

The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People: Powerful Lessons in Personal Change

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Habits are behaviors that people learn over time. Behaviors are repeated until the individual reaches a point where the behaviors feel as if they are second nature. Habits can make or break the success of a person. Both good habits and bad habits are learned and can be changed, improved upon, or eliminated. Awareness of habits, both good and bad, creates an environment within the individual in which one has recognized and is able to make changes in order to achieve desired results. Stephen R. Covey's book "The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People" describes habits that can improve success in both the personal and professional aspects of one's life. The seven habits, as listed in the table of contents are: (1) be proactive, (2) begin with the end in mind, (3) put first things first, (4) think win/win, (5) seek first to understand, then to be understood, (6) synergize, and (7) sharpen the saw (Covey, 2013, *xxviii-xxx*).

Habit one is "Be proactive." Stephen Covey (2013), states that proactivity "means more than merely taking initiative. It means that as human beings, we are responsible for our own lives... We have the initiative and responsibility to make things happen" (pg. 78). Proactive people are able to take responsibility for their actions and not let their actions be a result of feelings. People who take action based on feelings are the opposite of proactive; they are reactive. Proactive people are able to make value-based decisions in response to stimuli, take initiative and action, and maintain commitments. People who are proactive have a different mindset in that they understand that beliefs, attitudes, and language can affect themselves and the people around them. Positive proactive statements include, "I will; I choose; I can create an effective presentation; and Let's look at our alternatives" (Covey, 2013, pg. 86). On the other hand, reactive statements include, "If only; I can't; They won't allow that; and There's nothing I can do" (Covey, 2013, pg. 86). As shown in the statements above, proactive people focus on

taking responsibility and working to expand their circle of influence through making value based decisions in areas of which they have control. People who are reactive tend to feel like they have no control or influence and also do not accept responsibility. Problems are not their problems and they are the victims of their feelings and external influences.

Habit two is “Begin with the end in mind.” Habit two is about setting goals. A part of setting goals is creating visions and mission statements. Covey (2013) relates the principle that “...all things are created twice. There’s a mental or first creation, and a physical or second creation, to all things” (pg. 106). Having a mental image, picture, or idea guides the creation of all things. Mission statements are based on visions, values, and principles and Covey (2013) suggests creating mission statements that work to guide the directions and actions of individuals, families, and organizations. Further, Covey (2013) suggests breaking down mission statements into “roles and goals” by defining the various roles a person plays in one’s life (personal and professional) and determining long-term goals that the individual wants to accomplish in the different roles (pgs. 143-145). In this way, an individual is able identify expectations for themselves based on their visions, values, and principles.

Habit three is “Put first things first.” Where habit two involves the leadership and visionary component of good leadership, habit three describes the action component of good leadership. Covey (2013) writes, “Effective management is putting first things first. While leadership decides what ‘first things’ are, it is management that puts them first, day-by-day, moment-by-moment. Management is discipline, carrying it out...Organize and execute around priorities” (pg. 157-158). An excellent strategy that Covey (2013) suggests is the Time Management Matrix (see appendix A). The matrix is table made up for four quadrants. Across the top of the table are the terms, “urgent” and “not urgent.” Along one side of the table are the

terms “important” and “not important.” Thus creating four quadrants: (1) urgent and important, (2) not urgent and important, (3) urgent and not important, and (4) not urgent and not important (Covey, 2013, pg. 160). Covey (2013) asserts that people who live most of their lives (professional or personal) in quadrants one and three are basically responding to crisis situations. The situations may or may not be important, but they are urgent! Covey (2013) also states that for those people who place a heavy focus on quadrant one eventually feel like problems become bigger and more frequent to a point where it feels like “the pounding surf” (pg. 160). Covey (2013) suggests spending more time and focus on quadrant two activities such as prevention and building relationships in order to manage more effectively. Quadrant two is defined as important but not urgent, so activities that fall into this quadrant can be pushed to the wayside since they are not “urgent.” Engaging in quadrant two activities requires the skills of habits one and two, initiative and goals. Without quadrant two activities such as prevention, long-range planning, preparation, and building relationships, issues and problems that could have been dealt with in quadrant two suddenly become quadrant one and three issues and require immediate attention. Finally, quadrant four contains activities that are both “not important” and “not urgent.” These activities are generally pleasant or time-wasters. People who spend most of their time on quadrant four activities are basically not effective.

