

The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People

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What follows is a plan for building true, enduring success. It is not a handbook of tricks or techniques. It is a guide for strengthening your character. Character alone will give you the consistent energy and know-how to pursue opportunity and the courage to prevail against the challenges you will face. Our character, basically, is a composite of our habits. Because they are consistent, often unconscious patterns, habits constantly express our character and produce our effectiveness - or our ineffectiveness. In the words of Aristotle, "We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence, then, is not an act, but a habit".

I identify here seven habits shared by all truly effective people. Fortunately, for those of us not born effective (no one is), these habits can be learned.

The Two Sides of Success

Aesop's Fable, "The Goose and the Golden Egg", is the story of a poor farmer who one day visits the nest of his goose and finds at her side a glittering golden egg. Though he suspects it to be a trick, he decides to take it home where he learns to his delight that the egg is actually pure gold. Every morning thereafter the farmer gathers one golden egg from the nest of the goose, and soon become fabulously wealthy. As he grows rich, however, he also grows greedy and impatient with the output of the goose. In an attempt to get at once all the gold in the goose, he kills and opens it, only to find nothing.

The moral of this old fable has a modern ring to it. Like the foolish farmer, we often emphasize short-term results (golden eggs) at the expense of long-term prosperity (the goose). Indeed, it seems that we are often more concerned with doing things right (efficiency) than with doing the right things (effectiveness). In his attempt to be efficient, the farmer became grossly ineffective; he destroyed his capability for getting desired results.

Habits are patterns of behaviour composed of three overlapping components: knowledge, attitude, and skill. Because these are learned rather than inherited, our habits constitute our second nature, not our first. We are not stuck with our current habits; hence, we should avoid defining ourselves in terms of our habits, characteristics, and reactive tendencies. Habits of effectiveness can be learned, habits of ineffectiveness unlearned.

Successful people daily weave habits of effectiveness into their lives. Often, they are internally motivated by a strong sense of mission. By subordinating their dislike for certain tasks, they develop the following

seven habits and discipline their lives in accordance with fundamental principles.

These habits are interrelated, interdependent, and sequential. **The first three are habits of character; they will help you achieve the daily private victory and progress from a state of dependence to independence. The next three are the outward expressions of character and lead to interdependence, mutual benefit, and public victories. The seventh habit renews the goose and sustains the growth process.** If there is not deep integrity and fundamental goodness behind what you do, the challenges of life will cause true motives to surface, and human relationship failure will replace short-term success. As Emerson once put it, "What you are shouts so loudly in my ears I cannot hear what you say".

Changing our habits to improve what we are can be a painful process. It must be motivated by a higher purpose, and by the willingness to subordinate what you think you want now for what you know you want later.

As you open the gates of change to give yourself new habits, be patient with yourself. This is not a quick fix. But I assure you that you will see immediate benefits. And if you see the whole picture clearly, you'll have the perseverance to see the process to its conclusion. Have faith – it is worth the effort.

HABIT 1: BE PROACTIVE

You won't find it in an ordinary dictionary, but the word is common now in management literature: **Proactivity means more than just taking the initiative. It means that as human beings, we are responsible for our own lives.**

The habit of being proactive, or the habit of personal vision, means taking responsibility for our attitudes and actions. It's more instructive to break the word "responsibility" into two parts: response/ability. Proactive people develop the ability to choose their response, making them more a product of their values and decisions than their moods and conditions.

Many behavioural scientists have built reactive stimulus-response models of human behaviour based on studies of animals and neurotic people. Relatively little research has been conducted with healthy, creative, proactive people who exercise the freedom to choose their response to any given internal or external state.

Being proactive means recognising our responsibility to make things happen. People who end up with the good jobs are those who seize the initiative to do whatever is necessary, consistent with correct principles, to get the job done.

The more we exercise our freedom to choose our response/ability, the more proactive we become. The key is to be a light, not a judge; a model, not a critic; a programmer, not a program; to feed opportunities, stave problems; to keep promises, not make excuses; and to focus upon our immediate circle of influence, not upon the large circle of concern.

You can find a clue to whether you now have the proactive habit by looking at how you speak. Do you find yourself using these expressions?

Reactive Language

There's nothing I can do.
That's just the way I am.
What can I do?
She makes me so mad.
They won't allow that.
I have to do that.
I can't.
I must.
If only...

Proactive Language

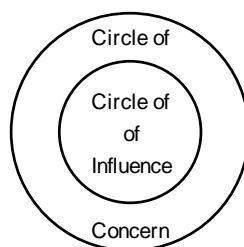
Let's look at our alternatives.
I can choose a different approach.
What can I do?
I control my own responses.
I feel angry.
I can respond appropriately.
I choose.
I prefer.
I will.

