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# THE 7 HABITS OF HIGHLY EFFECTIVE PEOPLE. Powerful Lessons in Personal Change

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## Basic Outline

Success and happiness are not measured over seconds, minutes or hours, but over an entire lifetime. But how can you support lasting success and happiness all your life?

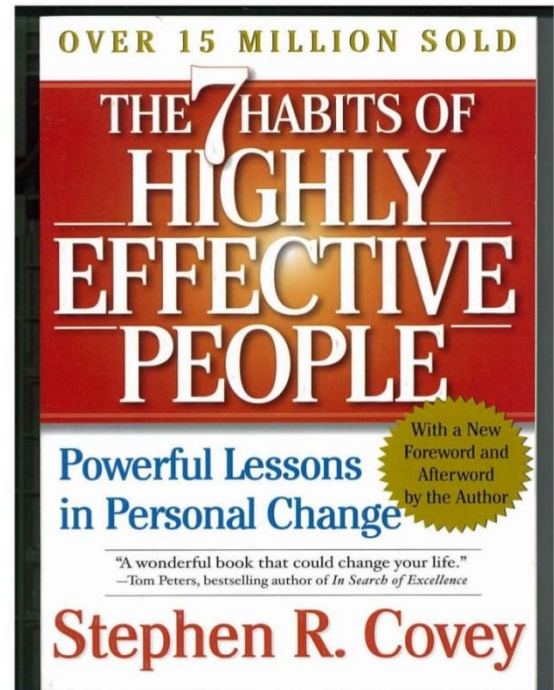
In *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, author, teacher and one of Time Magazine's 25 most influential Americans, Stephen Covey, focuses on timeless, fundamental principles as the tools to building and maintaining meaningful and prosperous lives. Developing, applying and living by these fundamental principles will build character, create oneness and empower individuals and organizations to function in accordance to those goals and paradigms they value.

These fundamental principles, such as integrity, honesty, fairness, human dignity, service, excellence, potential, quality, growth, nurturance, patience and encouragement are inherent to all, so all may benefit from Stephen Covey's

world-celebrated 7 habits. Covey teaches us how to develop and practice these values and principles to become better friends, employees, spouses, and leaders.

Unlike success literature from the past 50 years that have promoted quick-fix solutions and manipulative techniques for success, The 7 habits are not shallow practices that promote speedy results. Such practices only leave "underlying chronic problems untouched to fester and resurface time and again." These books that emphasize self-centred independence, trait approaches and authority over leadership are not based on enduring and enlightened character ethics that contribute to effective living and leadership. Covey promotes a principle-and conscious-centred life-style change, asserting "that people can only experience true success and enduring happiness as they learn and integrate these principles into their basic character."

There is no fast lane to becoming an effective person and leader, but Covey's 7 Habits of Highly Effective People will serve as a guide along your life's journey to discover your true values and goals and empower you with the necessary skills, tools and direction to live your life to its purest potential.



### Key features of the book:

- How to be effective
- Shifting Paradigms
- Habits for improving self-awareness and independence
- Habits for developing deeper relationships
- Further Considerations

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## How to Be Effective

Everyone has his or her problems in life. Maybe you are unhappy at work, continuously argue with your parents or feel like you are sacrificing time with family to be successful at work. No matter what the problem is, we all want to find a way to fix it – and the sooner the better. Self-help books and online sources give us immediate satisfaction by offering us quick advice on how to deal with our problems.

If you hate your job, get a new one that you will like better!  
Manage your time better so that you can balance work with family!  
Talk to your parents and get them to understand how you feel!

These quick fixes may provide some initial relief to your issue, but it does not explore the deeper factors that may be causing your discontent. Such temporary approaches may seem efficient, but they are not **effective** in the long term. Over time and in different circumstances, you will find the same problems recurring again and again. Perhaps you change your work, but you are still unhappy; or you spend more time with your family, but still feel stressed and constrained by your demands at work; or your parents listen to you one time, but argue with you again later!

