STEVEN COVEY - 7 HABITS OF HIGHLY EFFECTIVE PEOPLE

HABIT 1: BE PROACTIVE

THE HABIT OF PERSONAL VISION

Be Proactive means that as human beings we are responsible for own lives. Our basic nature is to act and not be acted upon. It’s instructive to break the work responsibility into two parts - response-ability, the ability to choose your response.

Highly proactive people recognize that responsibility. They do not blame circumstances, conditions, or conditioning for their behaviour. Their behaviour is a product of their own conscious choices, based on values, rather than a product of their conditions, based on feelings.

The opposite of proactive is reactive. The spirit of reactive people is the transfer of responsibility. Their language absolves them of responsibility.

“That’s me. That’s just the way I am.” I am determined. There’s nothing I can do about it.

“He makes me so mad! I’m not responsible. My emotional life is governed by something outside of my control.

Many behavioural scientists have built reactive, deterministic, stimulus-response models of human behaviour. The basic idea is that we are conditioned to respond in a particular way to a particular stimulus. In contrast, the proactive model states that between stimulus and response lies our freedom to choose our response.

As human beings, we have four unique human endowments that distinguish us from the animal world. These endowments reside in that space between stimulus and response.

• **Self-awareness** is our capacity to take a look at ourselves and examine our own thinking, our motives, our habits, and our paradigms.

• **Conscience** serves as our internal guidance system, which allows us to sense when we act or even contemplate acting in a way that’s contrary to principle.

• **Creative Imagination** is our ability to create in our minds beyond our present reality.

• **Independent Will** is our capacity to act, free of all other influences.
HABIT 2: BEGIN WITH THE END IN MIND

THE HABIT OF PERSONAL LEADERSHIP

Begin with the End in Mind means to begin each day or task with a clear understanding of your desired direction and destination. By keeping that end in mind you can make certain that whatever you do on any particular day does not violate the criteria you have defined as supremely important, and that each day of your life contributes in a meaningful way to the vision you have of your life as a whole.

It’s incredibly easy to get caught up in an activity trap, in the “business” of life, to work harder and harder at climbing the ladder of success only to discover, upon reaching the top rung, that the ladder is leaning up against the wrong wall. It is possible to be busy, very busy, without being very effective. People often find themselves achieving victories that are empty - successes that have come at the expense of things they suddenly realise were far more valuable to them. If the ladder is not leaning against the right wall, every step we take just gets us to the wrong place faster.

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. The second creation follows from the first, just as a building follows from a blueprint. In our personal lives, if we do not develop our own self-awareness and become responsible for first creations, we empower other people and circumstances to shape our lives by default.

Habit 2 is based on imagination - the ability to envision, to see the potential, to create with our minds what we cannot at present see with our eyes; and conscience - the ability to detect our own uniqueness and the personal, moral, and ethical guidelines within which we can most happily fulfill it.

The most effective way we know to begin with the end in mind is to develop a personal mission statement, philosophy, or creed. It focuses on what you want to be (character) and do (contributions and achievements).
HABIT 3: PUT FIRST THINGS FIRST

THE HABIT OF PERSONAL MANAGEMENT

What are first things? First things are those things that you, personally, find most worth doing. They move you in the right direction and help you achieve the purpose expressed in your mission statement.

Put First Things First involves organizing and managing time and events according to the personal priorities established in Habit 2. Habit 2 is the first or mental creation. Habit 3, then, is the second or physical creation.

Basically, we spend our time in one of four ways, as illustrated in the Time Management Matrix. This matrix defines activities as “urgent” or “not urgent”, and “important” or “not important”. With careful analysis, most people discover that they spend far too much time responding to the urgent crises of Quadrants I and III, escaping occasionally for survival to the not urgent, unimportant time wasters of Quadrant IV. Most time management tools focus on prioritizing and accomplishing Quadrants I and III “urgent” activities. But research indicates that truly effective people focus on Quadrant II.

The ideal to work toward is eliminating time spent in Quadrants III and IV, and increasing time spent in Quadrant II. As you invest more time on the planning, prevention, and relationship-building activities of Quadrant II, you’ll find that you spend far less time picking up the broken pieces in Quadrant I or reacting to the urgent demands of others in Quadrant III. If you’re struggling to find time to invest in Quadrant II, Quadrant III is the primary place to get it.

