

The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People by Stephen R Covey

Habit 1 – Be Pro-active.

Covey distinguishes between pro-active people - people who focus their efforts on things which they can do something about – and reactive people, who blame, accuse, behave like victims, pick on other people's weaknesses, and complain about external factors over which they have no control (for example, the weather).

Pro-active people are responsible for their own lives. Covey breaks down the work responsibility into two parts: response (especially choosing a response) and ability. Pro-active people recognise their responsibility to make things happen. Those who allow their feelings to control their actions have abdicated responsibility and empowered their feelings. When pro-active people make a mistake, they not only recognise it as such and acknowledge it, they also correct it if possible and, most importantly, learn from it.

Habit 2 – Begin with the end in mind.

Leadership is about effectiveness – the vision of what is to be accomplished. It calls for direction (in every sense of the word), purpose, meaning, and sensitivity. Management, on the other hand, is about efficiency – how best to accomplish the vision. It depends on control, guidance, and rules.

To identify the end, and to formulate one's route or strategy to achieving that end, Covey maintains the need for a 'principle-centred' basis to all aspects of life. Most people adopt something as the basis (or pivotal point) of their life – spouse, family, money, church, pleasure, friends (and, in a perverse way, enemies), sport, etc. Of course all of these have some influence over the life of every individual. However, only by clearly establishing one's own principles, in the form of a personal mission, does one have a solid foundation.

Habit 3 – Put first things first

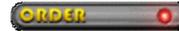
Covey's first major work, First Things First, sets out his views on time management. It argues that the important thing is not managing time, but managing oneself, focusing on results rather than on methods when prioritising within each compartment of work & life. He breaks down life's activities into four quadrants:

Quadrant I – Urgent & important – for example, crises, deadlines, unexpected opportunities.

Quadrant II – Not urgent, but important – for example, planning recreation, relationship-building, doing, learning.

Quadrant III – Urgent but not important – for example, interruptions, meetings.

Quadrant IV – Not urgent & not important – for example, trivia, time wasters, gossip, excessive TV watching.



The Time Management Matrix

	Urgent	Not Urgent
Important	<p>Quadrant I Quadrant of Reaction</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Crises – irate client • Pressing problems – undergo heart surgery • Deadline driven projects, meetings, preparations • Where we manage, produce, bring our judgment to bear to respond to the needs that press upon us • Quadrant I acts on us 	<p>Quadrant II Quadrant of Quality:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Long range planning • Anticipate & prevent problems • Broaden our skills through reading & continuous professional development • Envision how we are going to help a struggling son or daughter • Prepare for important meetings • Invest in relationship through deep, honest listening • We act on Quadrant II – this is a quadrant of personal leadership
Not Important	<p>Quadrant III Quadrant of Deception:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The noise of urgency creates the illusion of importance • The activities (if important at all) are only important to someone else. • Interruptions • Some calls, mail, reports • Some meetings • Many proximate, pressing matters • Popular activities 	<p>Quadrant IV Quadrant of Waste:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We escape to here from Quadrant I & III for survival – but this is a slow decline into the abyss. • Trivia, busy work • Unnecessary/unprepared meetings • Some email, some phone calls • Time wasters • Watching mindless TV shows • Interruptions that consume the entire day – you're busy all day long & have accomplished nothing • A quadrant of deterioration.

Essentially all activity of effective people should focus on the second quadrant, apart from genuinely unpredictable Quadrant I events. However, effective planning & doing in Quadrant II should minimise the number of occasions on which crises occur.

The outcomes of a Quadrant II focus include, vision, perspective, balance, discipline, & control. On the other hand, the results of placing one's main focus on the other quadrants are:

Quadrant I – stress, burn-out inability to manage time (& thus loss of control of one's own life).

Quadrant III – short termism, loss of control, shallowness, feelings of being a victim of circumstances.

Quadrant IV – irresponsibility, dependency, unsuitability for employment.

Habit 3 is therefore about managing oneself effectively, by prioritising according to the principles adopted in Habit 2. This approach transcends the office diary or day-planner, embracing all roles in life – as manager, mentor, administrator, strategist, and also as parent, spouse, member of social groups, and as an individual with needs and aspirations.

