

PRACTICAL PHILOSOPHY FOR COAS

Managing Stress and Uncertainty

Practical Philosophy for COA Staff

Working at a Council on Aging means meeting uncertainty every day. A new family arrives in crisis. A program needs reshaping with no warning. A long-time visitor doesn't show up, and you don't yet know why. The work asks for steady judgment in the middle of things you cannot fully control.

The Stoic philosophers, writing two thousand years ago, faced a similar problem. Epictetus, who had been enslaved before becoming one of Rome's most influential teachers, opened his small handbook with one of philosophy's most useful distinctions: some things are within our control, and some are not. Within our control are our judgments, our intentions, our responses. Outside it: most everything else. He wasn't suggesting indifference. He was suggesting where to put our energy.

When a day at the COA goes sideways, this distinction can be a quiet anchor. Not *what should have happened?* – but *what is mine to handle right now?* Not *why is this person being difficult?* – but *what response is mine to choose?* The work doesn't get easier. But it gets clearer.

Discussion Questions

1. Think of a recent difficult moment at work. What part of it was within your control, and what wasn't?
2. Does the Stoic distinction feel freeing, or does it feel like it lets the world off the hook too easily?
3. What is one situation you've been carrying that might not actually be yours to carry?

TRY THIS WEEK

At the start of the day, take a sticky note and draw two columns: **Mine** and **Not Mine**. When something stressful happens, take ten seconds to put it in a column. The point isn't to be perfect about it – just to practice the noticing. Many people find that the column itself does most of the work.

A contribution to the MCOA Aging Matters series

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