Most of the activities essential to the development of the Seven Habits - creating a personal mission statement, identifying long-range goals, nurturing relationships, and obtaining regular physical, spiritual, mental, and social/emotional renewal - are all Quadrant II activities. They are “important” - vitally important - but because they aren’t “urgent”, they often don’t get done. Only by saying no to the unimportant can we say yes to the important (Quadrant II).
HABIT 4: THINK WIN-WIN

THE HABIT OF INTERPERSONAL LEADERSHIP

In relationships and businesses, effectiveness is largely achieved through the cooperative efforts of two or more people. Marriages and other partnerships are interdependent realities, and yet people often approach these relationships with an independent mentality, which is like trying to play golf with a tennis racket - the tool isn’t suited to the sport.

Most of us learn to base our self-worth on comparisons and competition. We think about succeeding in terms of someone else failing. That is, if I win, you lose. Or if you win, I lose. Life is a zero-sum game. There is only so much pie, and if you get a big piece, there is less for me. People with this type of Scarcity Mentality find it difficult to share recognition and power, and to be happy for the successes of others, especially those closest to them.

Win-win, on the other hand, is based on the paradigm that there is plenty for everybody, that one person’s success is not achieved at the expense or exclusion of the success of others. Win-win sees life as a cooperative, not a competitive, arena. Win-win is a frame of mind and heart that constantly seeks mutual benefit in all human interactions. Win-win means that agreements or solutions are mutually beneficial and satisfying. Character is the foundation of win-win.

A Win-Win Agreement is an effective tool for establishing the win-win foundations necessary for long-term effectiveness, and may be created between employers and employees, between teams, between companies and suppliers, or between any two or more people who need to interact to accomplish desired results. In a Win-Win Agreement, the following five elements are made explicit.

- **Desired Results** (not methods) identify what is to be done and when.

- **Guidelines** specify the parameters (principles, policies, etc) within which results are to be accomplished.

- **Resources** identify the human, financial, technical, or organizational support available to help accomplish the results.

- **Accountability** sets up the standards of performance and the time of evaluation.

- **Consequences** specify - good and bad, natural and logical - what does and what will happen as a result of achieving or not achieving desired results.
HABIT 5: SEEK FIRST TO UNDERSTAND, THEN TO BE UNDERSTOOD

THE HABIT OF COMMUNICATION

Communication is the most important skill in life. We spend most of our waking hours communicating. But consider this: You’ve spent years learning how to read and write. Years learning how to speak. But what about listening? What training or education have you had that enables you to listen so that you really, deeply understand another human being from that individual’s own frame of reference?

Seek first to understand, or Diagnose Before You Prescribe, is a correct principle manifest in many areas of life. A wise doctor will diagnose before writing a prescription. A good engineer will understand the forces, the stresses at work, before designing the bridge. An effective salesperson first seeks to understand the needs of the customer before seeking to be understood. Until people feel properly diagnosed they will not be open to prescriptions.

We typically seek first to be understood. Most people do not listen with the intent to understand; they listen with the intent to reply. They’re either speaking or preparing to speak. They’re filtering everything through their own paradigms, reading their autobiography into other people’s lives, listening within their own frame of reference.

“Oh, I know exactly how you feel.”
“I went through the very same thing. Let me tell you about my experience.”

They’re constantly projecting their own home movies onto other peoples’ behavior.

In contrast, Empathic Listening gets inside another person’s frame of reference. You look out through it, you see the world the way he or she sees it, you understand how he or she feels. This does not mean that you agree necessarily, simply that you understand his or her point of view.

Empathic Listening is, in and of itself, a tremendous deposit in the Emotional Bank Account of another. Next to physical survival, the greatest need of a human being is psychological survival, to be affirmed, to be appreciated, to be understood. When you listen with empathy to another person, you give that person psychological air.

Empathic Listening is also risky. It takes a great deal of security to go into a deep listening experience because you open yourself up to be influenced. You become vulnerable. It’s a paradox, in a sense, because in order to have influence, you have to first be influenced. You have to really understand.