Habits 1-3 are grouped under the banner of 'Private Victory', as they are the basic paradigms of interdependence.

Habit 4 – Think win/win

Interdependence occurs when there is co-operation, not competition, in the workplace (or the home). Covey holds that competition belongs in the marketplace.

Covey points out that, from childhood, many people are conditioned to a win/lose mentality by school examinations, by parental approval being rationed to 'success', by external comparisons and league tables. This results in a 'Scarcity Mentality', a belief that there is only a finite cake to be shared: a 'Scarcity Mentality' is evident in people who have difficulty in sharing recognition or credit, power or profit. It restricts their ability to celebrate other people's success, and even brings about a perverse satisfaction at others' misfortune.

By contrast Covey advocates an 'Abundance Mentality' that:

- Recognises unlimited possibilities for positive growth & development
- Celebrates success, recognising that one person's success is not achieved at the expense, or to the exclusion, of others.
- Understands and seeks a win/win solution.

Covey argues that to be true to your ideals, it is sometimes necessary to walk away, if the other party is interested only in a win/lose outcome. Covey describes this as 'win/win or no deal.'

Habit 5 – Seek first to understand, then to be understood.

'I just can't understand my son...he won't listen to me/'. The absurdity of this statement is highlighted by Covey in emphasising the importance of listening in order to understand. Clearly, the parent needs to stop & listen to the son if he or she truly wants to understand him.

However, most people want to make their point first, or are so busy looking for their opportunity to butt into the conversation that they fail to hear & understand the other party. Covey defines the different levels of listening as:

- Hearing but ignoring
- Pretending to listen ('Yes', 'Oh', 'I see...')
- Selective listening (choosing to hear only what we want to hear)
- Attentive listening, without evaluation (eg, taking notes at a lecture)
- Empathic listening (with intent to understand the other party)

True empathic listening requires a great deal of personal security, as one is vulnerable to being influenced, to having one's opinions changed. The more deeply you understand other people,' Covey says, 'the more you appreciate them, the more reverent you feel about them.'

Likewise, when you feel that someone is genuinely seeking to understand your point of view, you recognise & share their openness & willingness to negotiate & to reach a win/win situation.

Habit 6 – Synergise

The essence of synergy is where two parties, each with a different agenda, value each other's differences. Everything in nature is synergistic, with every creature and plant being interdependent with others.

We also have personal effectiveness where there is synergy at an individual level – where both sides of the brain are working in tandem on a problem or situation: the intuitive, creative, visual right side & the analytical, logical, verbal left side combining to achieve the optimum outcome. Synergy is lacking in insecure people: they either clone others, or else try to stereotype them. Of such insecurity is born prejudice – racism, bigotry, nationalism, & any other form of prejudging others.

Habit 7 – Sharpen the Saw

The seventh & final habit relates to renewal. Just as a motor car or any other sophisticated tool needs regular care & maintenance, so too do the human body & mind.

Covey uses the metaphor of a woodcutter who is labouring painfully to say down a tree. The saw is obviously in need of sharpening, but when asked why he doesn't stop & sharpen the saw, the woodcutter replies, 'I can't stop – I'm too busy sawing down this tree.'

The warning is quite clear. Everyone can become so engrossed in the task at hand that the basic tools are neglected:

- The physical self – which requires exercise, a sensible & balanced diet, & management of stress.
- The social/emotional self – which connects with others through service, empathy, & synergy, & which is the source of intrinsic security.
- The spiritual self – which through meditation, reflection, prayer, and study helps to clarify & refine our own values & strengths, & our commitment to them.
- The mental self-building on to our formal education through reading, visualising, planning, writing, & maintaining a coherent programme of continuing personal development.

Types of Questioning

Type	Description	Examples
Evaluating	Judging, agreeing & disagreeing	"I know how you feel."
Advising	Telling the person what to do	"Have you tried this?"
Probing	Asking questions to get new information	"Why are you doing this/acting that way?"
Interpreting	Explaining motives & behaviours	"You're just being selfish, immature."
Empathic listening (We need to be here)	Understanding the other's person's position, gaining the perspective from his/her viewpoint (emotionally, mentally, etc)	"Let me see if I can understand things from your point of view by restating your concerns", "It must be hard for you."