

THE SEVEN HABITS OF HIGHLY EFFECTIVE PEOPLE

Source: Stephen Covey's *The 7 Habits Of Highly Effective People* (1989)
Add this book to your management library. Highly recommended!

Dr Stephen Covey is a hugely influential management guru, whose book *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, became a blueprint for personal and management development when it was first published in 1989. The book is still popular today and its principles still apply. The 7 Habits are a remarkable set of inspirational and aspirational standards for anyone who seeks to live a purposeful and meaningful life.

Habit 1 - Be Proactive

This is the ability to control one's environment, rather than have it control you. The principles of self-determination, choice, and the power to decide how to respond to stimuli, conditions and circumstances are outlined in this habit.

Habit 2 - Begin with the end in mind

Covey calls this the habit of personal leadership - leading oneself towards what you consider your aims or desired outcomes. By developing the habit of concentrating on relevant activities you will build a platform to avoid distractions and become more productive and successful.

Habit 3 - Put first things first

Covey calls this the habit of personal management. This is about organising and implementing activities in line with the aims established in habit 2. Covey says that habit 2 is the first or mental creation; habit 3 is the second, or physical creation. It's about prioritizing and doing what's important rather than just focusing on the urgent or unnecessary.

Habit 4 - Think win-win

Covey calls this the habit of interpersonal leadership, necessary because achievements are largely dependent on co-operative efforts with others. He says that win-win is based on the assumption that there is plenty for everyone, and that success follows a co-operative approach more naturally than confrontation or the win-lose approach.

Habit 5 - Seek first to understand and then to be understood

This is Covey's habit of communication, and effective or empathic listening. Covey helps to explain this in his simple analogy 'diagnose before you prescribe'. Covey explains the skills of empathic or active listening beautifully, getting to the principles rather than merely focusing on the mechanics of the skill.

Habit 6 - Synergize

Covey says this is the habit of creative co-operation - the principle that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts, which implicitly lays down the challenge to see the good and potential in the other person's contribution. 1+1 can equal 3.

Habit 7 - Sharpen the saw

This is the habit of self renewal and it necessarily underpins all the other habits, enabling and encouraging them to happen and grow. Covey interprets the self into four parts: the spiritual, mental, physical and the social/emotional, which all need feeding and developing for us to live a balanced life. If we are not focusing on developing ourselves in each of these 4 areas we will be out of balance. See the Woodcutter's story on the next page.

THE WOODCUTTER'S STORY

A man was walking in a forest one day, and he met a woodcutter hard at work sawing down a tree. It was a hot day, and he stopped and engaged in some friendly banter with the woodcutter about the weather and such.

The man continued on his way and a couple of hours later as he came back through the forest he came upon the woodcutter again who was still hard at and sweating profusely from the heat and his efforts. He asked, "Mr. Woodcutter, how long have you been sawing that tree? You haven't made much progress. Perhaps your saw is too blunt. Why don't you sharpen it?"

"I could" the woodcutter sighed. "The saw has not been sharpened for a long while"

"Then why not take some time to sharpen it now? You'd make much better progress!" said the man.

"I don't really have time for that, you know. I've got to cut down all these trees" replied the woodcutter.