

The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People explores a number of paradigms, principles and habits that can help you become more productive, whether that be as an individual, as part of an organisation or a business.

THE SEVEN HABITS OF HIGHLY EFFECTIVE PEOPLE BY STEPHEN R. COVEY | BOOK SUMMARY

PARADIGMS AND PRINCIPLES

On order to change a situation, you first have to change yourself. And to change yourself effectively, you first have to change your perception.

A Paradigm is the way we “see” the world – not in terms of our visual sense of sight, but in terms of perceiving, understanding, and interpreting. Paradigms are the source of our attitudes and behaviours. We cannot act with integrity outside of them. We simply cannot maintain wholeness if we talk and walk differently than we see.

The Power of a Paradigm Shift

Whether they shift us in positive or negative directions, whether they are instantaneous or developmental, Paradigm Shifts move us from one way of seeing the world to another. And those shifts create powerful change. Our paradigms, correct or incorrect, are the sources of our attitudes and behaviours, and ultimately our relationships with others.

A Paradigm Shift is the “a-ha” experience associated with finally perceiving or understanding some aspect of the world (or a circumstance) in a different way.

The Principle-centred Paradigm

Principles are natural laws that cannot be broken. While individuals may look at their own lives and interactions in terms of paradigms or maps emerging out of their experience and conditioning, these maps are not the territory. They are a “subjective reality,” only an attempt to describe the territory. The “objective reality,” or the territory itself, is composed of “lighthouse” principles that govern human growth and happiness – natural laws that are woven into the fabric of every civilized society throughout history and comprise the roots of every family and institution that has endured and prospered.

Principles of Growth and Change

In all of life, there are sequential stages of growth and development. Each step is important and each one takes time. No step can be skipped. Consequently, we sometimes look for a shortcut, expecting to be able to skip some of these vital steps in order to save time and effort and still reap the desired result. It is simply impossible to violate, ignore, or shortcut this development process. It is contrary to nature, and attempting to seek such a shortcut only results in disappointment and frustration.

The Way We See the Problem is the Problem

As we look around us and within us and recognize the problems created as we live and interact within the personality ethic, we begin to realize that these are deep, fundamental problems that cannot be solved on the superficial level on which they were created. We need a new level, a deeper level of thinking – a paradigm based on the principles that accurately describe the territory of effective human being and interacting – to solve these deep concerns.

THE SEVEN HABITS

Habits Defined

A habit is the intersection of knowledge, skill, and desire. Knowledge is the theoretical paradigm, the what to do and the why. Skill is the how to do. And desire is the motivation, the want to do. In order to make something a habit in our lives, we have to have all three.

Habit 1: Be Proactive

Proactivity - means more than merely taking initiative. It means that as human beings, we are responsible for our own lives. Our behaviour is a function of our decisions, not our conditions. We have the initiative and the responsibility to make things happen.

“Response-ability” – the ability to choose your response. Highly proactive people recognize that responsibility. They do not blame circumstances, conditions, or conditioning for their behaviour. Their behaviour is a product of their own conscious choice, based on values, rather than a product of their conditions, based on feeling.

Because we are, by nature, proactive, if our lives are a function of conditioning and conditions, it is because we have, by conscious decision or by default, chosen to empower those things to control us. In making such a choice, we become reactive. Reactive people are often affected by their physical environment. If the weather is good, they feel good. If it isn't, it affects their attitude and their performance.

Proactive people can carry their own weather with them. Whether it rains or shines makes no difference to them. They are value driven; and if their value is to produce good quality work, it isn't a function of whether the weather is conducive to it or not.

Proactive people are driven by values – carefully thought about, selected and internalized values. Proactive people are still influenced by external stimuli, whether physical, social, or psychological. But their response to the stimuli, conscious or unconscious, is a value-based choice or response.

Initiative - Our basic nature is to act, and not be acted upon. Taking initiative does not mean being pushy, obnoxious, or aggressive. It does mean recognizing our responsibility to make things happen.

Businesses, community groups, organizations of every kind can be proactive. They can combine the creativity and resourcefulness of proactive individuals to create a proactive culture within the organization.

Another excellent way to become more self-aware regarding our own degree of proactivity is to look at where we focus our time and energy. We each have a "Circle of Concerns" – our health, our children, problems at work, the national debt, nuclear war. These things over which we have no real control. Proactive people focus their efforts in what we call the Circle of Influence. They work on the things they can do something about.

Habit 2: Begin with the End in Mind

To Begin with the End in Mind means to start with a clear understanding of your destination. It means to know where you're going so that you better understand where you are now and so that the steps you take are always in the right direction. It's incredibly easy to get caught up in an activity trap - it is possible to be busy – very busy – without being very effective.