Have you ever considered that perhaps the issue is not with them but YOU!? Why are you unhappy at work? How do your values conflict with your family and work? Are your parents not listening or are you not listening? These are the questions that look for deeper, more lasting solutions that will contribute to a more effective you!

Effective people are leaders who base their character on fundamental principles that are inherent to all humans, such as integrity, honesty, fairness and encouragement. Effective people also take the time to realize their values and act on those values throughout their lives. Finally, effective people are able to evaluate their perspectives so that they are never limited to one paradigm.

Effectiveness is a gradual process that takes a lifetime of diligence and personal growth to maintain. Although this route does not provide instant gratification, it does provide deeper and lasting solutions that will significantly improve the quality of personal relationships and overall happiness. Relying on others to solve your problems will only make you dependent on others for your success and happiness. By dedicating yourself to a life based on fundamental principles and established values, you will become an empowered, interdependent leader whose deep relationships and self-awareness will result in true success and happiness.

## Part 1: Private Victories

### Shifting Paradigms

Our perceptions govern the way we see things and, by extension, how we behave. As Covey states, “what we see is highly interrelated to what we *are*.” People may believe that they observe everyday life objectively; however, who we are conditions the way we perceive, understand and interpret what we see and, therefore, influences how we look at things. Covey demonstrated this idea using a real life experience that occurred to him while riding on a train in New York City. A man with his two children entered on the subway; the children were quite rowdy, but the man sat in a daze without seeming to notice. This annoyed Covey, who thought it was impolite and bad parenting for the man to allow his children to behave in such a manner. When he confronted this man on the issue, the man surfaced from his dreary daze and apologized, saying that their mother, his wife, had just died a couple hours ago and they weren’t sure how to handle it. This shocking, new understanding caused Covey to experience what he terms an “AHA!” moment – a paradigm shift. This shift is not always so instant as in the example, but it does stress that a person must first change their being before they can change their seeing of the world. Our perceptions are contrived realities based on experiences and subjective understandings that shape who we are. In order for a person to change his or her attitude and behaviour towards something, he or she must first be aware of the paradigm from which they stem. Only then may they begin to examine their perceptions to gain a more objective and effective view of a situation.

### How Can We Shift Our Paradigms?

- **Adopt a principle-centred paradigm: forming our perceptions around timeless and unchanging principles that represent reality, instead of relying on inconsistent and manipulative emotions that distort reality.**
- **Become self-aware: realizing how our perceptions are influenced and determining whether these views are supported by reality or conditioning.**
- **Support values: eliminate reactive responses to stimuli by subordinating those emotions to adhere to your constant set of values; and**
- **Practice proactive language: communicate your conscious influence in events that occur, rather than your passive conditioning by these events.**

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## Principle-Centred Paradigm

Human effectiveness is governed by fundamental principles. What are these fundamental principles? They are “self-evident and can easily be validated by any individual.” Principles such as fairness, integrity, honesty, and patience are universal truths that are not distorted by circumstance. They provide people with an objective reality that supports more effective problem solving and empowers people to act according to these principles. Therefore, when a leader must make a difficult decision, the he or she knows and can believe in his or her decision, because it is based on a constant principle and not some temporary emotion or reaction. It also opens us to other people’s opinions and to adjust our perceptions so that they may be better situated in reality than buried under false emotions. This is an important responsibility of effective leadership, because being receptive of and incorporating new ideas fosters better understanding, communication and independence between followers and leaders and encourages more creative problem-solving.

