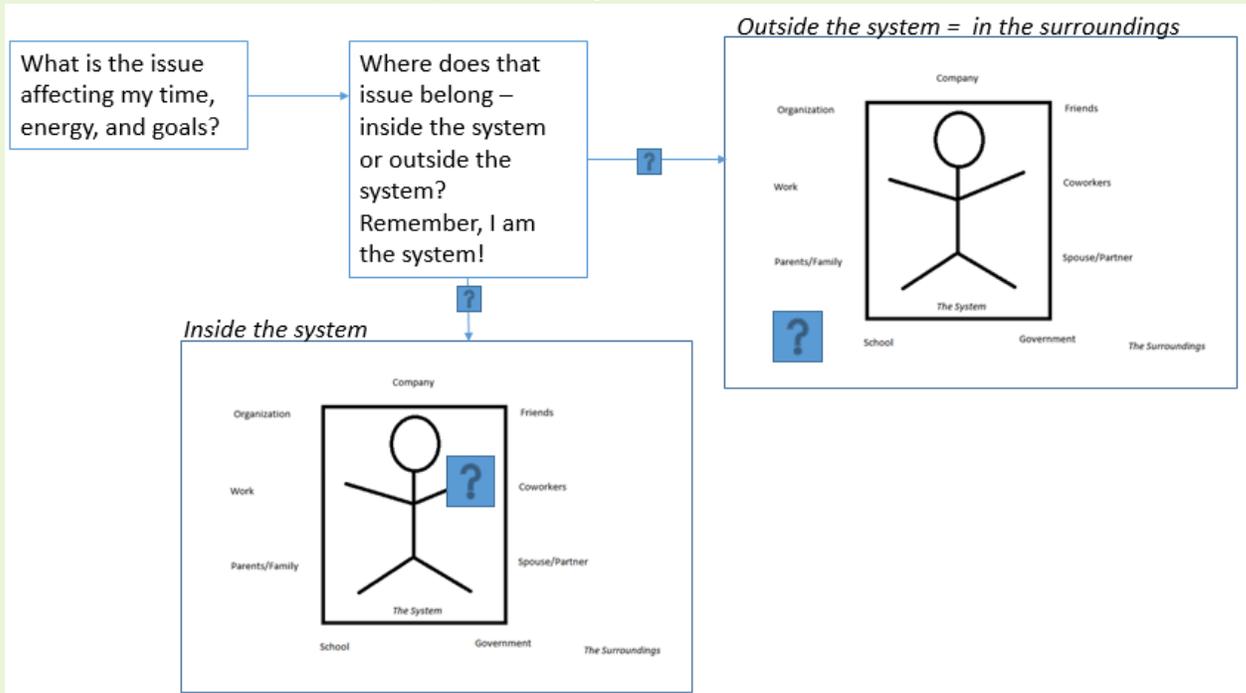
So, this is what I mean by “drawing the box” and “identifying the location of the issue.”

In a way, I am relaying very simple engineering principles to life!

The original version of this free book consisted primarily of a workbook – some flow charts to help guide you through an example issue if you are facing a problem. Now that you have the foundation, take a look at these charts as we close the first chapter.

