

THE SEVEN HABITS OF HIGHLY EFFECTIVE PEOPLE



"The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People" by Steven R. Covey is one of the most successful self-help books ever. More than 25 million copies have been sold since its first publication in 1989. In August 2011, the American news magazine *Time* listed *The Seven Habits* as one of "The 25 Most Influential Business Management Books".¹ In my essay I am trying to cut through it. I'd like to have a look at the essence, usefulness and applicability of *The Seven Habits*.

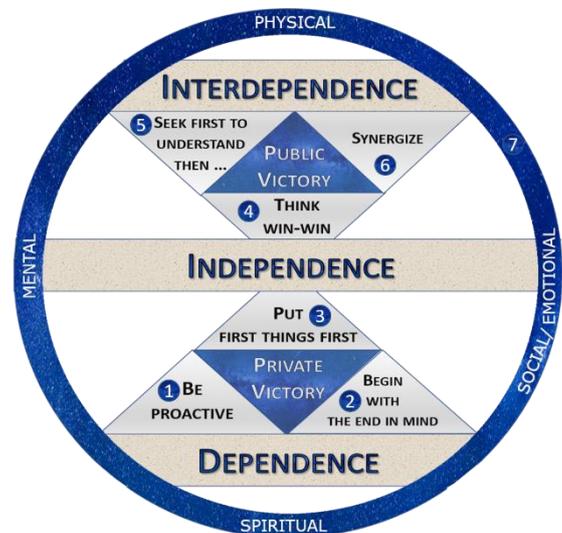
Steven R. Covey is a follower and advocate of a sustainable principle-centred character ethic as opposed to a quick-fix, skill and technique-oriented personality ethic. Your character and your principles are situated at the very centre of yourself. This strong core gives you guidance, wisdom, strength and security. Your personal mission and purpose is deeply enrooted in your core.

The Seven Habits are based on the "P/PC Balance" principle:
P/PC stands for *Production/Production Capability*.

If you do not take care of yourself (=Production Capability)
 you lose the ability to produce pleasurable results (=Production).



HABIT 1	BE PROACTIVE	PRIVATE VICTORY
HABIT 2	BEGIN WITH THE END IN MIND	
HABIT 3	PUT FIRST THINGS FIRST	
HABIT 4	THINK WIN/WIN	PUBLIC VICTORY
HABIT 5	SEEK FIRST TO UNDERSTAND THEN TO BE UNDERSTOOD	
HABIT 6	SYNERGIZE	
HABIT 7	SHARPEN THE SAW	RENEWAL
	❖ MENTAL	
	❖ PHYSICAL	
	❖ SOCIAL/EMOTIONAL	
	❖ SPIRITUAL	



The first three habits (*Be Proactive; Begin with the End in Mind and Put First Things First*) are related to self-mastery, independence and private victory while Habits Four to Six (*Think Win/Win; Seek First to Understand, Then to Be Understood and Synergize*) are connected to public victory and interdependence. These 6 Habits are embedded and surrounded by the Seventh Habit of balanced self-renewal (sharpen the saw). For Covey's approach is *inside-out* self-mastery and private victory (Habits 1 to 3) are the precondition for public victory.

For achieving private victory and self-mastery the habit of proactivity (Habit 1) is fundamental. Covey's definition of proactivity goes beyond just taking the initiative and

¹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Seven_Habits_of_Highly_Effective_People
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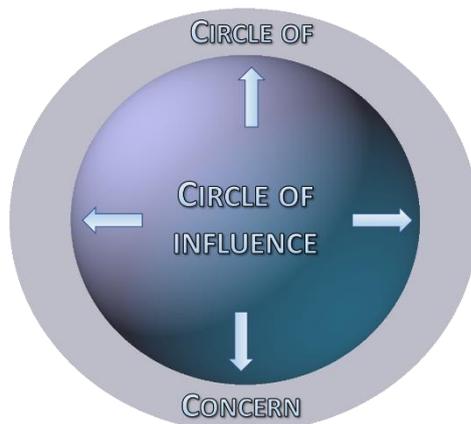
comprises several aspects: Proactive people know that they can always choose their (mental) response even when confronted with immutable circumstances. Hence, they are not just responsible but "response-able": Proactive people can choose their mental response in any given situation. This freedom to choose is what Viktor E. Frankl called "The last of the human freedoms":

We who lived in concentration camps can remember the men who walked through the huts comforting others, giving away their last piece of bread. They may have been few in number, but they offer sufficient proof that everything can be taken from a man but one thing: **the last of the human freedoms** – to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one's way.

