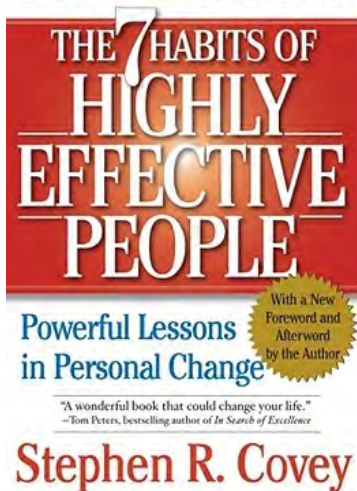


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The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People

Powerful Lessons in Personal Change

Stephen R. Covey

Reviewed by David Hanlon.

With the passing of Stephen Covey this year, it is timely to revisit his most popular book. It is also timely as this book was first published in 1990 and whilst there are very few people who haven't heard of the title, there are many today who have not read the book. That is one of those things – we read the latest and frequently miss the gems in some of the older books.

Perhaps one of the reasons for the success of *7 Habits* was its timing. I am of the opinion *7 Habits* hit the spot for many of the baby boomers who were looking for integrity, substance and meaning in their everyday workplace: something that could awaken the link between personal and work values. Covey's work, indirectly led to the rise of organizational values given much higher prominence and now seen commonly as part of strategic plans.

Who was Stephen Covey?

In 1996, Time magazine named Stephen Covey one of the 25 most influential Americans, and Forbes called *7 Habits* one of the top 10 business management books ever.

Covey was influenced by Peter Drucker, who wrote in 1967 that, "effectiveness...is a habit." Covey also drew inspiration from two centuries worth of American "success literature" that he read for his doctoral thesis. He discovered that, in the first 150 years or so of the republic, self-help books mostly emphasised character; it was only after the Second World War that they switched to touting superficial qualities such as appearance and style.

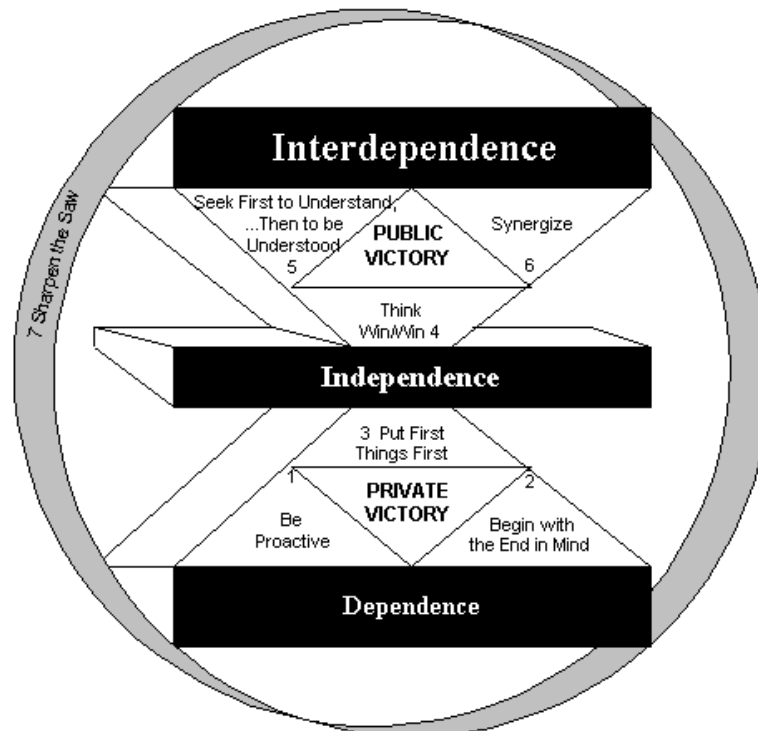
He was also guided by his Mormon faith. According to Clayton Christensen, the Kim B. Clark Professor of Business Administration at the Harvard Business School and a Mormon, the *7 Habits* are essentially a secular distillation of Mormon teaching "written for anyone regardless of which sort of God you believe in or whether you even believe in God".

As Schumpeter in the Economist put it, Covey "tried to rescue the notion of 'character' from both the simple-minded purveyors of self-help (who imply that you can change your character as easily as your underpants) and the social-service establishment (which ignores questions of character by blaming everything on 'the system')".