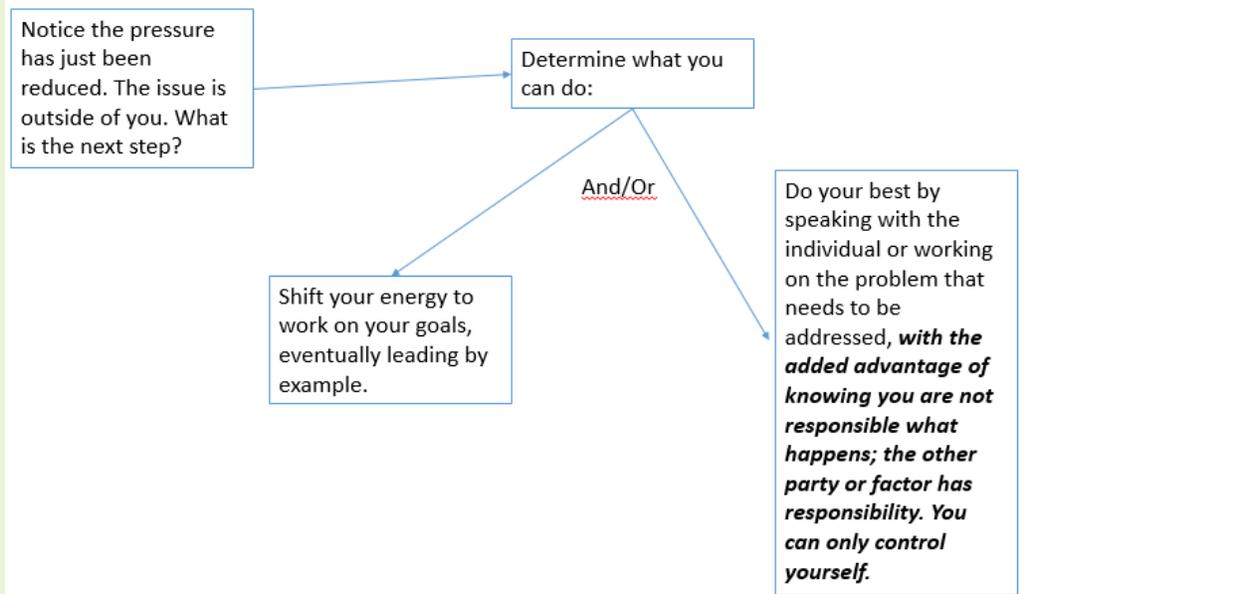
The charts can guide you when you are trying to get through a difficult situation:

# 1. How to draw the box/identify the location of an issue.



# 2. The process to follow if the answer is outside of our box.

## If the Answer is Outside the System (In the Surroundings)



### 3. The process to follow if the issue is within our area of control.

## If the Answer is Inside the System

Many times this is not the case. This **is** the case if you identified something you need to improve, such as a skill or a behavioral issue within yourself.

Determine what you can do to improve the situation:

And/Or

Seek professional help/support from an appropriate individual.

Make a plan on how you will work on improving in that particular area – such as spending an extra 30 minutes daily on learning something new, etc.

### 4. A typical example of having issues with your manager.

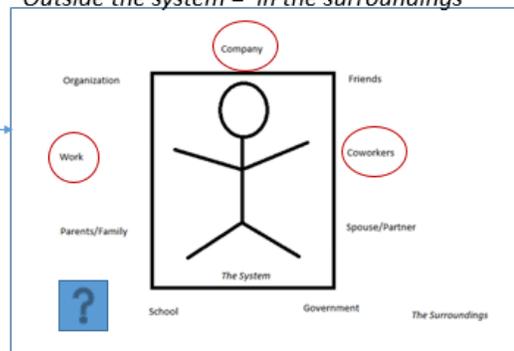
## Example: I am unhappy with my manager

What is the issue affecting my time, energy, and goals?

Problems with my manager

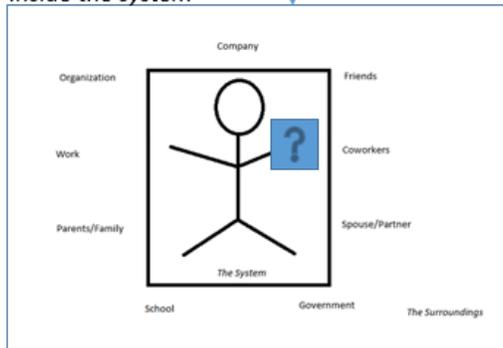
Where does that issue belong – inside the system or outside the system? Remember, I am the system!