For all of us, there are many things that concern us that we can't do anything about, for now. But there are also things we can do. Proactive people work on their circle of influence - the people and things they can reach - and spend less energy on their much wider circle of concern. By keeping their focus on their circle of influence, they actually extend its area.

Proactive focus

Two kinds of issues occupy our minds: those we can control and those we can't. Reactive people waste energy worrying about the things they can't change - in their Circle of Concern: other people's weaknesses or other problems in their environment.

Proactive people focus their thoughts and actions on the things they can do something about - things falling within their Circle of Influence. By continually focusing their efforts on results, proactive people expand this inner circle.



As you become more proactive, you will make mistakes. The proactive approach to a mistake is to acknowledge it instantly, correct it, and learn from it. To delay, to deny the mistake, is to miss its lesson.

Try this exercise for 30 days:

- 1. Work only in your smaller circle of influence.**
- 2. Make small commitments to yourself and others, and keep them:**
- 3. Be a light, not a judge; be a model, not a critic; be the solution, not the problem.**

If you start to think some important problem in your life is "out there somewhere", stop yourself. That thought itself is the problem.

HABIT 2: BEGIN WITH THE END IN MIND

The second habit of effectiveness is to begin with the end in mind:

It means to know where you're going so as to understand where you are now, and take your next step in the right direction. It is amazingly easy to get caught up in an activity trap in the 'busyness' of life, to work harder and harder at climbing the ladder of success only to discover it is leaning against the wrong wall. We may be very efficient by working frenetically and heedlessly, but we will be effective only when we begin with the end result in mind.

This is the habit of personal leadership, meaning to begin each day with a clear understanding of your desired direction and destination. Management is more concerned with efficiency and speed along that course.

The best way to start is to develop a personal mission statement.

It describes what we want to be (character) and to do (achievements). The following is from my friend Rolfe Kerr's personal mission statement:

- **Succeed at home first**
- **Seek and merit divine help**
- **Remember the people involved**
- **Develop one new proficiency a year**
- **Hustle while you wait**
- **Keep a sense of humour.**

You could call a personal mission statement a sort of written constitution - its power lies in the fact that it is fundamentally changeless. The key to living with change around you is retaining a sense of who you are and what you value.

Start developing your mission statement, like Kerr's from a core of principles. I mention this because all of us are drawn away from real effectiveness when we make our centre something other than principles.

We want to centre our lives on correct principles. Unlike other centres based on people and things subject to frequent change, correct principles don't change. We can depend on them.

Your mission statement may take you some weeks to write, from first draft to final form: **it is a concise expression of your inner most values and directions.** Even then you will want to review it regularly and make minor changes as the years bring new insights.

Be guided by Viktor Frankl, who says we detect rather than invent our mission in life: ***"Every one has his own specific vocation in life.... Therein he cannot be replaced, nor can his life be repeated"***.

Effective people realise that things are created mentally before they are created physically. They write a mission or purpose statement and use it as a frame of reference for making future decisions. They clarify values and set priorities before selecting goals and going about their work.

Ineffective people allow old habits, other people, and environmental conditions to dictate this first creation.

The second or physical creation follows from the first, just as a building from a blue print. If the design is good, the construction will go faster and better. Quality, after all, cannot be inspected into a product; it must be designed and built into it from the beginning.

HABIT 3: PUT FIRST THINGS FIRST

Question: *What one thing could you do - which you aren't doing now - that if you did it regularly, would make tremendous difference in your business or personal life?*

The next habit involves self-leadership and self-management: putting first things first. Leadership decides what the "first things" are, and management puts them first on a daily basis. **Management is the discipline of carrying out your programme.**

As Peter Drucker has pointed out, the expression "**time management**" **is something of a misnomer. We have a constant amount of time, no matter what we do: the challenge we face is to manage ourselves. To be an effective manager of yourself, you must organise and execute around priorities.**

Instead of trying to fit all the things of our lives into the time allotted, as many time-management plans do, our focus here is on enhancing relationships and achieving results.

We all face the same dilemma. We are caught between the urgent and the important.

Something urgent requires immediate attention, it's usually visible, and it presses on us, but may not have any bearing on our long-term goals.

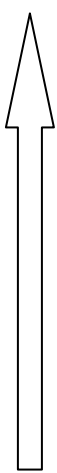
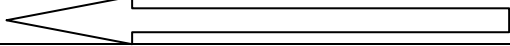
Important things, on the other hand, have to do with results - they contribute to our mission, our values, and our high-priority goals.