[Man's Search for meaning, Viktor E. Frankl, page 86]

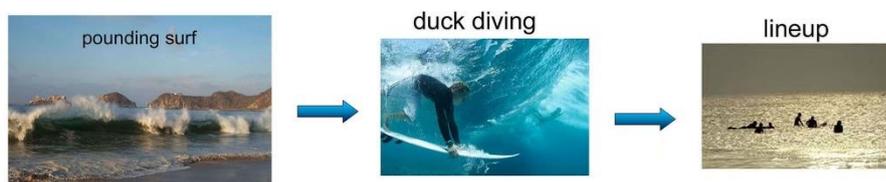


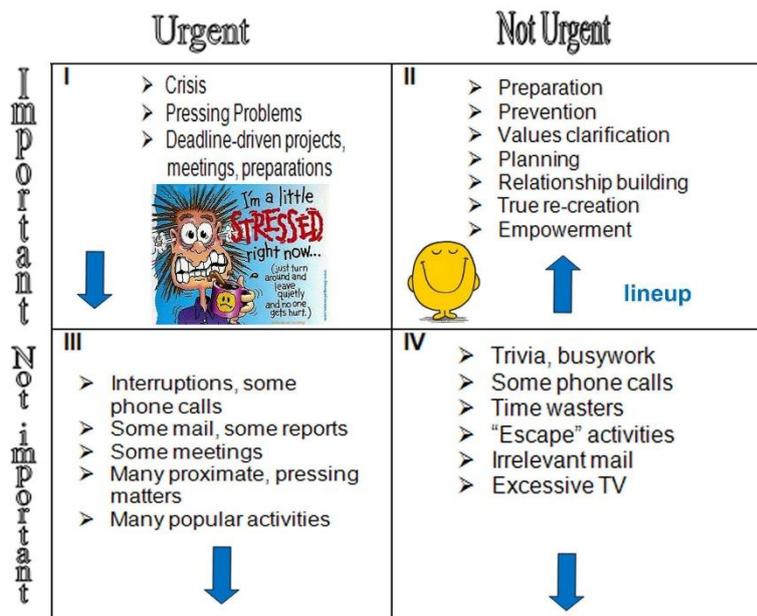
By applying a proactive focus and by using their energy mainly within their circle of influence proactive people can effectively use their resources to accomplish their goals. With the proactive approach people grow their circle of influence and become more powerful.



Habit 2 – *Begin with the End in Mind* – is about your vision, mission and purpose in life. Use spiritual renewal (one of the four dimensions of habit 7) to get in touch with your heart for conceiving your accomplishments.

The next step (*Habit 3: Put First Things First*) is to take action, that is, to organise and execute around your priorities to achieve whatever you conceived in the first place. Beware of the "pounding surf" - don't let yourself be overwhelmed by urgent not so important tasks. I'd like to elaborate on Covey's time management metaphor – in fact it's a simile :-) – the "pounding surf". It's crucial to overcome the pounding surf, otherwise the "time surfer" is thrown back to the shore again and again. By alternately paddling and duck diving the "sportsman" can make it to the lineup where they have got time and also the air for socialising and planning the next ride.





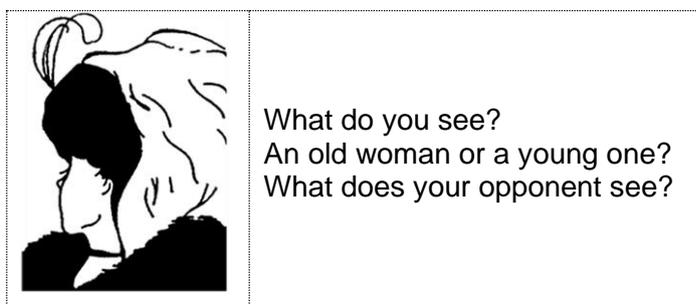
adapted from Steven R. Covey – "First Things First" – page 37

Proactive people spend a considerable amount of their time in Quadrant II dealing with not urgent but important tasks. The key towards shifting your centre of time management into this quadrant is to save time in the not (so) important quadrants III and IV. The ability to say "No" in a friendly, nonapologetic way is fundamental for shifting your focus into the proactive Quadrant II. Be aware that *there is never enough time to do everything but there is always enough time to do the most important thing²*. Hence there is a "Yes/No"-tradeoff; by saying "Yes" to not so important things you are by default saying "No" to the really important matters.