*Outside the system = in the surroundings*



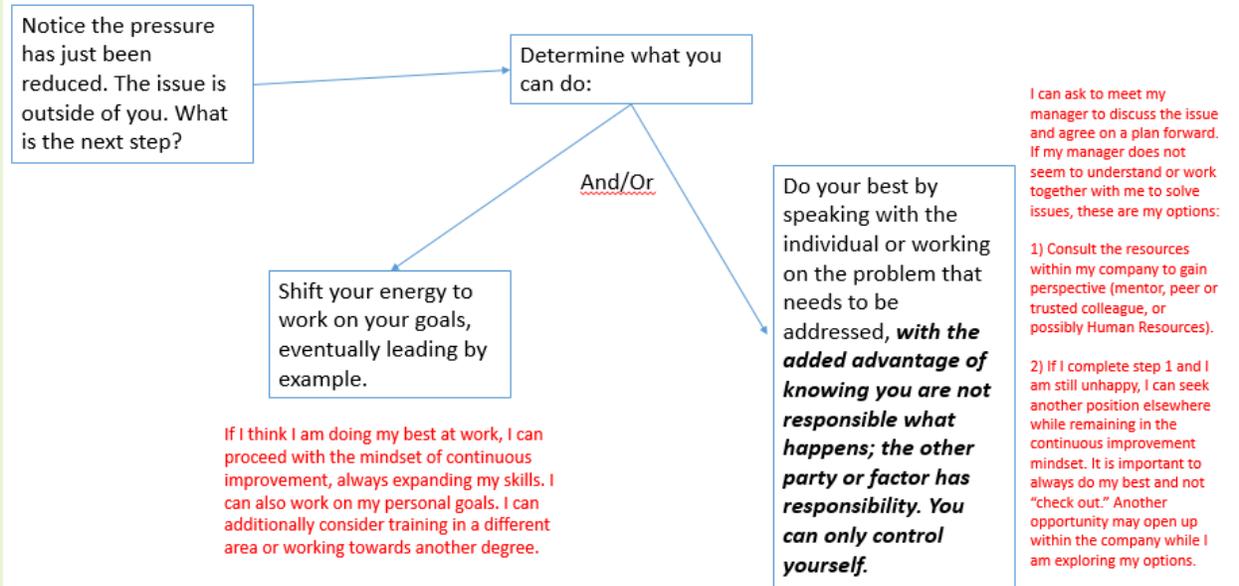
My manager is outside of my system

*Inside the system*



## 5. The resulting flow chart of issues with our manager.

### If the Answer is Outside the System (In the Surroundings)



## 2. Engineer What is Inside the Box and Invest Your Time

Now that you understand the foundation of how to draw the box and also how to identify the location of the issues in your life, it's time to think further about what it means to "think inside the box."

Since we are defining ourselves as a system to optimize, or engineer, it means that we want to do as engineers do - help a system operate more efficiently, have higher output/productivity, all while minimizing "cost" (energy-based or financially-based).

We are already minimizing the cost of energy/time, etc. by ensuring we do not let the surroundings (issues) creep into our area. This is actually a big step. Now we can build on that to consider something very important: we have to think about how we want to spend each minute of our day. Each minute is either helping our success/future or hurting it.

A good, quick rule of thumb is this: consider each minute as an investment. You are either completing something, which will in turn help your future, or you are learning/educating yourself, to make yourself better for the future. This is explored much more in-depth in my book if you would like more information.

### 3. Challenge Yourself

Now that you can draw the box, identify the location of issues, and are being mindful of how you spend your time, it's important to always ensure you challenge yourself every day.

This does not have to be a big challenge - in fact, sometimes the best way to build discipline incrementally is to tackle something small.

Just pick one thing every day that you really don't want to do, but that will only take ten minutes or less (i.e. make a phone call, schedule an appointment, throw out some old mail, etc.).

This sounds very simple, but taking one additional action will get you in the framework of "This is not so bad" and it will help you grow. You will consequently build up your willpower and ability to take on more and more over time. There are many resources that discuss the power of this concept (as well as my book, too!)

## Summary and Thanks

Thanks again for downloading this ebook! I hope I was able to help you – to give you some simple ideas that you can implement in your life to make your days easier!

If you would like more information on “optimizing yourself,” check out my blog (<http://optimizebooks.com>), my tweets ([@lisakardos](#)), Facebook page ([Optimize for Victory Page](#)), or my book [\*Optimize for Victory: A Simple Approach to Overcome Challenges and Achieve Your Dreams!\*](#)

I hope to serve you in the future with additional books. If you are on my mailing list, you will get a chance to download the next one for free!

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