Human beings are not things needing to be motivated and controlled; they are four dimensional—body, mind, heart and spirit.

The 7 Habits

When asked about the *7 Habits*, Covey believed he was simply telling people what he thought they already knew: the efficacy of good behaviour. "All that people had to do was form habits out of their best instincts", calling his seven nuggets of knowledge natural laws, like gravity.



Independence or Self-Mastery

The first three habits are about moving from dependence to independence.

Habit 1. Be Proactive

The focus of this habit is our response. We are *Response-able* and have *Response-ability* because we have the ability to consciously choose how we respond to any situation.

Stimulus – response model

Covey provides a very powerful story to support the stimulus – response model. Viktor Frankl emphasised the point that we have the freedom to choose our response to whatever happens to us. Frankl is best known for his masterpiece, "*Man's Search for Meaning*". While in some of the worst concentration camps Frankl realised that we can always choose our response, no matter what happens to us. It was in these circumstances that Frankl expanded his concept of *liberty* versus *freedom*. He realised that his Nazi captors had more liberty, more options to choose from their environment, however he had more freedom, more internal power to choose how all going on around him was going to effect him. Application of this principle led to Frankl becoming an inspiration to all those around him.

If there are 5 books you read in your life, "*Man's Search for Meaning*" should one of them. It is a powerful book.

Influence versus concern

People, who do not consider their reactions, are reactive and often blame others or things outside of themselves for what happens. They don't take any responsibility. Proactive people take responsibility for their response, often looking for what they can learn from what happened.

To help develop proactivity Covey introduces the concept of the Circle of Concern and Circle of Influence. He says proactive people focus their time and energy in the Circle of Influence where they work on things they can do something about. This is a powerful metaphor and I use it often in organisations involved with change. It's a tool that helps people identify what's important and what they can do to positively influence their future rather than feeling like a pawn.

Habit 2. Begin with the End in Mind

We are reminded of Alice in Wonderland with this habit.

"Would you tell me, please, which way I ought to go from here?"
"That depends a good deal on where you want to get to," said the Cat.
"I don't much care where –" said Alice.
"Then it doesn't matter which way you go," said the Cat.
"– so long as I get somewhere," Alice added as an explanation.
"Oh, you're sure to do that," said the Cat, "if you only walk long enough."

Alice's Adventures in Wonderland

"Begin with the end in mind" is based on the principle that *all things are created twice*. There's a mental or first creation, and a physical or second creation to all things." Covey makes the point that everything is created twice, first in the mind and then in reality.

For example, Covey asks you to envision your funeral. Not to be morbid, rather to help you think about the words that you wish to be said about you. It is a tool to help you visualise what you value the most. To begin with the end simply means to start with your destination in mind. That gives a sense of where you are at present. One has to know where they are going to make sure that they are headed in the right direction.

Developing this concept further, Covey suggests developing a personal mission statement. After doing that, you should identify your centre of attention. Are you spouse centred, money centred, family centred, work centred, etc. Whatever dominates the core (family, money, work) will influence how you address your needs for security, guidance, wisdom and power.

Habit 3. Put First Things First

This is the last of the habits that deals with self-awareness and "Private Victory". If Habit 2 is the first, or mental creation, then Habit 3 is the second, the physical creation. As we've just seen it's easy to spend a lot of our time doing stuff that just is not that important to meeting your intentions set up in Habit 2. Covey recommends that you do first things first. Identify what is important in order to keep you heading towards your destination.

The famous time management quadrant is attributed to Covey.

	Urgent	Not Urgent
Important	I (MANAGE) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Crisis • Medical emergencies • Pressing problems • Deadline-driven projects • Last-minute preparations for scheduled activities 	II (FOCUS) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preparation/planning • Prevention • Values clarification • Exercise • Relationship-building • True recreation/relaxation
	Quadrant of Necessity	Quadrant of Quality & Personal Leadership
Not Important	III (AVOID) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interruptions, some calls • Some mail & reports • Some meetings • Many "pressing" matters • Many popular activities 	IV (AVOID) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trivia, busywork • Junk mail • Some phone messages/email • Time wasters • Escape activities • Viewing mindless TV shows
	Quadrant of Deception	Quadrant of Waste

Quadrant 1: Important and Urgent

Only crisis activities should be in here. If you have included budgets and board-papers here, you are probably not allowing yourself enough time to fully prepare. If you continue at this pace you could burn yourself out!

