

## **The Seven Habits of highly effective people (Book Summary)**

In this book, Stephen Covey, the celebrated writer discusses the habits of effective people. He lists seven habits and goes into a detailed explanation of how to acquire and nurture these habits. The book presents a holistic, integrated principle – centered approach for solving personal and professional problems. Covey explains how we can live with fairness, integrity, honesty and human dignity.

What we are communicates more effectively than we say or do. In other words, the key to becoming effective is developing a good character. There are people we trust absolutely because we know their character. The seven habits of highly effective people embody many of the fundamental principles of human effectiveness. These habits are the principles upon which enduring happiness and success are based.

Covey argues that making and keeping promises to ourselves precedes making and keeping promises to others. It is futile to put personality ahead of character, to try to improve relationships with others before improving ourselves. The book emphasizes the need for a principle centered, character based inside out approach to personal and inter personal effectiveness.

Habits are developed through the interaction of knowledge, skill & desire.

Knowledge	-	What to do and why
Skill	-	How to do
Desire	-	Motivation, the want to do

The seven habits mentioned by Covey are:

Habit 1	:	Be proactive
Habit 2	:	Begin with the end in mind
Habit 3	:	Put first things first
Habit 4	:	Think win/win
Habit 5	:	Seek first to understand, then to be understood
Habit 6	:	Synergize
Habit 7	:	Sharpen the saw

### **Habit 1 : Be proactive**

Between stimulus and response, man has the freedom to choose because of self awareness, imagination, independent will and conscience.

Proactive means more than merely taking initiative. It means that as human beings, we are responsible for our own lives. Our behavior is a function of our decisions, not our conditions. We can subordinate feelings to values. We have the initiative and responsibility to make things

happen. We are by nature proactive. If our lives are a function of conditioning and conditions, it is because we have, consciously or unknowingly allowed these things to control us. Proactive people focus their efforts on the things they can do something about. The nature of their energy is positive, enlarging and magnifying, causing their circle of Influence to increase. Reactive people on the other hand, focus their efforts on the circle of concern. Their focus results in blaming and accusing attitudes, reactive language and self-pity.

At the very heart of our circle of influence is our ability to make and keep commitments and promises. The commitments we make to ourselves and to others and our integrity to those commitments is the essence and clearest manifestation of our proactivity.

## **Habit 2 : Begin with the end in mind**

To begin with the end in mind means to start with a clear understanding of the destination. It means we better understand where we are now and ensure that the steps we take are in the right direction. Habit 2 is based on the principle of personal leadership. Leadership is doing the right things. Management is doing things right. As Covey puts it, management is efficiency in climbing the ladder of success. Leadership determines whether the ladder is leaning against the right wall.

Effectiveness does not depend solely on how much effort we spend but on whether or not the effort we spend is in the right direction. No management success can compensate for failure in leadership. The most effective way to begin with the end in mind is to develop a personal mission statement. It focuses on what we want to be and to do and on the values and principles upon which being and doing are based.

Whatever is at the centre of our life is the source of our security, guidance, wisdom and power. Security represents our sense of worth, our identity, our emotional anchorage and self esteem.

Guidance is the source of direction. It is the internal frame of reference that interprets, sets standards/criteria and guides moment by moment decision making.

Wisdom is our perspective on life, sense of balance, understanding of how various parts and principles apply and relate to each other.

Power is the faculty or capacity to act, the strength or potency to accomplish something. It includes the capacity to overcome deeply embedded habits and to cultivate higher, more effective ones.

When security, guidance, wisdom and power are there together, they create the great force of a noble personality, a balanced character, a beautifully integrated individual.

A principle centered person tries to stand apart from an emotionally charged situation and evaluates the options. Looking at the balanced whole-the work needs, the family needs, other needs that may be involved and possible implications of various alternative decisions, he tries to come up with the best solution. He proactively chooses what he thinks to be the right alternative.

He feels comfortable about the decision and whatever he chooses to do, he can focus on it and enjoy it. A principle centered person has a high degree of security, guidance, wisdom and power, that flows from a solid, unchanging core and also has the foundation of a highly proactive and highly effective life.

An organization mission statement, that truly reflects the deep shared vision and values of everyone within the organization creates a great unity and tremendous commitment. It creates in people's hearts and minds, a frame of reference, a set of criteria and guidelines, by which they will govern themselves. They don't need some one else directing, controlling, criticizing or taking cheap shots. They have bought into the changeless core of what the organization is about.

### **Habit 3 : Put First Things First**

Effective management is putting first things first. So it is important to set priorities. It is good to divide activities using a 2 x 2 matrix as shown below.