Once we understand, we can proceed with the second step of the interaction, seeking to be understood. Because the other person’s need to be understood has been satisfied, we are much more likely to have influence and to be understood ourselves.
HABIT 6: SYNERGIZE

THE HABIT OF CREATIVE COOPERATION

Synergy is everywhere in nature. The intermingled roots of two plants growing closely together improve the quality of the soil. Two pieces of wood bonded together hold much more than the total of the weight held by each separately. The whole is greater than the sum of its parts. One plus one equals three or more.

The principle of synergy also holds true in social interactions. Two people, creatively cooperating, will be able to produce far better results than either one could alone. Synergy lets us discover jointly things that we are much less likely to discover by ourselves. It occurs when minds stimulate each other and ideas call forth ideas. I say something that stimulates your mind; you respond with an idea that stimulates mine. I share that new idea with you, and the process repeats itself and even builds. Synergy works. It is the crowning achievement of all the previous habits. It is effectiveness in an interdependent reality - it is teamwork, team building, the development of unity and creativity with other human beings.

Valuing the differences is the essence of synergy - the mental, the emotional, the physiological differences between people. And the key to valuing those differences is to realize that all people see the world not as it is, but as they are. When we value differences and bring different perspectives together in the spirit of mutual respect, people feel free to seek the best possible alternative, often the Third Alternative - one that is substantially better than either of the original proposals. Finding a Third Alternative is not a compromise, but represents a win-win solution for both parties.

The person who is truly effective has the humility and reverence to recognize his or her own perceptual limitations and to appreciate the rich resources available through interaction with the hearts and minds of other human beings. That person values the differences because those differences add to his or her knowledge, to his or her understanding of reality. When we’re left to our own experiences, we constantly suffer from a shortage of data.

Insecure people, in contrast, tend to make others in their own image and surround themselves with people who think similarly. They mistake uniformity for unity, sameness with oneness. Real oneness means complementariness. The chance for synergy is greater when two people tend not to see things in the same way. Differences, therefore, become an opportunity. If two people have the same opinion, one is unnecessary.
HABIT 7: SHARPEN THE SAW
THE HABIT OF SELF-RENEWAL

Habit 7 surrounds the other habits because it is the habit that makes all the others possible. As the farmer in the fable learned from sad experience, success has two sides: the goose, which represents production capability (PC), and the golden egg, the production (P) of desired results.

It’s wise to keep both sides in balance. Yet when people get busy producing, or sawing, they seldom take time to sharpen the saw because maintenance seldom pays dramatic, immediate dividends.

Sharpen the Saw means preserving and enhancing the greatest asset you have - you. It means having a balanced, systematic program for self-renewal in the four areas of our lives: physical, social/emotional, mental, and spiritual. Without this discipline, the body becomes weak, the mind mechanical, the emotions raw, the spirit insensitive, and the person selfish.

To do this, we must be proactive. Taking time to sharpen the saw is a Quadrant II activity, and Quadrant II must be acted on. This is the single most powerful investment we can ever make in life - investment in ourselves, in the only instrument we have with which to deal with life and to contribute.

The physical self is the body. We build its strength through nutrition, exercise, and rest.

We exercise our social/emotional self by making consistent daily deposits into the Emotional Bank Accounts of our key relationships.

We exercise our minds through education, study, expanding our minds - by thinking, visualising, planning, writing, drawing, creating.

We exercise our spiritual self through reading literature that inspires us, through meditation or prayer, and through spending time with nature.

Exercising these four areas regularly is like combining elements in chemistry that ignite a fire within and give vision, passion, and a spirit of adventure to life.

A minimum of one hour a day in renewal of the physical, spiritual, and mental dimensions is the key to the development of the Seven Habits, and it’s completely within our control. Renewal is the principle and the process that empowers us to move in an upward spiral of growth and change, of continuous improvement.
THE SEVEN HABITS OF HIGHLY EFFECTIVE PEOPLE

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. Synergise

7. Sharpen the saw
1. **Be Proactive**  
Principles of personal vision  

2. **Begin with the end in mind**  
Principles of personal leadership  

3. **Put first things first**  
Principles of personal management  

4. **Think Win-Win**  
Principles of interpersonal leadership  

5. **Seek first to understand ...............then to be ..........understood**  
Principles of empathetic communication  

6. **Synergise**  
Principles of creative co-operation  

7. **Sharpening the saw**  
Principles of balanced self-renewal