Habit four is “Think win/win.” Covey (2013) states that “Win/win is not a technique; it’s a total philosophy of human interaction... [it] is a frame of mind and heart that constantly seeks mutual benefit in all human interactions” (pg. 217). Think win/win is about finding creative solutions to issues that matter. Many times in deals or relationships, it seems like there has to be one winner and one loser or some kind of compromise. The idea of think win/win is there are other answers to problems where both parties can come to a mutual agreement and feel satisfied.

Covey (2013) illustrates the Five Dimensions of Win/Win in a diagram which includes character, relationships, agreements, supportive systems, and processes (see appendix B). Covey (2013) proposes that a win/win mentality begins with character and the three essential character traits are integrity, maturity, and an abundance mentality. A person cannot effectively go into a “deal” without possessing the above three character traits. While all three are important, having an abundance mentality allows a person to realize that there is plenty of “stuff” to go around. When one is approaching an agreement from a mentality of scarcity, there will surely be at least one loser in the situation.

Next, from good character comes the sincere building and maintaining of win/win relationships. Creating relationships where all parties trust each other and cooperatively work toward a mutual benefit is ideal in creating win/win situations. Building and maintaining trust in relationships is essential thus leading to agreements that can be mutually satisfying.

Underlying the dimensions of character, relationships, and agreements are the dimensions of supportive systems and processes. It is important to cultivate a system which favors and supports a win/win mentality. There are no systems in which the integrity of the system can be maintained if it is being undermined because of lack of support and rewarding behaviors which are counter to the expected behaviors of the system. In addition, for a system to work properly, processes and expectations need to be clearly lined out so that participants are able to understand how the system works and what part they play in the system. Covey (2013) suggests a four-step process when cultivating win/win solutions: “First, see the problem from the other point of view...Second, identify the key issues and concerns (not positions) involved. Third, determine what results would constitute a fully acceptable solution. And fourth, identify possible new options to achieve those results” (pg. 245).

Habit five is “Seek first to understand, then to be understood.” Habit five is about effective communication. Covey (2013) asserts that in our daily lives we have a tendency to rush in and fix things in the name of efficiency. He encourages emphatic listening in order to truly understand a person and a situation so that one can gain a clearer picture about how to move forward regarding any particular issue. Understanding and valuing differences, needs, problems, and perceptions can have a huge impact on negotiations.

Habit six is “Synergize.” Habit six is about creative cooperation, where one plus one can equal three or more; where the whole is truly greater than the sum of its parts. Habit six is an extension of habit five, “think win/win,” in that sometimes mutual cooperation leads to ideas, projects, or partnerships that end up being bigger and better than the individual parties. Building and maintaining relationships and trust foster an environment ideal for cooperation which in turn leads to opportunities for synergistic collaboration. People can work interdependently rather than independently, sharing knowledge and ideas, and producing results greater than if an individual were working alone.

Habit seven is “sharpen the saw.” Habit seven is self-renewal. Covey (2013) defines the four dimensions of renewal as physical, mental, spiritual, and social/emotional (pg. 300). The physical dimension involves caring for one’s physical body. Covey (2013) relates maintaining the physical body to the time management matrix stating, “Exercise is one of those Quadrant II, high-leverage activities that most of us don’t do consistently because it isn’t urgent. And because we don’t do it, sooner or later we find ourselves in Quadrant I, dealing with health problems and crises that come as a natural result of our neglect” (pg. 301). “Sharpening the saw” in relation to the mental dimension involves studying, reading, expanding the mind, and writing. Covey (2013) encourages writing as a way of communicating and understanding on a

deeper level because the writer is more involved with the material rather than on a superficial level. Renewing one's spiritual dimension applies to a person's core values and beliefs. Covey (2013) suggests reading, meditation, listening to music, and nature walks; activities in which a person can quietly and contemplatively think and feel a sense of inner peace. The final dimension of social/emotional is renewed when an individual practices habits four, five, and six (Covey, 2013). Building and maintaining relationships in multiple settings is a good practice for building and maintaining oneself.