Quadrant 2: Important and Not Urgent

This is where you define your priorities. What's important in your life? What will keep you balanced? For example, you may know that good nutrition, sleep, recreation, and maintaining healthy social relationships are important but do you consciously make time for them in your daily or weekly routine? Managing your life and the lifestyle will help you manage your time.

Quadrant 3: Not Important and Urgent

While you may feel that activities, such as instant messaging need your attention right away, too much time spent on Quadrant 3 activities can seriously reduce valuable study time. This may leave you feeling pulled in too many directions at once.

Quadrant 4: Not Important and Not Urgent

If you're spending many hours on Quadrant 4 activities, you're either having a great deal of fun or spending a lot of time procrastinating! Remember, the objective is balance.

These are worth reviewing from time to time as we can all get caught in the trivia trap if not mindful of our purpose.

Perhaps the most useful of his planning tools is the “weekly worksheet”, which is in essence a time-management planner, however the section on Roles and Goals is great to keep focus on each of the multiple roles we play (father/mother, social club chair, new product manager, etc).

Interdependence

The next three habits are about interdependence (working with others)

Habit 4. Think Win-Win

Covey’s fourth habit – Think Win/Win – is foundational to achieving what Covey calls our *Public Victory*. He begins by defining the “Six Paradigms of Human Interaction”:

- Win/Win
- Win/Loose
- Lose/Win
- Lose/Lose
- Win
- Win/Win or No Deal

This habit is fundamentally setting the basis for negotiating agreements. It is a way of looking for a solution that benefits you and the other person or group. “Win/Win is a belief in the Third Alternative. It’s not your way or my way; it’s a *better* way, a higher way”.

Scenario 1: I win, You lose

The *win-lose scenario* seems to be the one most loved by many. Relationships between clients and vendors, managers and employees, and competing suppliers are designed as a competition, with each party investing in their personal outcome at the expense of another. Me winning means you losing. The leadership style of this approach is the authoritarian approach: “I get my way, you don’t get yours.”

Scenario 2: I lose, You win

In lose-win, one party continually feels the need to capitulate to the other. Similar to abusive relationships between individuals, both parties develop a common understanding of the power imbalance.

Covey suggests this is worse than Win/Loose as there are no standards. The dominant party feeds off the weaker party who constantly capitulates.

Scenario 3: I win

In an *I win* scenario, there is no concept of “you”. I achieve my outcomes without regard for the other party.

Scenario 4: I lose, You lose

We see the *lose-lose* scenario when everything falls apart. It is the philosophy of adversarial conflict and where one or both parties are so focused on the other party losing, that they are themselves prepared to lose.

Scenario 5: I win, You win

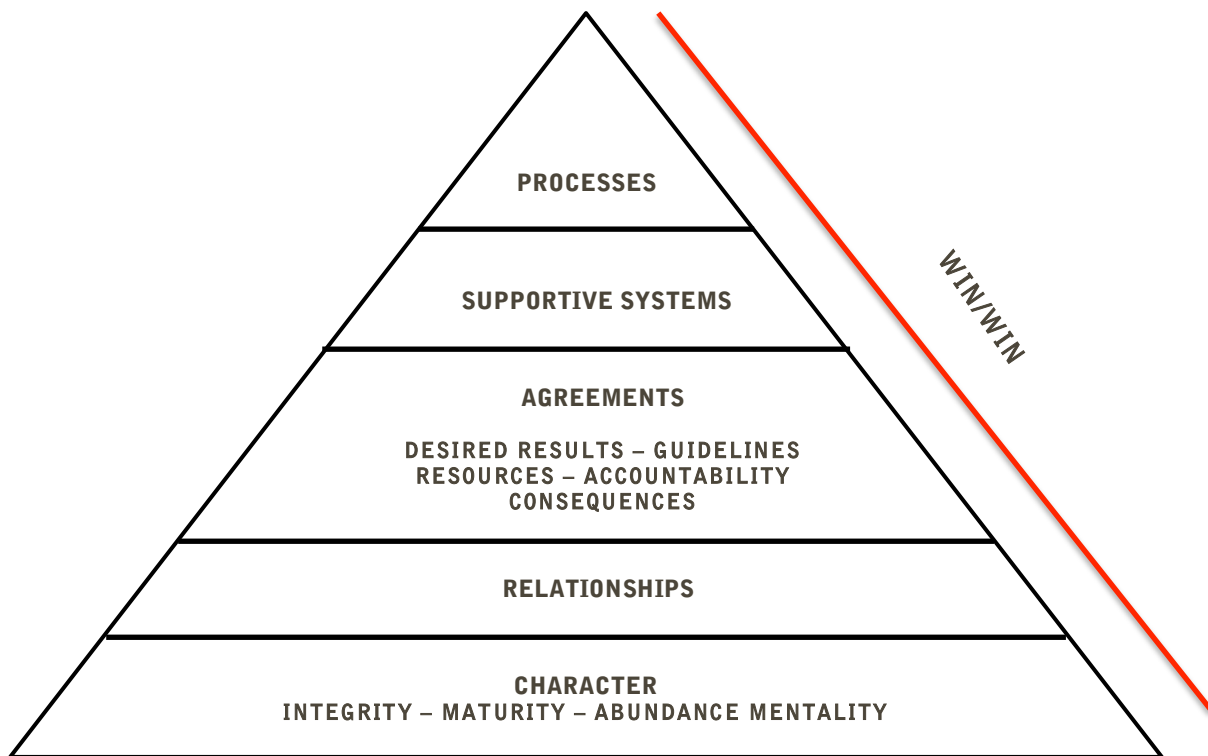
Based on issues identified above, you would think a *win-win* scenario would be the solution. We both work together to ensure each party has an acceptable outcome. Looking at this scenario in depth, however, reveals a hidden word in the proposition: the notion of "must".

