



The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People

By Steven R. Covey

A (really brief) Book Summary by Jeff Cavignac

The 7 Habits is one of those timeless books that will never lose its relevance. It ranks up there with Norman Vincent Peale's "Power of Positive Thinking" and Dale Carnegie's "How to Win Friends and Influence People." There is no new ground broken here and a lot of Covey's writing is common sense, however he presents it in a manner and order that clearly brings the message home. I should also mention that this is a summary from my perspective. In order to learn and benefit from this book, you need to read it and apply the concepts to your personal situation.

Introduction: Habits are patterns of behavior composed of three overlapping components:

- Knowledge
- Desire
- Skill

The key here is habits can be learned. Just because you have behaved one way in the past doesn't mean you can't change your habits and behave differently in the future.

The first 3 habits are habits of character. The second 3 are the outward expression of character and the 7th involves renewal and recognizes the fact that to be effective occasionally you have to "sharpen the saw."

Habit 1: Be Proactive: Being proactive means taking responsibility for your attitudes and actions. Another way to look at it is breaking the word in to two, response and ability. Being proactive means recognizing that you have the ability to choose your response. We've all heard of the "stimulus/response" mechanism. Proactive people add a step in between:

Stimulus-**Self Awareness/Creative Imagination/Conscience/Independent Will**-Response

Proactive people focus their time and effort on the things they can control or change. They don't react to conditions over which they have no control.

Habit 2: Begin with the end in mind: This is the habit of personal leadership. In simple terms, you should start each day or each task with a clear understanding of your desired direction and destination. You don't want to get to the top of the ladder and realize it is leaning against the wrong wall. Once you know where you are going or what you want to achieve, you then need to figure out what specific steps you need to take to get there. When you look at your day or your week, or when you are working on a project or negotiating a deal, you have to know what you are looking for, what is the desired result, and if you can't achieve that what is the next best alternative?

Habit 3: Put First Things First: This is the habit of personal management, or looked at another way, this is Covey's Time Management formula. This involves organizing and managing your time according to the personal priorities you established in Habit 2. Covey created the Time Management Matrix:



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	Urgent	Not Urgent
Important	Quadrant I: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Crises • Pressing Problems • Deadline driven projects and meetings 	Quadrant II <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preparation • Planning • Relationship building
Not Important	Quadrant III <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interruptions • Most phone calls, emails and gotta minutes • Other peoples priorities 	Quadrant IV <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trivial busy work • Mindless television • Escape activities

You cannot avoid Q1 activities. However, if you spend too much time in Q1, you will burn out. Quadrants III and IV should be avoided. You can't eliminate them entirely but you have to proactively manage those activities. Quadrant II is where you want to be, in QII you have enough time to do the most important things correctly.

Habit IV: Think Win-Win: Habits IV, V and VI all tie together. Think Win-Win is the habit of interpersonal leadership. Whether it's business or personal, effectiveness is achieved through the cooperative efforts of two or more people. Our success does not have to be achieved at the expense of another. Win-Win is based on the concept of "Abundance Mentality". There is plenty for everybody, you just need to figure out what others want.

Habit V: Seek First to Understand and then to be Understood: The most important skill in life is the ability to listen empathically. Yet most people have never been taught how to listen and most people "listen to respond." Habit V, the habit of communication is critical to not only success but positive relationships in general. Empathetic listening means understanding the others point of view. Figuring out where they are coming from and what their wants, needs and desires are. It is only when people are convinced you have listened to and understand their issues that they will listen to you.

Habit VI: Synergize: Synergize maximizes the benefits of Team Work. Synergize is the habit of creative cooperation. Synergize allows us to discover jointly, things we may not have discovered on our own. This habit emphasizes that the differences in people, the fact that everyone sees the world differently creates opportunities to generate creative solutions.

Habit VII: Sharpen the Saw: The habit of self-renewal. Sharpening the saw means having a balanced systematic program for self-renewal in the four areas of our lives:



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1. Physical
2. Mental
3. Social Emotional
4. Spiritual

To sharpen the saw, we must be proactive (make the time). This is an investment in yourself. Renewal is the principle and the process that empowers us to move in an upward spiral of growth and change, of continuous improvement.

Final Comments: Covey's "7 Habits" is a classic. Every time I listen to it (I've read or listened to this book 4 times over the years) I get something new. This book is not one to read and forget about. Covey's concepts, ideas and model can help improve effectiveness, results and happiness. Read it!