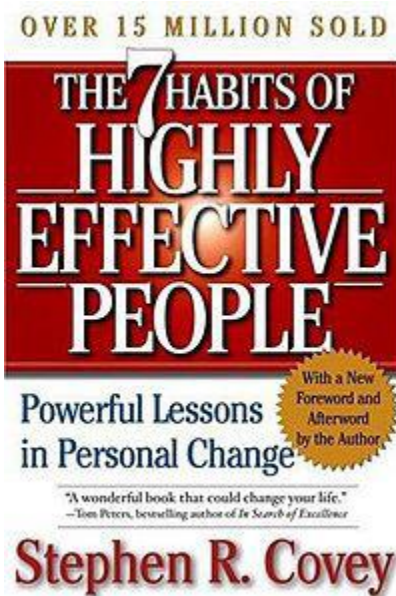


How Do We Become a Transitional Person?

Steven Eliason



Abstract

We are governed by our habits. Some of us become slaves to our habits. However, throughout our life we are forced to change our habits, and if we do change our habits to meet the challenge before us, we will become more effective in our dealing with others in both interpersonal and international contacts. Stephen R. Covey's *7 Habits of Highly Effective People* present insightful suggestions to become effective people. Although the book was written many years ago (1989), the suggestions offered by Covey are still valid and have proven effective.

Key words: Steven Covey, habits, effective people.

Absorbing Information and Knowledge from Others as Our Own

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Around 25 years ago my brother-in-law introduced me to a book that had tremendously impacted him in his role at his family's greeting card company business. When I returned home after several years of my social and religious work in the Philippines, reading a business-oriented book seemed like a refreshing change of pace from my long stay and work in the Philippines. I found the perspective and context of business effectiveness could be applied both personally and professionally. That book was Stephen R. Covey's *7 Habits of Highly Effective People*. Reading it again after so long surprised me; it contained ideas and principles which I believed, but which I had long forgotten the source. We all receive knowledge and information from as it becomes an integral part of our life, we may totally forget the original source which enlightened us!



Steve Covey (1932-2012)

Courtesy: <http://www.npr.org/blogs/thetwo-way/2012/07/16/156853201/stephen-covey-author-of-7-habits-dead-at-79>

Paradigms and Principles

Part one describes paradigms and principles associated with the objective of the book – how to effectively bring about change. What immediately struck me was the correlation between these deeply imbedded perceptions and the concept of worldview. Speaking of these perceptions, Covey says, “It taught me that we must look AT the lens through which we see the world, as well as at the world we see, and that the lens itself shapes how we interpret the world” (p.17).

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Worldview as a Lens

The idea of worldview as a lens with which we view the world is described both in secular and religious or spiritual terms. Charles Kraft (p.287. Winter, Ralph (Editor). *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement*. Pasadena, CA:Wm.Carey Library, 1999), for example, suggests this: “There are two realities, REALITY as God sees and perceptual reality as we with human limitations see (1 Cor.13:12). Our worldview provides us with the lens, model or map by of which we perceive, interpret, structure and respond to God’s REALITY.” Our perceptual realities, we all know, are diverse, could be in conflict with each other, and potentially be competitive. Realities are also graded in terms of their acceptance, values expressed, and so on.

Covey also compares the power of a paradigm to two types of maps: “Maps of the way things are, or realities, and maps of the way things should be, or values.” (p.24) A “realities” map addresses the deep metaphysical questions everyone has answers for, but are rarely aware of; this is what worldviews do. Paul G. Hiebert (p.375, Winter, Ralph (Editor), *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement*, Pasadena, CA: Wm.Carey Library, 1999) has described culture (worldview being a culture’s foundation) as someone’s “mental map of their world;” it is the way one understands reality.

Right Maps and Wrong Maps

Covey draws attention to the power of this paradigm, noting that behavior and attitude can be changed, but if you have the wrong map you will still be lost. He uses the illustration of using a map of Detroit to find your way around Chicago; because it doesn’t accurately reflect reality, you will never find your way.

The other map Covey describes, the “values” map, represents the shared understanding about what is right and wrong (for the Westerner), what is honorable or shameful (for the Easterner) or what produces peace or conflict (for the animist). The ideas about “the way things should be” are normally derived from the “realities” map and reflect an individual’s or group’s morality. Covey doesn’t spend much time directing us to a particular source for these values,

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although as a Mormon, he does give several indicators along the way of his “realities” map through the stories he shares. In other words, the celebrated author also could not escape from his assumed or inherited worldview. We are all in the same situation. Business executives, politicians and statesmen, innovators, diplomats and so on start with their inherited worldview. Some struggle hard to realize this fact. Some are unable to change their worldview to have an intimate look into and experience of the worldview assumed by their international collaborators and competitors. We need to recognize that we can change our inherited or taught worldview based on the exigencies we encounter. But, for this, we also need to integrate flexibility as an important element in the world view we assume to possess.