For applying the win-win approach (Habit 4) an abundance mentality is essential.

Habit 5 – *Seek First to Understand, Then to Be Understood* – is about empathetic communication building on mutual respect. Synergies (Habit 6) – the culmination of public victory – can be generated when listening empathetically, thinking win-win and valuing the differences:

Seeing things differently is an opportunity to learn something new. Be curious and try to find out about your opponent's perception. If they see things differently try to figure out why and be grateful for the different perceptions.



The Seventh habit – the habit of balanced self-renewal – is to make sure that you take care of yourself (=Production Capability) according to four dimensions: mental, physical, social/emotional and spiritual.

² Brian Tracy: Eat That Frog
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These four dimensions are highly interrelated both among each other and with the first 6 Habits. On top of that they are synergetic, e.g. hiking can have a spiritual dimension and certainly a social dimension when you are hiking in company. Planning is part of the mental dimension. Covey suggests dedicating a minimum of one hour a day in renewal of the physical, spiritual and mental dimensions. This three-dimensional personal "workout", which is completely within your circle of influence, gives you the intrinsic security and personal strength to move from Daily Private Victory to Daily Public Victory.

Steven R. Covey recommends a teacher's approach when reading his book: He proposes reading with the purpose of sharing your insights with someone else within 48 hours and that's what I did: I organized a language meeting in the Cafe Valdés (Austria - 4020 Linz: Herrenstraße 7) on the 30th of May 2012 to talk about Steven R. Covey's recipe for life: The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People

My general impression was that most of the visitors focused their energy mainly on dismissing the 7 habits as trivial. A colleague of mine put the criticism in a nutshell: "Steven R. Covey didn't reinvent the wheel either." My colleague was absolutely right, even though I couldn't appreciate her remark at the very moment she uttered it. Now, with the distance of time, it is easier to value her remark. As the requirements for being happy, content and successful are timeless, there was no need for reinventing the "wheel for life".

Steven R. Covey's 7 Habits are equally timeless. Moreover, they are insightful and useful for developing clarity. Yet, for getting yourself committed it needs more than clarity. Knowledge is only powerful if applied. It is rather pointless to know that being proactive is the precondition for evolving along the 7 Habits maturity continuum if this wisdom is not applied.

According to the German philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer (22 February 1788 – 21 September 1860) man can do what they want but they cannot want what they want³. I strongly recommend not giving a flying flamingo about what Schopenhauer said and to take (pro)action anyway. Don't give in to a gloomy, hopeless determinism. It's pathetic.

Just set yourself up emotionally to get yourself committed. Start with small goals and gradually develop your mental power to learn and to exercise. Never cease working on your people skills and stay green, that is, never stop learning and sharpening your saw.

That way, you can make it onto the success and happiness track – evolving along the 7 Habits maturity continuum fully capable of handling interdependence. Take your goal buddies, your partner, family and friends with you on your journey, get into the flow of things, overcome your fears⁴, try to gather insights, feed your spirit, exercise (start with 50 push-ups combined with 50 deep squats today), pray if you like, try to solve the Rubik's Cube, read a book, don't take yourself and life in general too seriously⁵ and laugh a lot – otherwise it's all wasted.

³ http://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Arthur_Schopenhauer: "Man can do what he wants but he cannot want what he wants."

⁴ When it's about overcoming fears I'd like to recommend Susan Jeffers book "Feel The Fear And Do It Anyway".

⁵ At this point I would like to quote Oscar Wilde: "Life is too important to be taken seriously." and Regina Brett: "Don't take yourself so seriously. No one else does!!"