	<b>Urgent</b>	<b>Not urgent</b>
<b>Important</b>	<b>I</b> Crises Pressing problems Deadline driven projects	<b>II</b> Prevention, Relationship building Recognizing new opportunities Planning / Recreation
<b>Not important</b>	<b>III</b> Interruption, some calls, some mails, some reports some meetings Proximate, pressing matters Popular activities	<b>IV</b> Trivia, phone calls, Time wasters

Quadrant II is the heart of effective personal management. It deals with things that are not urgent, but are important. These are the activities that must be given the highest priority. People who can develop the habit of relentlessly focusing on Quadrant II activities are invariably the ones who make a mark in their personal and professional lives. Quadrant II activities focus on building relationships, writing personal mission statements, long range planning, exercising, preventive maintenance and preparation.

#### **Habit 4 : Think win/win**

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, mutually satisfying. With a win/win solution, all parties feel good about the decision and feel committed to the action plan. Win/win sees life as a cooperative, not a competitive arena. Win/win is not about your way or my way. It is about a better way, a higher way.

Character is the foundation of win/win. Everything else builds on that foundation. There are three character traits essential to the win/win paradigm - Integrity, Maturity and Abundance mentality. Integrity is the value we place on ourselves. As we clearly identify our values and proactively organize and execute around those values on a daily basis, we develop self-awareness and independent will by making and keeping meaningful promises and commitments. Maturity is the balance between courage and consideration. An emotionally mature person has the ability to express one's own feelings and convictions balanced with consideration for the thoughts and feelings of others. The Abundance Mentality, assumes that there is plenty out there for everybody. Most people see life as having only so much. They forget that the cake can expand. As people really learn to think win/win, they can set up the systems to create and reinforce it. They can turn unnecessarily competitive situations into cooperative ones.

#### **Habit 5 : Seek first to understand, than to be understood**

Most people, first seek to be understood. They do not listen with the intent to understand. They listen with the intent to reply. They are either speaking or waiting to speak. They are filtering the messages they receive, based on their own paradigm. The essence of empathetic listening is fully, deeply, understanding that person, emotionally as well as intellectually. Empathetic listening means listening with the intent to understand. When one listens with empathy to another person, one gives that person psychological air. And after that vital need is met, one can then focus on influencing people.

Empathetic listening is also risky. It takes a great deal of security to go into a deep listening experience because we are opening oneself up to be influenced. We become vulnerable. So we have a normal tendency to evaluate, probe, advise or interpret. These responses come naturally to most of us.

When we can present our own ideas, clearly, specifically, visually and most important, contextually, in relation to the other party's paradigms and concerns, we significantly increase the credibility of our ideas.

When we really listen, we become influenceable. But being influenceable is the key to influencing others. The circle of influence begins to expand.

As Covey puts it, "Whatever investment of time it takes to do that (understand people) will bring much greater returns of time as you work from accurate understanding of the problems and issues from the high emotional bank account that results when a person feels deeply understood."

## **Habit 6 : Synergize**

Synergy is the essence of principle centered leadership. It catalyzes, unites and unleashes the greatest powers within people. The challenge is to apply the principles of creative cooperation.

There are some circumstances in which synergy may not be achievable. But even then, the spirit of sincere trying will usually result in a more effective compromise.

Valuing the mental, the emotional, the psychological differences between people is the essence of synergy. And the key to valuing these differences is to realize that all people see the world, not as it is, but as they are.

We can value the differences in other people. When someone disagrees with us, we can say, “Good! You see it differently.” We don’t have to agree with them, you can simply affirm them. And we can seek to understand.

When we can see only two alternatives – yours and the ‘wrong’ one – we can look for a synergistic third alternative. There’s almost always a third alternative. If we can work with a win/win philosophy and really seek to understand, we usually can find a better solution that will be better for everyone concerned.

## **Habit 7 : Sharpen the saw**

If one keeps at a job, burnout is likely. So, renewal is important. It consists of the following:

Physical – Exercise, nutrition, stress management

Mental – Reading, visualizing, planning and writing

Social/emotional – Service, empathy, synergy, intrinsic security

Spiritual – Value clarification & commitment, study & mediation

To be effective performers, we need to recognize the importance of taking time regularly to sharpen the saw in all four ways. Although renewal in each dimension is important, it only becomes optimally effective as we deal with all four dimensions in a wise and balanced way. The things we do to sharpen the saw in any one dimension have positive impact on other dimensions.

Renewal is the principle that empowers us to move as an upward spiral of growth and change, of continuous improvement. Conscience is the endowment that senses our congruence or disparity with correct principles and lifts us toward them. The daily private victory – 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 circle of Influence. It is the Quadrant II focus time necessary to integrate these habits into your life, to become principle centered.

## **Concluding notes**

Covey concludes by saying: “I believe that correct principles are natural laws and that God, the Creator and Father of us all, is the source of them and also the source of our conscience. I believe that to the degree people live by this inspired conscience, they will grow to fulfill their natures, to the degree that they do not, they will not rise above the animal plane. As human beings, we cannot become perfect. But to the degree to which people align themselves with correct principles, divine endowments will be released within our nature.”