Scenario 6: I win *and* you win *or* no deal

This leads us to the final option: the "*win-win-or-no-deal*" scenario. Either we both get an acceptable outcome, or the deal is off, and that's OK. Each party agrees that the project, contract, and even the relationship may terminate if the parameters are not acceptable.

Having this belief at the beginning of a business relationship is the most realistic and it is also very liberating. If the nature of the deal is not going to meet either party's objectives you are prepared to walk away.

The five dimensions for a win-win situation



In this review, I will only touch on the foundation – the key character aspects.

1. Integrity

Integrity removes your duplicity, allowing you to know without doubt what constitutes a win: one that is in alignment with your deepest values.

2. Maturity

With maturity comes emotional intelligence, allowing you to understand the relationship from the other's perspective. As Covey states, it is the balance between courage and consideration.

3. Abundance Mentality

Confidence in your ability will result in a core belief that there will always be enough of anything. Unfortunately, there is plenty of scarcity mentality out there: a large number of people see only one pie that has to be divided. Those with a scarcity mentality find it difficult to share recognition and credit, power or profit.

Habit 5. Seek First to Understand, Then to be Understood

This habit centres around the understanding of the other person - what they want, need and aspire to as well as what their motivations and mindset are.

Generally when we listen we don't understand at all. We may *think* we do, but we don't - as Covey points out. Usually, when we listen everything is "understood" within our own frame of reference. Therefore when people have a problem, or ask for advice, we see it from our point of view not theirs; we've failed to understand completely.

The fundamental element to understanding is empathy. Empathic listening isn't about agreeing with the other person, it's about understanding them emotionally, behaviourally, physically (i.e. body cues) and intellectually. Empathy is not sympathy. Sympathy is a form of agreement, a form of judgment and worse, people feed on sympathy and it keeps them dependent.

When the other parties know that you have sought to fully understand their motivations and where they're coming from, their "emotional bank account balance" with you increases.

As well as understanding, we too need to be understood which is the second half of Habit 5. As Covey puts it "Seeking to understand requires consideration; seeking to be understood requires courage." You need to base your desires around the other's frame of reference and have the conviction to get your points across in a way that's mutually beneficial to all parties.

Habit 6. Synergise

Covey says this is the habit of creative co-operation – the principle that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts, which implicitly lays down the challenge to see the good and potential in the other person's contribution.

To put it simply, synergy means, "two heads are better than one." Synergise is the habit of creative co-operation. It is teamwork, open-mindedness, and the adventure of finding new solutions to old problems. But it doesn't just happen on its own. It's a process, and through that process, people bring all their personal experience and expertise to the table. Together, they can produce far better results than they could individually. Synergy lets us discover jointly things we are much less likely to discover by ourselves. It is the idea that the whole is greater than the sum of the parts. One plus one equals three, or six, or sixty - you name it.

