



# THE 7 HABITS OF HIGHLY EFFECTIVE PEOPLE BY STEPHEN R. COVEY

A Book Summary from Virtual Done Well

## About the Author: Stephen R. Covey

Once placed by Time Magazine among the 25 most influential Americans, Stephen R. Covey was an educator, keynote speaker, and businessperson. He was also the author of a number of highly acclaimed self-improvement books, including *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, which remains a bestseller today, nearly 30 years after its first publication. Dr. Covey's ideas and guidance have been a source of inspiration for millions of business professionals, parents, and educators all over the world.

# THE 7 HABITS OF HIGHLY EFFECTIVE PEOPLE: THE SUMMARY

## HABIT 1: BE PROACTIVE

Habit 1 is to change the way we think about our lives and the influences that act upon them. In effect, we can be architects of our own lives, but only by filtering out all the things over which we have no control, and focusing continually on the things we can.

In developing this habit, we must also learn that **we have a choice in the way we respond** to stimuli. Covey suggests thinking of the word responsible in a different way. He says we should equate responsibility with *response-ability*. In other words, we can respond to stimuli in any number of ways, and the way we choose to respond will have a direct effect on the consequences. To become more effective, we must take advantage of this and pick the responses most likely to deliver **positive outcomes**.

## HABIT 2: BEGIN WITH THE END IN MIND



If we can change our paradigms and begin to be proactive in shaping our lives, Habit 2 is the one that will help us to do the shaping. The first step is to build a vision of the future—of your **destination and goals**. This is what Covey means when he talks about beginning with the end in mind.

However, to be effective, you should take care in choosing the **bases upon which you make decisions** for your future. Instead of centering your decisions on work, pleasure, family, friends, enemies, your spouse, money, possessions, church, or self, **you must identify and adopt principles** that matter most to you, and **become centred** on those.

The next step is to define a **set of personal values** that fit within the framework of the principles. Further steps in the development of this habit (begin with the end in mind) include:

- Identifying the roles that you wish to play in the course of your life;
- Setting goals for achievement in each of the identified roles;
- Writing a mission statement incorporating your principles, values, functions, and goals;
- Reading and committing to the mission statement on a daily basis;
- Reviewing, adjusting, and developing your mission statement frequently.



## HABIT 3: PUT FIRST THINGS FIRST

While the first two habits are concerned with acquiring a direction and destination in life, the adoption of Habit 3 will begin to give you the means to **get where you wish to go**—and to do so efficiently. The habit is primarily to **develop a productivity system** that **shifts emphasis away from urgent and unimportant tasks**, which obstruct productivity, and on to non-urgent, but important ones, which tend to deliver outcomes that propel us definitively toward our goals.

Adoption of this habit requires a **new approach to prioritisation** based on two fundamental paradigms. The first is the **[P][PC] Paradigm**, which prioritises the development of **performance capability** over performance itself.

The second is the **Q2 Paradigm**, which addresses the need to reduce the time you spend on urgent and unimportant tasks, and **increase time spent on important, non-urgent ones**. Habit 3 also requires that you develop a disciplined approach to planning on both a daily and weekly basis.

## HABIT 4: THINK WIN-WIN

Habits 1 to 3 focus very much on developing and managing oneself to become more **effective**. Habit 4 represents the first step towards being effective in your **interaction with others**. Covey states that any time you move from an **independent role** (covered by Habits 1 to 3) into an **interdependent one** (in which you interact with others) you are entering the realms of leadership, because you are in a position where you can influence other people.

To be effective in interdependent environments, you will need to develop the habit of **seeking win-win outcomes** in any instance where agreements are necessary. To facilitate this approach, you must become **relationship-focused**, which means **building emotional capital** in your interactions with others.