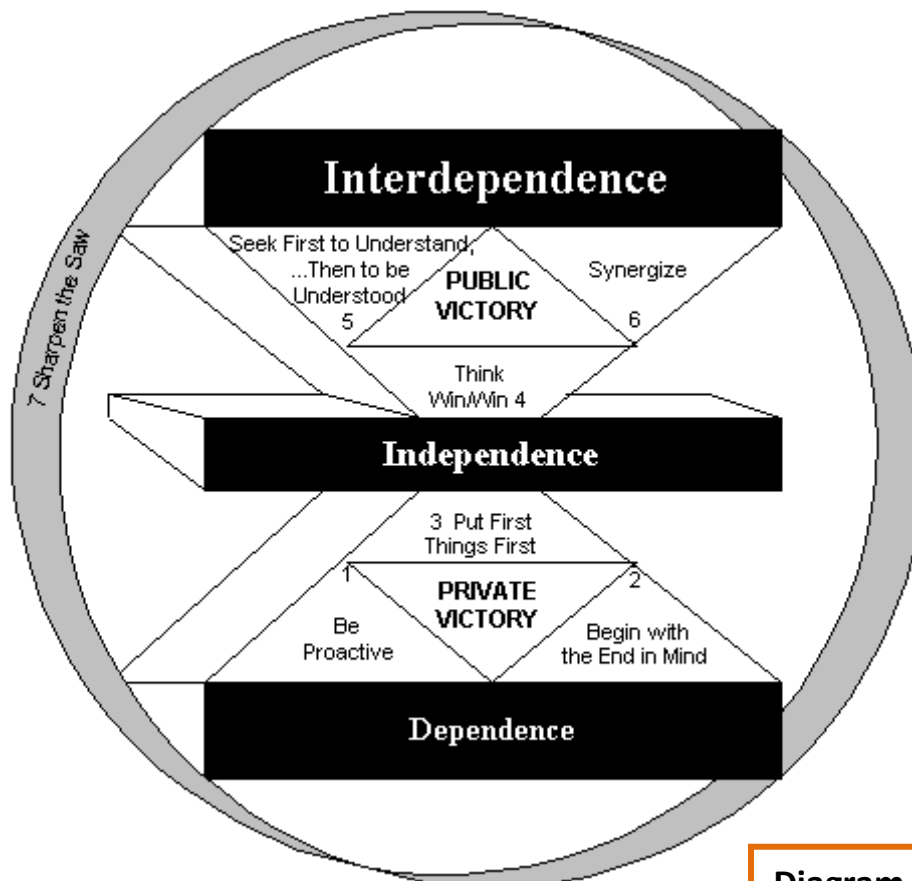


Diagram of the seven habits

## Habit 1: Be Proactive

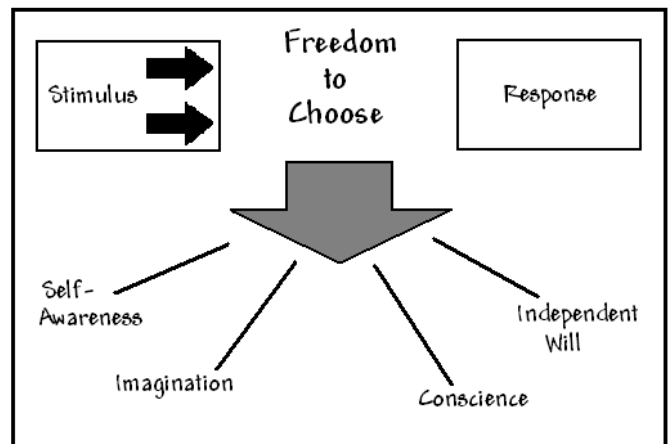
If you are the kind of person who believes that his or her thoughts and emotions are the result of any sort of circumstance, then you are not a proactive person. You are a person dependent on those internal and external forces that act upon you for emotional reactions. However, proactive people’s behaviours

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and attitudes are independent from circumstances so that the person determines how he or she will be affected. These people's feelings are not dependent on the forces acting upon them, rather their values influences how these forces affect them.

To be effectively proactive, a person needs to demonstrate a strong self-awareness and build of character. In other words, a person must understand who they really are and then have the courage and conviction to act as that person throughout all circumstances, guided by fundamental values. These qualities empower an individual to act according to their values instead of reacting with emotions. Furthermore, it also enables a person to consider another person's perspective and to exercise imagination and flexibility while evaluating incongruences in perspectives or solving problems.