"Begin with the End in Mind" is based on the principle that all things are created twice. There's a mental or first creation, and a physical or second creation to all things. The extent to which you Begin with the End in Mind often determines whether or not you are able to create a successful enterprise. Most business failures begin in the first creation, with problems such as undercapitalization, misunderstanding of the market, or lack of a business plan.

The unique human capacities of self-awareness, imagination, and conscience enable us to examine first creations and make it possible for us to take charge of our own first creation, to write our own script.

Habit 2 is based on principles of personal leadership, which means that leadership is the first creation. Leadership is not management. Management is the second creation. But leadership has to come first. Management is a bottom-line focus: How can I best accomplish certain things? Leadership deals with the top line: What are the things I want to accomplish?

Through imagination, we can visualize the uncreated worlds of potential that lie within us. Through conscience, we can come in contact with universal laws or principles with our own singular talents and avenues of contribution, and with the personal guidelines within which we can most effectively develop them. Combined with self-awareness, these two endowments empower us to write our own script.

Develop a personal mission statement or philosophy or creed. It focuses on what you want to be (character) and to do (contributions and achievements) and on the values or principles upon which being and doing are based. Once you have that sense of mission, you have the essence of your own proactivity. You have the vision and the values which direct your life.

Habit 3: Put First Things First

Habit 3, is the second creation – the physical creation. It's the fulfilment, the actualization, the natural emergence of Habits 1 and 2.

The ability to manage well determines the quality and even the existence of the second creation. Management is the breaking down, the analysis, the sequencing, the specific application, the time-bound left-brain aspect of effective self-government.

In addition to self-awareness, imagination, and conscience, it is the fourth human endowment – independent will – that really makes effective self-management possible. It is the ability to make decisions and choices and to act in accordance with them. It is the ability to act rather than to be acted upon, to proactively carry out the program we have developed through the other three endowments.

Time Management has 4 'generations'. The first generation is characterized by notes and checklists, an effort to give recognition to the many demands placed on our time and energy. The second generations is characterized by calendars and appointment books, reflecting an attempt to look ahead and schedule events in the

future. The third generation reflects the current time-management field. It adds the important idea of prioritization, of clarifying values, and of comparing the relative worth of activities based on their relationship to those values. In addition, it focuses on setting goals – specific long-, intermediate-, and short-term targets toward which time and energy would be directed in harmony with values. It also includes the concept of daily planning, of making a specific plan to accomplish those goals and activities determined to be of greatest worth.

While the third generation has made a significant contribution, people have begun to realize that “efficient” scheduling and control of time are often counterproductive. There is an emerging fourth generation that is different in kind. It recognizes that “time management” is really a misnomer – the challenge is not to manage time, but to manage ourselves. Satisfaction is a function of expectation as well as realization. And expectation (and satisfaction) lie in our Circle of Influence. Rather than focusing on things and time, fourth-generation expectations focus on preserving and enhancing relationships and accomplishing results.

The fourth-generation tool recognizes that the first person you need to consider in terms of effectiveness rather than efficiency is yourself. It encourages you to spend time to understand and centre your life on principles, to give clear expression to the purposes and values you want to direct your daily decisions.

We accomplish all that we do through delegation – either to time or to other people. If we delegate to time, we think efficiency. If we delegate to other people, we think effectiveness. Many people refuse to delegate to other people because they feel it takes too much time and effort and they could do the job better themselves. But effectively delegating to others is perhaps the single most powerful high-leverage activity there is.

Habit 4: Think Win-Win

Win-win is not a technique; it's a total philosophy of human interaction. In fact, it is one of six paradigms of interaction. The alternative paradigms are win-lose, lose-win, lose-lose, win, and Win-Win or No Deal TM.

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.

Think Win-Win is the habit of interpersonal leadership. It involves the exercise of each of the unique human endowments – self-awareness, imagination, conscience, and independent will – in our relationships with others. It involves mutual learning, mutual influence, and mutual benefits. It takes great courage as well as consideration to create these mutual benefits, particularly if we're interacting with others who are deeply scripted in win-loss.

Win-win is not a personality technique. It's a total paradigm of human interaction. It comes from a character of integrity, maturity, and the Abundance Mentality. It grows out of high-trust relationships. It is embodied in agreements that effectively clarify and manage expectations as well as accomplishments. It thrives in supportive systems. And it is achieved through the process of Habits 5 and 6.

Habit 5: Seek First to Understand, Then to be understood

We have such a tendency to rush in, to fix things up with good advice. But we often fail to take the time to diagnose, to really, deeply understand the problem first. This principle is the key to effective interpersonal communication.

Communication is the most important skill in life. We spend most of our waking hours communicating. But consider this: You've spent years learning how to read and write, years learning how to speak. But what about listening?