The keys to building emotional capital are as follows:

- Understand the individual;
- When making commitments, be sure that you can honour them;
- Make goals and roles explicit, and avoid implicit ones;
- Exercise personal integrity;
- When you are wrong, admit it quickly and emphatically, and apologise sincerely;
- Pay attention to the little things: Extend small courtesies and kindnesses when you can.

## HABIT 5: SEEK FIRST TO UNDERSTAND, THEN TO BE UNDERSTOOD

If you wish to achieve win-win situations, it is essential that you **know what constitutes a win for the other party or parties involved**. The only way you can do this is to listen. Habit 5 though, is about learning to hear in a way that many people are never able to achieve. It's called *empathic listening* and is something you will need to put plenty of work into if you are to do it successfully.

People tend to apply four different levels of listening. The first level is to **ignore**, or not listen at all. The second is to **pretend to listen**. The third is to **listen selectively**, staying alert for specific cues. The fourth is to **listen actively**, and is the highest level that most of us achieve.

Empathic listening is, if you like, the fifth level. It is listening solely with the **intent to understand what is in the speaker's heart and mind**. Empathic listening is essential for the development of win-win outcomes, but it is hard to do because we are always tempted to **evaluate**, to **probe** from within our own set of perspectives, to **offer counsel**, and try to **interpret** in a way that fits with our paradigms. While these are all accepted components of active, attentive listening, they are counterproductive in **empathic listening**.



Empathic listening employs the use of silence, reflection (but purely to understand the speaker's emotions), and paraphrasing to confirm our understanding of what the speaker has told us. Only when you truly **understand the speaker's point of view**, should you reciprocate and present *your* perspectives and ideas, and seek to be understood.

## HABIT 6: SYNERGISE

All the habits covered by Covey up to this point, are, in part, preparations for Habit 6—the **creation of synergy**. Synergy is achieved when the **whole** of something becomes **greater than the sum of its parts**.

For example, if you believe a problem can be solved in a certain way and your colleague, spouse, boss, or peer believes in a solution that is different to yours, synergy might be achieved if the two of you **work together**, to arrive at other alternatives that will **solve the problem in an even better way**. Thus, you will have created synergy.

To be able to synergise on a consistent basis (a true hallmark of highly effective people), you will need to combine all the habits set out in this book, and also cast off the misconception that **differing paradigms** and points of view are inconveniences, and **see them instead as strengths**.

## HABIT 7: SHARPEN THE SAW

Highly effective people do not rest on their laurels. If you are prepared to put the work into developing Habits 1 to 6, then you owe it to yourself to maintain them for the long haul. To do this though, you need to **keep yourself sharp** in a physical, mental, spiritual, and emotional sense.

Stephen Covey concludes his book with some guidance for sharpening the saw. They include ideas for building and maintaining **physical endurance, flexibility, and strength**, suggestions to stay mentally sharp through **reading, writing, and visualising**, advice for **finding inner peace** and calm to maintain spiritual sharpness, and tips to remain emotionally and socially sharp, which typically involve practicing the **relationship-building and accumulation of emotional capital** discussed in Habit 4.

## SUMMARY CONCLUSION

By developing the habits in this book, you will be **more independent and self-confident** and in your dealings with others, will be able to **win trust and cooperation**, and to **embrace differences** to synergise and build better relationships. The habits are all based on principles, so over time, will come to form the very basis of your character—but of course, you will need to continually **revise, renew, and internalise** the six habits as you develop, which you can do by applying the seventh habit of continually **sharpening the saw**.

## OTHER RESOURCES

**Virtual Done Well Blog**  
**Youtube Channel**

- [www.virtualdonewell.com/blog](http://www.virtualdonewell.com/blog)
- [www.youtube.com/VirtualDoneWell](http://www.youtube.com/VirtualDoneWell)

**“ To achieve goals  
you’ve never  
achieved before,  
you need to start  
doing things you’ve  
never done before. ”**

*— Stephen Covey*



[www.virtualdonewell.com](http://www.virtualdonewell.com)