

The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People

**By
Stephen R. Covey**

One of the most widely read and most widely referenced books on personal development is Stephen Covey's The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People. The 7 habits are:

- Be Proactive – You must move from a reactive approach to one where you plan ahead sufficiently.
- Begin with the End in Mind – You need to take the time to envision the end state prior to initiating any actions.
- Put First Things First – You must you focus on the important, NOT urgent items.
- Think Win/Win – You need to adopt the abundance mentality.
- Seek First to Understand, Then to be Understood – You must you put yourself in the position of those around you prior to initiating any action.
- Synergize – You need to trust those you work with and foster a spirit of cooperation.
- Sharpen the Saw – You must continually focus on your own personal development.

These seven basic principles are simple to understand, challenging to master, and incredibly effective when mastered. The first three focus on the basic building blocks that you need to develop personally, the second three focus on the skills you need to develop to most effectively deal with others, and the final principle suggests that the process is never ending / needs to be repeated on a regular basis.

Some of the key highlights and insights from the book include:

- When dealing with individuals, consider their frame of reference (i.e. a child's perspective is much different than your own) to help determine the next best step.
- There is a vast difference in the "personality" ethic and a "character" ethic. Most people practice/have been taught to practice the former. The latter is the key to success and fulfillment.
- "Paradigm Shifts" are required to make major impacts.
- A "principle centered" approach will maintain the proper balance.
- Habits are composed of three elements – knowledge, skills, and desire.
- The key to effectiveness is to progress from dependence to independence to interdependence.
- You must balance production (P) and production capability (PC).
- There are three types of assets – physical, financial, and human.
- The key to becoming proactive is recognizing your circle of influence.
- The key to beginning with an end in mind is to realize that all things are created twice: first mentally and second physically.

- Leadership focuses on idea creation, management focuses on idea direction.
- Education is focused on how to use the left brain (analytical), we need to learn how to “educate” and develop the right brain (creative).
- A principle centered existence involves balancing four elements – security, wisdom, guidance, and power.
- A mission statement is critical to personal development.
- All activities can be viewed through a lens of “importance” and “urgency”. The key to success is to focus on the important and non-urgent items. These are what Covey calls “quadrant 2” items
- An organizer requires six elements – coherence, balance, quadrant 2 focus, people dimension, flexibility, portability.
- Organizing consists of four elements – identifying roles, selecting goals, scheduling activities, and daily adaption.
- Successful delegation (stewardship approach) versus unsuccessful delegation (go-fer approach) requires five elements be defined – desired goals, guidelines, resources, accountability, consequences.
- We have an “emotional bank account” with every individual. This account requires six things if we desire to maintain a “positive balance”:
 - Understanding of the individual.
 - Attending to the “little” things.
 - Keeping commitments.
 - Clarifying expectations.
 - Showing personal integrity.
 - Apologizing sincerely.
- Every “production” problem is a “production capability” opportunity.
- There are six possible interpersonal dynamics:
 - Win/Win
 - Win/Lose
 - Lose/Win
 - Lose/Lose
 - Win
 - Win/Win or No Deal
- The only long term dynamic that makes sense is “Win/Win”.
- Win/Win is composed of five elements:
 - Character
 - Relationships
 - Agreements
 - Supporting Systems
 - Supporting Processes

- Character is composed of three elements – integrity, maturity (a balance between courage and consideration) and the abundance mentality.
- The systems and processes you implement must support win/win (i.e. contests, awards, etc.).
- The problem solving process has four steps:
 - See the problem from another’s point of view
 - Identify key issues and concerns
 - Determine results which would constitute fully acceptable solution
 - Identify options to achieve results
- Empathic listening is critical.
- Do not forget to establish the diagnosis BEFORE the prescription.
- Seek to be understood by putting the steps in the proper sequence:
 - Ethos – A focus on establishing your personal credibility.
 - Pathos – A demonstration of your capacity for empathy.
 - Logos – Addressing the issues from a logical perspective.
- To have the best possible relations with others we must focus on developing trust and working in a cooperative manner.
- As we focus more on the important, not urgent items we will see the opportunities for synergy emerge.
- Personal development – or sharpening the saw as Covey puts it – requires that we recognize the four critical dimensions and continually work on renewing them:
 - Physical (exercise, nutrition, stress management)/(endurance, flexibility, strength)
 - Social/Emotional (service, empathy, synergy, intrinsic security)
 - Spiritual (value clarification and commitment, study and meditation)
 - Mental (reading, visualizing, planning, writing)
- Ultimately the seven habits are a journey and not a destination. This gives rise to what Covey refers to as “The Upward Spiral”:
 - Learn.
 - Commit.
 - Do.
 - Repeat!

Covey’s book definitely falls in to the “must read” category. Readers that enjoy the text should also consider reading Napoleon Hill’s Think and Grow Rich. Hill wrote the proverbial book on personal development decades before Covey broached the topic.