If you want to interact effectively with someone, to influence them, you first need to understand them. If you want to be really effective in the habit of interpersonal communication, you have to build the skills of empathic listening on a base of character that inspires openness and trust.

"Seek first to understand" involves a very deep shift in paradigm. We typically seek first to be understood. Most people do not listen with the intent to understand; they listen with the intent to reply. They're either speaking or preparing to speak. They're filtering everything through their own paradigms, reading their autobiography into other people's lives.

Empathetic Listening - gets inside another person's frame of reference. You look out

through it, you see the world the way they see the world, you understand their paradigm, you understand how they feel. The essence of empathic listening is not that you agree with someone; it's that you fully, deeply, understand that person, emotionally as well as intellectually.

Empathic listening is also risky. It takes a great deal of security to go into a deep listening experience because you open yourself up to be influenced. You become vulnerable. It's a paradox, in a sense, because in order to have influence, you have to be influenced. That means you have to really understand.

As you learn to listen deeply to other people, you will discover tremendous differences in perception. You will also begin to appreciate the impact that these differences can have as people try to work together in interdependent situations.

When we really, deeply understand each other, we open the door to creative solutions and Third Alternatives. Our differences are no longer stumbling blocks to communication and progress. Instead, they become the stepping stones to synergy.

Habit 6: Synergize

When properly understood, synergy is the highest activity in all life – the true test and manifestation of all the other habits put together. Synergy is the essence of Principle-Centered Leadership. It is the essence of principle-centered parenting. It catalyzes, unifies, and unleashes the greatest powers within people.

What is synergy? Simply defined, it means that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. It means that the relationship which the parts have to each other is a part in and of itself. It is not only a part, but the most catalytic, the most empowering, the most unifying, and the most exciting part.

When you communicate synergistically, you are simply opening your mind and heart and expressions to new possibilities, new alternatives, new options. It may seem as if you are casting aside Habit 2 (to Begin with the End in Mind); but, in fact, you're doing the opposite – you're fulfilling it. You're not sure when you engage in synergistic communication how things will work out or what the end will look like, but you do have an inward sense of excitement and security and adventure, believing that it will be significantly better than it was before. And that is the end that you have in mind.

Once people have experienced real synergy, they are never quite the same again. They know the possibility of having other such mind-expanding adventures in the future. Synergy is exciting. Creativity is exciting. It's phenomenal what openness and communication can produce. The possibilities of truly significant gain, of significant improvement are so real that it's worth the risk such openness entails.

There are some circumstances in which synergy may not be achievable and no deal isn't viable. But even in these circumstances, the spirit of sincere trying will usually result in a more effective compromise.

Synergy works; it's a correct principle. It is the crowning achievement of all the previous habits. It is effectiveness in an interdependent reality – it is teamwork, team building, the development of unity and creativity with other human beings.

Habit 7: Sharpen the Saw

“Sharpen the Saw” means preserving and enhancing the greatest asset you have – you. It's renewing the four dimensions of your nature – physical, spiritual, mental, and social/emotional. To do this, we must be proactive.

This is the single most powerful investment we can ever make in life – investment in ourselves, in the only instrument we have with which to deal with life and to contribute. We are the instruments of our own performance, and to be effective, we need to recognize the importance of taking time regularly to sharpen the saw in all four ways.

The Physical Dimension: The physical dimension involves caring effectively for our physical body – eating the right kinds of foods, getting sufficient rest and relaxation, and exercising on a regular basis.

The Spiritual Dimension: The spiritual dimension is your core, your centre, 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 whether that be meditation, experiencing nature or yoga.

The Mental Dimension: Most of our mental development and study discipline comes through formal education. But as soon as we leave the external discipline of school, many of us let our minds atrophy. Education – continuing education, continually honing and expanding the mind – is vital mental renewal. Sometimes that involves the external discipline of the classroom or systematized study programs; more often it does not. Proactive people can figure out many, many ways to educate themselves. It is extremely valuable to train the mind to stand apart and examine its own program.

The Social/Emotional Dimension: These dimensions of our lives are tied together because our emotional life is primarily, but not exclusively, developed out of and manifested in our relationships with others. Renewing our social/emotional

dimension does not take time in the same sense that renewing the other dimensions does. We can do it in our normal everyday interactions with other people. But it definitely requires exercise.

Most people are a function of the social mirror, scripted by the opinions, the perceptions, the paradigms of the people around them. As interdependent people, you realise that we are a part of that social mirror. Choose to reflect back to others a clear, undistorted vision of themselves.

The self-renewal process must include balanced renewal in all four dimensions of our nature: the physical, the spiritual, the mental, and the social/emotional. 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. To neglect any one area negatively impacts the rest.