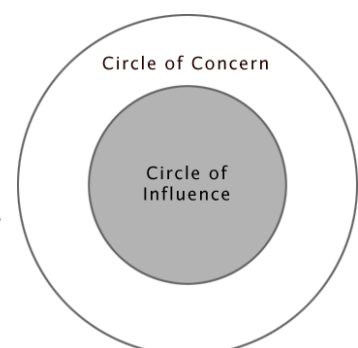


There are many ways to demonstrate a proactive attitude, but the most obvious is through the daily language we use to express ourselves. For example, I could say, "I have to wear glasses, because I can't see far distances," or I could say, "I choose to wear glasses, because I want to see far distances. The second phrase is proactive because it states a conscious desire and freedom to wear glasses. Language is a powerful tool in shifting paradigms to foster more proactive attitudes and behaviours.

### Habit 2: Begin with the End in Mind

Pretend it is your funeral and then write down all the qualities, achievements and sentiments that you would want to hear from your coworkers, friends and family. Covey often uses this activity to help people identify what really matters to them. Once you realize what is important in your life, you can begin living a more meaningful and directed existence. Suddenly, there is direction in life that will help you to make better decisions that will keep you true to your values.

Once you know what is important to you, you can start evaluating how your time and energy is spent. Covey refers to the circle of influence to separate activities that are important to us from the unimportant activities. Activities that we cannot control belong in the circle of concern. Activities that we can influence are part of the circle of influence. A proactive person will invariably engage in the circle of influence much more than the circle of concern. The better a person is at differentiating between these two types of activities, the more effective he or she will be at organizing their time and avoiding useless activities.



Covey also recommends writing a Personal Mission Statement that you can keep with you at all times. This statement illustrates your greatest values and direction in life. It can be referenced when making hard decisions and to empower your solutions as in keeping with your life view.

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## Habit 3: Put First Things First

It is not easy to always live according to one's values and principles. So many times we are pressured to commit to activities or emotions that we regret. However, this habit is essential to becoming an effective person and leader. When we trust in our principles and values and put them first, we experience richer, more authentic and meaningful relationships and lives.

One of the most relatable issues is a person's ability to say "No." Not many people like to say "No." Some may find it rude or negative or discouraging. However, there is nothing wrong with saying "No" to something that is incongruous to or invokes imbalance among your life goals. It is imperative to remain proactive and make your decisions consciously and independently of other's desires.

## Part 2: Public Victories

### What are Public Victories?

You cannot engage in deep and meaningful relationships with others if you have first not developed such a relationship with yourself. Habits 1,2 and 3 all focused on developing a person's self-awareness, independence, proactive behaviours and attitudes, values, and principles, so that he or she would be able to transfer those "Private Victories" into what Covey labels as "Public Victories". Public Victories concern themselves with establishing, building and maintaining deeper and more meaningful relationships with others.

## Habit 4: Think Win-Win

We have all been part of agreements where some person did not get what they wanted. It seems normal where choices are concerned for someone to win over the other. However, effective people do not think in this way. Whereas some people see negotiations as having a winner and a loser, proactive people see an opportunity to find creative and deeper solutions that can meet both people's needs. This win-win mentality transcends an individual from being independent to being interdependent. Whereas an independent person sees relationships in terms of "I" or "me," an interdependent person is concerned with "we." Of course, there will be times when no solution that serves both parties can be reached. In this case, there is the No Deal agreement which allows both parties to agree to disagree. Pursuing agreements that are mutually beneficial provides enormous emotional freedom free from manipulation and coercion. It also encourages greater understanding and respect for each other and more creative and complex problem solving.

## Habit 5: Seek First to Understand...Then to be Understood

Effective people not only strive to work together with people, they are also concerned with who that person is. How many times have people in your life offered you advice or passed quick judgements on

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an issue you were having before understanding the situation properly? We are all guilty of this; however, Stephen Covey shows us that we are all capable of overcoming this bad habit.