We react to urgent matters: we often must choose to act to take care of important matters, even as urgent things scream for our attention.

People get "harried" away from their real goals and values by subordinating the important to the urgent; some are beaten up by problems (in quadrants I and III on the "Time-Management Matrix") all day, every day. Their only relief is in escaping once in a while to the calm waters of quadrant IV.

To paraphrase Drucker again, **effective people don't solve problems - they pursue opportunities. They feed opportunities and starve problems. They have genuine quadrant I emergencies, but by thinking and acting preventively, they keep their number down.**

With the time-management quadrants in mind, consider the question you answered at the beginning of this section. **What quadrant do your answers fit in? My guess is quadrant II: deeply important, but not urgent.** And because they aren't urgent, you don't do them.

Important 	Quadrant I. Activities Important and urgent	Quadrant II. Activities Important not urgent
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Crises • Pressing problems • Deadline driven projects 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Crisis prevention • Values clarification • Preparation & planning • Relationship building • Renewal & evaluation
	Quadrant III. Activities Urgent not important	Quadrant IV. Activities Not urgent and not important
	Urgent 	

Quadrant II activities are very powerful, because they are closely tied to results. Your effectiveness will increase dramatically with a small increase in those activities: your crises will be fewer and smaller.

To say "yes" to important things requires you to say "no" to other activities, some of them urgent. Keep in mind that you are always saying "no" to something. If it isn't to the urgent things in your life it's probably to the more fundamental, important things.

To pursue quadrant II:

- Identify your key roles: business, family, social, interests - whatever comes to mind as important. Think of those you will act in for the coming week.
- Think of two or three important results you feel you should accomplish in each role during the next seven days. At least some of these goals should be quadrant II activities.
- Look at the week ahead with your goals in mind, and block out the time each day to achieve them. Once your key goals are in place, look how much time you have left for everything else! How well you succeed will depend on how resilient and determined you are at defending your most important priorities.

HABIT 4: THINK WIN-WIN

Win-win is the habit of interpersonal leadership. In families and businesses, effectiveness is largely achieved through the co-operative efforts of two or more people. Marriages and other partnerships are interdependent realities, and yet people often approach these relationships with an independent mentality, which is like trying to play golf with a tennis racket - the tool isn't suited to the sport.

Win-win is the attitude of seeking mutual benefit. Win-win thinking begins with a commitment to explore all options until a mutually satisfactory solution is reached, or to make no deal at all. It begins with an abundance mentality, a belief that by synergistically increasing the "pie", there are pieces enough for everybody. People with scarcity mentalities believe there is only enough for the best; they seek win-lose solutions. And people who are kind but lack courage, usually end up with the lose-win leftovers. **Effective people model the win-win principle in their relationships and agreements.**

All the other possibilities - win/lose (I win, you lose), lose/win (I lose, you win), and lose/lose - are ineffective, either in the short term or the long term.

The best way to approach win/win dealing is to remember that it (like all agreements) embodies a caveat: The complete description is "win/win - or no deal". Your attitude should be: "I want to win, and I want you to

win. If we can't hammer something out under those conditions, let's agree that we won't make a deal this time. Maybe we'll make one in the future".

Using the paradigm of win/win requires three traits.

- Integrity - We define integrity as the value we place on ourselves: We need to be self-aware, within an independent will. We make and keep meaningful promises and commitments to ourselves and others.
- Maturity - This is the balance between courage and consideration. Simply put, you must have enough empathy and goodwill to work for a win for your counterpart, and enough courage to make a win for yourself.
- Abundance Mentality - You must know and believe that there is plenty out there for everybody. Many people don't: they think that to succeed themselves, others must fail. They harbour secret hopes that other people suffer misfortune - not terrible misfortune, but acceptable misfortune that will keep them in their place. The Abundance Mentality recognises that possibilities for growth and success are potentially limitless, and sees in others the opportunity to complement its own strengths.

Win/win is a powerful management tool. Drucker recommends using the "manager's letter" to define the performance agreement between boss and employee. After a thorough discussion of expectations, guidelines, and resources, the employee writes a letter to the manager summarising the discussion and setting the date for the following review.

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

The fifth habit is the habit of **communication, one of the master skills in life**, the key to building win-win relationships, and the essence of professionalism. Doctors diagnose before they prescribe; top sales people pre-assess needs and sell solutions to problems, not just products.

We see the world as we are, not as it is. Our perceptions come out of our experiences. To make this point in the seminar, I divide the audience in half and show one half a drawing of a young girl and the other half a drawing of an old woman. Everyone then sees a composite illustration.

