



Summary of Stephen R. Covey's 7 Habits of Highly Effective People

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“Leaning your ladder against the right building.”

In his #1 bestseller, Stephen R. Covey presented a framework for personal effectiveness. The following is a summary of the first part of his book, concluding with a list of the seven habits.

The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People, Covey's best-known book, has sold more than 15 million copies worldwide since its first publication in 1989. Covey argues against what he calls "The Personality Ethic", something he sees as prevalent in many modern self-help books. He instead promotes what he labels "The Character Ethic": aligning one's values with so-called "universal and timeless" principles.

Covey adamantly refuses to confound principles and values; he sees principles as external natural laws, while values remain internal and subjective. Covey proclaims that values govern people's behavior, but principles ultimately determine the consequences. Covey presents his teachings in a series of habits, manifesting as a progression from dependence via independence to interdependence.

Our character is a collection of our habits, and habits have a powerful role in our lives. Habits consist of knowledge, skill, and desire. Knowledge allows us to know what to do, skill gives us the ability to know how to do it, and desire is the motivation to do it.

The Seven Habits move us through the following stages:

1. Dependence: the paradigm under which we are born, relying upon others to take care of us.
1. Independence: the paradigm under which we can make our own decisions and take care of ourselves.
2. Interdependence: the paradigm under which we cooperate to achieve something that cannot be achieved independently.

Much of the success literature today tends to value independence, encouraging people to become liberated and do their own thing.

The reality is that we are interdependent, and the independent model is not optimal for use in an interdependent environment that requires leaders and team players.

Therefore, the first three habits focus on self-mastery, that is, achieving the private victories required to move from dependence to independence. The first three habits are:

- Habit 1: Be Proactive
- Habit 2: Begin with the End in Mind
- Habit 3: Put First Things First

Habits 4, 5, and 6 then address interdependence:

- Habit 4: Think Win/Win
- Habit 5: Seek First to Understand, Then to Be Understood
- Habit 6: Synergize

Finally, the seventh habit is one of renewal and continual improvement, that is, of building one's personal production capability.

To be effective, one must find the proper balance between actually producing and improving one's capability to produce. Covey illustrates this point with the fable of the goose and the golden egg. In the fable, a poor farmer's goose began laying a solid gold egg every day, and the farmer soon became rich. He also became greedy and figured that the goose must have many golden eggs within her. In order to obtain all of the eggs immediately, he killed the goose. Upon cutting it open he discovered that it was not full of golden eggs. The lesson is that if one attempts to maximize immediate production with no regard to the production capability, the capability will be lost. Effectiveness is a function of both production and the capacity to produce. The need for balance between production and production capability applies to physical, financial, and human assets.

Habit 1: Be Proactive Focus on the things you can actually do something about. Change starts from within, and highly effective people make the decision to improve their lives through the things that they can influence rather than by simply reacting to external forces.

Habit 2: Begin with the End in Mind Begin everything you do with a clear picture of your ultimate goal. Develop a principle-centered personal mission statement. Extend the mission statement into long-term goals based on personal principles.

Habit 3: Put First Things First Manage your life according to your needs and priorities. Spend time doing what fits into your personal mission, observing the proper balance between production and building production capacity. Identify the key roles that you take on in life, and make time for each of them.

Habit 4: Think Win-Win Integrity: Stick with your true feelings, values, and commitments
Maturity: Be considerate of the feelings of others
Abundance Mentality: Believe there is plenty for everyone. Seek agreements and relationships that are mutually beneficial. In cases where a "win/win" deal cannot be achieved, accept the fact that agreeing to make "no deal" may be the best alternative. In developing an organizational culture, be sure to reward win/win behavior among employees and avoid inadvertently rewarding win/lose behavior.

Habit 5: Seek First to Understand, Then to Be Understood Learn how to communicate clearly and listen to others. Stephen Covey presents this habit as the most important principle of interpersonal relations. Effective listening is not simply echoing what the other person has said through the lens of one's own experience. Rather, it is putting oneself in the perspective of the other person, listening empathically for both feeling and meaning.

Habit 6: Synergize "Two heads are better than one." Through trustful communication, find ways to leverage individual differences to create a whole that is greater than the sum of the parts. Through mutual trust and understanding, one often can solve conflicts and find a better solution than would have been obtained through either person's own solution.

Habit 7: Sharpen the Saw Allow yourself to grow by maintaining a balanced program in the four areas of your life: physical, social/emotional, mental, and spiritual. Take time out from production to build production capacity through personal renewal of the physical, mental, social/emotional, and spiritual dimensions.

Follow-ups to The Seven Habits

Follow-up titles to The Seven Habits aim both to add to the original and to form a cohesive philosophy on personal, principle-based leadership. They come in the format of audio books as well (such as the title Beyond The 7 Habits). Covey has also written a number of learning-books for children. His son, Sean Covey, has written a version for teens: The Seven Habits of Highly Effective Teens. This version simplifies Covey's 7 habits in order for younger readers to better understand them.

The 8th Habit

In 2004, Covey's book **The 8th Habit: From Effectiveness to Greatness** was published. It functions as the sequel to The Seven Habits. Covey claims that effectiveness does not suffice in what he calls "The Knowledge Worker Age". He proclaims that "[t]he challenges and complexity we face today are of a different order of magnitude." The 8th habit essentially urges: "**Find your voice and inspire others to find theirs...**"