In conclusion, the seven habits that Covey (2013) lays out are interesting in that they build on each other and they themselves are interdependent. Covey (2013) speaks highly of building interdependent relationships and organizations and it's interesting to see that the seven habits are also interdependent. All in all, the book creates a deep awareness of habits that can be integrated into one's live in order to improve themselves and their relationships. Even though the book was written twenty-five years ago, the information is still very relevant today. The seven habits are applicable not only to the professional setting but could also be very beneficial in the personal setting and in life in general.

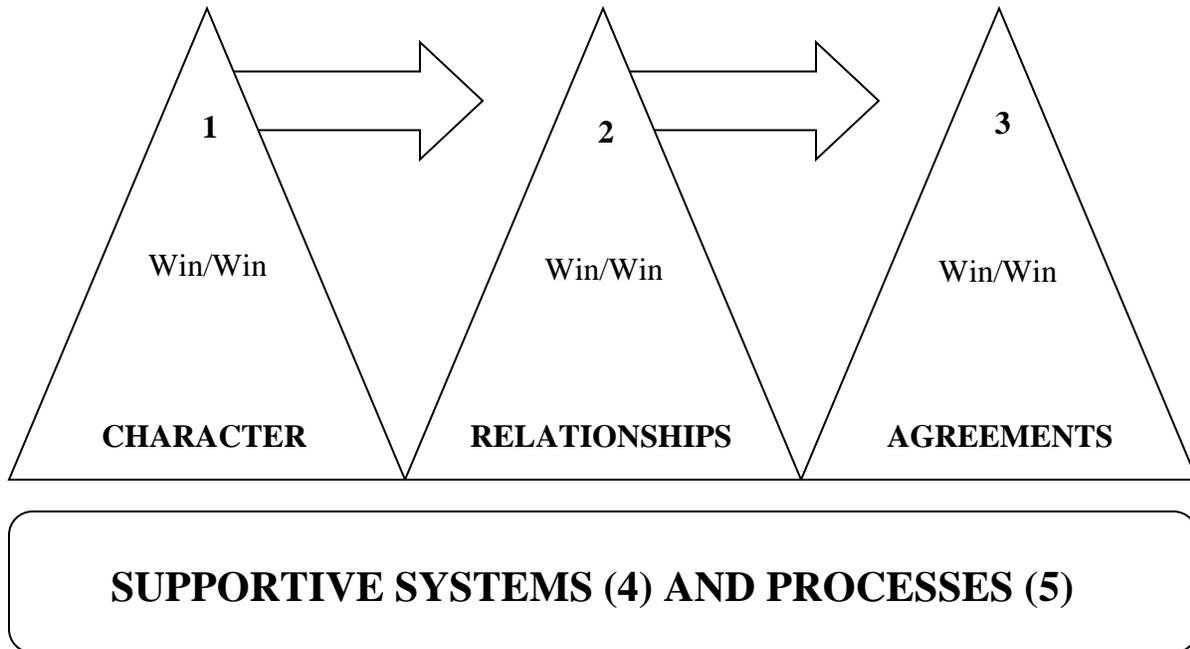
Appendix A

Time Management Matrix		
	Urgent	Not Urgent
Important	<p>I</p> <p>ACTIVITIES: Crises Pressing problems Deadline-driven projects</p>	<p>II</p> <p>ACTIVITIES: Prevention, PC (production capability) activities Relationship building Recognizing new opportunities Planning, recreation</p>
Not Important	<p>III</p> <p>ACTIVITIES: Interruptions, some calls Some mail, some reports Some meetings Proximate, pressing matters Popular activities</p>	<p>IV</p> <p>ACTIVITIES: Trivia, busywork Some mail Some phone calls Time wasters Pleasant activities</p>

(Covey, 2013, pg. 160)

Appendix B

Five Dimensions of Win/Win



(Covey, 2013, pg. 227)

References

Covey, S.R. (2013). Marzano, R.J. (2007). *The seven habits of highly effective people: Powerful lessons in personal change* (25th anniversary edition). New York, NY: Simon and Schuster