The Spiritual Dimension

Renewing the spiritual dimension provides leadership to your life. It's highly related to Habit 2. The spiritual dimension is your core, your center, your commitment to your value system. It's a very private area of life and a supremely important one. It draws upon the sources that inspire and uplift you and tie you to the timeless truths of all humanity. And people do it very, very differently.

In find renewal in daily prayerful meditation on the scriptures because they represent my value system. As I read and meditate, I feel renewed, strengthened, centered and recommitted to serve.

Immersion in great literature or great music can provide a similar renewal of the spirit for some. There are others who find it in the way they communicate with nature. Nature bequeaths its own blessing on those who immerse themselves in it. When you're able to leave the noise and the discord of the city and give yourself up to the harmony and rhythm of nature, you come back renewed. For a time, you're undisturbable, almost unflappable, until gradually the noise and the discord from outside start to invade that sense of inner peace.

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As we continue to grow and mature, we become increasingly aware that all of nature is interdependent, that there is an ecological system that governs nature, including society. We further discover that the higher reaches of our nature have to do with our relationships with others — that human life also is interdependent.

THE SEVEN HABITS OF HIGHLY EFFECTIVE PEOPLE, STEVEN R. COVEY

thehappinessinvesther.com

The 8th Habit	The central idea of the book is the need for steady recovery and application of the whole person paradigm, which holds that persons have four intelligences - physical, intellectual, emotional and spiritual. Denial of any of them reduces individuals to things, inviting many problems. WIKIPEDIA
The 8th Habit	The 8th Habit: From Effectiveness to Greatness is a book written by Stephen R. Covey, published in 2004. It is a follow-up to The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People, first published in 1989. WIKIPEDIA

alternately	ABWECHSELND <i>in a way that involves two things happening or existing one after the other repeatedly:</i> The film is alternately depressing and amusing. /ɒl' tʃ: .nət.li/
bequeath	VERMACHEN VERERBEN <i>to arrange for money or property to be given to somebody after your death:</i> Her father bequeathed her the family fortune in his will.
comfort	<i>to make someone feel less worried, unhappy, or upset, for example by saying kind things to them or touching them:</i> Within hours of the news, Helen arrived to comfort her heartbroken friend.
culmination	<i>the point at which an event or series of events ends, having developed until it reaches this point:</i> Winning first prize was the culmination of years of practice and hard work.
dismiss	<i>to decide that something or someone is not important and not worth considering:</i> I think he'd dismissed me as an idiot within five minutes of meeting me.
divergent	<i>different or becoming different from something else:</i> They hold widely divergent opinions on controversial issues like abortion.

entail	ZUR FOLGE HABEN <i>to make something necessary, or to involve something:</i> Repairing the roof will entail spending a lot of money.
immutable	<i>never changing or impossible to change:</i> This decision should not be seen as immutable.
interdependence	<i>the fact of depending on each other:</i> People should acknowledge their interdependence with others and with the earth itself.
metaphor	<i>an expression, often found in literature, that describes a person or object by referring to something that is considered to have similar characteristics to that person or object:</i> "The mind is an ocean" and "the city is a jungle" are both metaphors. Metaphor and simile are the most commonly used figures of speech in everyday language.
paradigm	<i>a typical example or model of something:</i> The West used to be the paradigm of economic success.
perception	<i>the quality of being aware of things through the physical senses, especially sight:</i> Drugs can alter your perception of reality.
reinvent the wheel	to waste time trying to create something that someone else has already created
renowned	known and admired by a lot of people, especially for a special skill, achievement, or quality SYN famous
simile	<i>(the use of) an expression comparing one thing with another, always including the words "as" or "like":</i> The lines "She walks in beauty, like the night..." from Byron's poem contain a simile. / 'sɪm.ɪ.li/
sportsperson	<i>someone who takes part in sports or a sport:</i> Muscles and joints in the arms and legs suffer too, as every sportsperson knows.
that is (to say)	SPRICH DAS HEISST <i>said when you want to give further details or be more exact about something:</i> I'll meet you in the city, that is, I will if the trains are running.
unflappable	UNERSCHÜTTERLICH <i>not likely to get worried, nervous, or angry even in difficult situations:</i> She's totally unflappable - you have to be when working in such a high-pressure environment.