It may be easy to approach someone else's issues through your own experiences and prescribe solutions that worked for you or others, but it is not effective. Before jumping to hasty conclusions, Covey writes that "you have to build the skills of emphatic listening on a base of character that inspires openness and trust." This means that an effective person listens to understand, not to respond. Through emphatic listening, the listener will get a truer understanding of the speaker and the speaker will, in turn, feel understood and trust the listener.

Trust is pinnacle in relationships. If there is no trust, there is no understanding, which leads to no communication, which leads to ineffective relationships. In order to build trust with people, Covey imagines an "Emotional Bank." Each day and at any moment, we should be investing in our emotional banks with those in our lives. Acts of kindness, love, honesty, dedication, loyalty and friendship contribute to building trust. The more trust between people, the better the understanding and the forgiveness. Of course, there will be times where we hurt someone with our actions or words. When that occurs, it is imperative that the offender sincerely apologize. Failure to recognize one's fault will drastically deplete your emotional bank. Effective relationships require constant emotional attention to establish trust and a deeper understanding for each other.

### Habit 6: Synergize

Synergy is the fusing together of other people's ideas, perceptions, understandings and values. Covey refers to this habit as the "most catalytic, the most empowering, the most unifying and the most exciting part." It occurs everywhere in nature and, yet, is probably the most unnatural habit for a person to adopt. This is because synergy forces us to explore and respect different values from our own. It forces us from our comfort zones and into an unknown environment of cooperative creativity. Synergy is about creating new connections, new communications, new ideas and all with an open mind and an open heart to what others have to contribute. When people participate in synergy, they become effective beings who are capable of taking any number of variables and transforming them into one new collaborative creation.

Covey warns us, however, of negative synergy. This is a process where people work together, but not as one. They communicate with each other, but do not listen. As Covey wrote, "insecure people think that all reality should be amenable to their paradigms." However, synergy is not about bringing everyone to the same conclusion; it is about valuing those differences that each person brings and combining them to forge something new. True effective people know the difference between synergy and synonymy.

### Habit 7: Renewal

Renewal features four key dimensions: physical, social, mental and spiritual. These dimensions should always maintain a balance so that neither is in excess or decline. For physical, this means exercising regularly, eating a healthy diet and getting regular check-ups. Spiritual include activities that feed the soul (prayer, dancing, cooking..etc). Mental features engaging in activities that feed the mind. Limiting



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television time for reading or study is an example. Finally, social entails treating people fairly and working together. This final habit encircles all the others, and this is because without renewing these four dimensions, people could not hope to be effective individuals and leaders. They would be like a carpenter with dull tools, lacking precision and skill. If you neglect one area of your life for another, you cannot strive for higher levels of effectiveness because you will be incomplete and unable to grow. Remember that this process is not a quick-fix solution; it is a lifestyle change that requires serious dedication, practice and continuous development of all dimensions.

### Further Considerations

Although this book is intuitively appealing since it revolves around universal themes that everyone can relate to, the themes are not well-defined and rely heavily on life experiences rather than empirical data. There is also a glaringly obvious and sometimes overbearing religious undertone throughout the book. This may not be a large issue in America, where such religious platitudes are somewhat accepted; however, I wonder how these ideals would affect cross-cultural application. Also, there is no comprehensive list of the fundamental principles on which this whole process is centred. Nor is there a clear understanding of how these principles contribute to developing effectiveness. Furthermore, I wonder how transferable conceptual understandings of these principles are across cultural borders. For example, does the definition of integrity for one types of government match that of a different government type? Is patience a central principle in stricter societies like Korea where authority is unquestionable? Although I find the 7 habits appealing, I think further investigation to determine a comprehensive list of fundamental principles and how they relate to effectiveness should be made. In addition, more efforts need to be dedicated in evaluating how effective this process is both in local and cross-cultural contexts.

### Other Books by Stephen Covey