Invariably, those who are conditioned to see the young girl see her in the composite drawing and those conditioned otherwise see the old woman. As people from both sides interact, they sometimes question the credibility (or sanity) of those who see it differently.

Most credibility problems begin with perception differences. To resolve these differences and to restore credibility, one must exercise empathy, seeking first to understand the point of view of the other person.

The most important word to know in mastering this habit is "listen". Listen to your colleagues, family, friends, and customers - but not with intent to reply, to convince, to manipulate. Listen simply to understand, to see how the other party sees things.

The skill to develop here is empathy. Empathy is not sympathy. Sympathy is a form of agreement, a judgement. The essence of empathetic listening is not that you agree with someone: it's that you fully understand him, emotionally and intellectually.

Empathetic listening is with the ears, eyes, and heart - for feeling, for meaning. It's powerful because it gives you accurate data to work with, instead of projecting and assuming your own thoughts and motives. You can only work with someone productively if you understand what really matters most to that person.

Hammering emotionally rooted problems by probing is often counterproductive. Evaluation, empathy, and advising are also ineffective as a means of gaining understanding and influence - but they may have value once the other person feels understood.

HABIT 6: SYNERGISE

This is the habit of creative co-operation or teamwork. For those who have a win-win abundance mentality and exercise empathy, differences in any relationship can produce synergy.

Properly understood, synergy is the highest activity of life. Through it, we create new, untapped alternatives - things that didn't yet exist. We unleash people's greatest powers. We make a whole greater than the sum of its parts.

Synergy results from valuing differences by bringing different perspectives together in the spirit of mutual respect. People then feel free to seek the best possible alternative, often the "third alternative", one that is substantially different and better than either of the original proposals.

Synergy is the human resource approach to problem solving as opposed to a "please or appease" human relations approach. Insecure people tend to make others over in their own image, and surround themselves with people who think similarly. They mistake uniformity for unity, sameness for oneness. Real oneness means complementarity.

The basis of synergy is that two people can disagree, and both can be right. It's not logical. It's psychological. I was hired to lead discussion at the annual two-day planning meeting for top executives of a big insurance company. The usual pattern was to discuss major issues chosen through a questionnaire. Past meetings had been generally respectful exchanges, and on occasion they deteriorated into win/lose ego battles. They were usually predictable and boring.

I convinced them to commission several executives to write anonymous "white papers" which were passed out to all executives ahead of time, so they could immerse themselves in the differing points of view.

By removing the need to be polite (and uncreative) and the threat of other egos (since papers were anonymous), the release of creative energy was incredible. The executives generated new ideas and insights, and quickly made all the white papers obsolete. Most interesting, a new, common vision for the company and its mission began to form before our eyes.

Once people have experienced real synergy, they are never quite the same again. They know that the possibility of such mind-expanding adventures always exists. The device that opens us to synergy's power depends on the use of all the habits at once, requiring confidence, integrity, and empathy. It's all embodied in one crucial ability; to value and exploit the mental, emotional, and psychological differences between people.

HABIT 7: SHARPEN THE SAW

This is the habit of self-renewal. As the farmer in the fable learned from sad experience, success has two sides: the goose, which represents production capability (PC) and the golden egg, the production (P) of desired results.

Suppose you come upon a man in the woods feverishly sawing down a tree. "You look exhausted!" you exclaim. "How long have you been at it?" "Over five hours" he replies. "And I'm beat. This is hard". "Maybe you could take a break for a few minutes and sharpen that saw. Then the work would go faster". "No time" the man says emphatically, "I'm too busy sawing".

Habit seven is taking time to sharpen the saw (you're the saw). It's the habit that makes all the others possible.

It's wise to keep both sides in balance. Yet when people get busy producing or "sawing", they rarely take time to sharpen the saw because maintenance seldom pays dramatic immediate dividends.

The habit of sharpening the saw regularly means having a balanced, systematic program for self-renewal in the four areas of our lives:

- **Physical** - exercise, nutrition, stress management:
- **Mental** - reading, visualising, planning, writing:
- **Social/Emotional** - service, empathy, synergy, security:
- **Spiritual** - spiritual reading, study and meditation.

To exercise in all these necessary dimensions, we must be proactive. No one can do it for us or make it urgent for us: it is a quadrant II activity.

Without this discipline, the body becomes weak, the mind mechanical, the emotions raw, the spirit insensitive and the person selfish.

It's the law of the harvest; we reap as we sow. We will enjoy a successful harvest if we cultivate these seven habits of effectiveness and live in accordance with the underlying principles.

Adapted from:

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