When people begin to interact together genuinely, and they're open to each other's influence, they begin to gain new insight. The capability of inventing new approaches is increased exponentially because of differences.

Synergy and Communication

The lowest level of communication coming out of low trust situations is characterised by defensiveness, protectiveness, and legalistic language, which covers all the bases and spells out qualifiers and escape clauses in the event things go sour.

The middle level of communication is respectful communication. It is the level at which most people communicate.

The highest level of communication is synergistic (win/win) communication.

Valuing the differences is the essence of synergy. If you are truly effective person then you have the humility and reverence to recognise your own perceptual limitations and realise the rich resources available through interaction with the hearts and minds of other people.

Self Renewal

The last habit relates to self-rejuvenation.

Habit 7. Sharpen the Saw

Covey draws on the four forms of energy in this last habit. Sharpen the Saw means preserving and enhancing the greatest asset you have: you. It means having a balanced program for self-renewal in the four areas of your life: physical, social/emotional, mental, and spiritual. Covey provides a few examples of such activities.

Physical	Well-being: beneficial eating, exercising, and resting
Social/Emotional	Heart: making social and meaningful connections with others
Mental	Mind: visualisation and learning
Spiritual	Purpose: spending time in nature, expanding spiritual self through meditation, music, art or service

The four forms of energy are well developed in “*The Power of Full Engagement*” by Jim Loehr and Tony Schwartz: a book that I highly recommend.

Spiritual Exercise

This is area, which is perhaps the most misunderstood. In the west, we have become spiritually blind. It is developing your **purpose** and direction in life that this habit refers to as Spiritual Exercise.

For Covey, it is the regular, review and preview of the things that are most important to you in life. These are the first things you define in habit 2.

Physical Exercise

Regular aerobic, physical exercise is essential for health, energy and a feeling of well-being. To practice this part of Habit 7 requires that you commit to at least three sessions of at least twenty minutes per week.

Mental Exercise

Ask yourself this question: What am I doing to sharpen my mind? Visualisation is also a key ingredient to Habit 2.

Social/Emotional Exercise

Is the practice to commit to approaching inter-personal relationships by making use of habits 4, 5 and 6.

Messages

Covey is the source of many wonderful quotes. Here are a few for consideration.

1. Most people do not listen with the intent to understand; they listen with the intent to reply.
2. The key is not to prioritise what's on your schedule, but to schedule your priorities.
3. When the trust account is high, communication is easy, instant, and effective.
4. Live out of your imagination, not your history.
5. We see the world, not as it is, but as we are—or, as we are conditioned to see it.
6. Most of us spend too much time on what is urgent and not enough time on what is important.
7. I am not a product of my circumstances. I am a product of my decisions.
8. You have to decide what your highest priorities are and have the courage—pleasantly, smilingly, non-apologetically, to say “no” to other things. And the way you do that is by having a bigger “yes” burning inside. The enemy of the “best” is often the “good.”
9. I teach people how to treat me by what I will allow.
10. Sow a thought, reap an action; sow an action, reap a habit; sow a habit, reap a character; sow a character, reap a destiny.

Summary

As seen in this short summary, *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People* ties together the seemingly diverse areas of human relationships, awareness and business issues. *The 7 Habits* is not a one-day wonder self-help book, full of promises. However, if the many commonsense principles and practices outlined in the book are acted on, you will improve your effectiveness - professionally and personally.

Moving along the upward spiral requires us to continuously learn, commit and do on higher planes. This is essential to keep progressing. At the end of each habit, there are application suggestions or exercises that help you become a more effective person.

While the focus is mostly business and work-related, Covey touches on how to be more effective in every area of life from marriage to contract negotiations. He brings a fresh perspective to improving our relationships with ourselves and everyone else in our lives. One thing I especially liked was how he carefully explains that there are not necessarily specific steps or methods to building the Habits, but rather conveys the necessity of a change in underlying attitudes that is required for significant progress in our lives.

“The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People” is available in good bookstores and in audible form.



David Hanlon is the founder of the Right Mind International Pty Ltd. He conducts his consulting and training activities globally. His leadership program, Conversations for Growth®, was a 2010 finalist in the Australian Institute of Training and Development's Australian Learning Innovation award.

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