The illustration given for demonstrating the importance of perspective is a drawing believed to be one of the oldest optical illusions on record, drawn in Germany in the 1880’s. Students were divided into two groups; one group was exposed to a version of a drawing that looked more like a young woman, the other to a similar drawing, but one that looked more like an old woman. After looking at these, the two groups were brought together and shown a composite drawing, one less distinctly like either an old or young woman. Nearly everyone who first looked at the drawing of a young woman saw a young woman in the composite, and nearly everyone who first looked at the drawing of an old woman saw an old woman in the composite.

Not Logical, But Psychological

Covey’s conclusion was that “two people can see the same thing, disagree, and yet both be right. It’s not logical; it’s psychological.” (p.27) His point is that each interpretation of “facts” is based on experience, and these facts don’t have meaning without interpretation. He is building a case for the importance of recognizing existing paradigms that govern human effectiveness instead of focusing on simply changing attitudes and behavior which is the flaw of most contemporary approaches.

Character Ethic

Covey proposes a “Character Ethic” based on the idea that there are objective principles which govern effectiveness. “A deeper level of thinking – a paradigm based on the principles

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that accurately describe the territory of effective human being and interacting...is what Seven Habits of Highly Effective People is about. It's a principle-centered, character-based, 'inside-out' approach to personal and interpersonal effectiveness." (p.42)

Importance of Habits

The next section deals with an overview of the importance of habits. I used a maxim found here as the outline for a serendipitous speaking opportunity in our village. The priest failed to show for the fiesta, and apparently I was viewed as the next most religious person there, so they asked me to speak! Here is my outline found in this book: "Sow a thought, reap an action; sow an action, reap a habit; sow a habit, reap a character; sow a character, reap a destiny." (p.46) I also wrote this out for my friends in the Services department when I worked there, and it is still hanging on the door.

The power of habits, good or bad, bridge our daily thoughts and actions to our ultimate character and destiny. Covey defines a habit as "the intersection of knowledge (what & why), skill (how), and desire (want)" (p.47). To be effective as a leader our habits must move us from dependence to independence to interdependence. Without this progression, which begins with one's self not the problem or circumstance, true effectiveness is impossible.

How Do We Define Effectiveness?

Effectiveness also needs definition, and Covey describes it as a function of the P/PC balance (P-Production of desired results, PC-Production Capability). If one focuses too much on production, short-term gains sacrifice longevity because the assets that produce are lost. If one focuses too much on the assets (physical, financial and human), insufficient production means that the purpose for those assets is not achieved.

The First Habit

The first habit is the first of three categorized as one's "Private Victory." These are chronological, so this first habit truly starts where one must start. Habit one is "Be Proactive – Principles of Personal Virtue." Being proactive is only possible if one recognizes that "because

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of the unique human capacity of self-awareness, we can examine our paradigms to determine whether they are reality- or principle-based, or if they are a function of conditioning and conditions” (p.67). This truth is what makes virtue a possibility.

When Covey speaks of “conditioning” or “conditions” he is referring to three theories of determinism (stimulus-response) commonly seen in the current social paradigm: 1) Genetic (“your grandparents did it to you”), 2) Psychic (“your parents did it to you”), 3) Environmental (someone/something is doing it to you now). Covey had a bit of a revelation (p.310) about “the nature of man: Between stimulus and response, man has the freedom to choose” (p.70). This freedom includes endowments that are uniquely human: 1) Self-awareness, 2) Imagination, 3) Conscience, and 4) Independent Will. These are the four areas leaders must take initiative and responsibility to govern. When they do, “they do not blame circumstances, conditions, or conditioning for their behavior. Their behavior is a product of their own conscious choice, based on values, rather than a product of their conditions, based on feeling.” (p.71)

It is important to note that those who are proactive work on things they can influence, not things that concern them but over which they have no ability to control. “The problems we face fall in one of three areas: direct control (problems involving our own behavior); indirect control (problems involving other people’s behavior); or no control (problems we can do nothing about, such as our past or situational realities)” (p.85). The example of the biblical patriarch Joseph was used as one who was proactive, focusing on what he could control (his character, his “be” qualities) and not his circumstance or people in his life; this is what broadened his circle of influence.

The Second Habit

The second habit is “Begin with the End in Mind – Principles of Personal Leadership.” A very personal illustration of this is to imagine what you would like to be said at your funeral, the ultimate end of this physical life. “The most effective way I know to begin with the end in mind is to 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

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which being and doing are based.” (p.107) A mission statement is much like the U.S. constitution – it establishes a standard by which other laws are judged, it is what the President agrees to defend and support when he takes his oath of office and it is what immigrants also agree to uphold in order to be admitted as citizens. “People can’t live with change if there’s not a changeless core inside them.” (p.108)

A well-composed mission statement provides you with: 1) the essence of your own proactivity, 2) the vision and the values which direct your life, 3) the basic direction from which you set your long- and short-term goals, and 4) the power of a written constitution. It is this “changeless core” which will serve as the source of our security, guidance, wisdom, and power (our four life-support factors). If this core is not based on correct principles, alternative centers will negatively impact these life-support factors.

This core must be affirmed by articulating those values in a way that’s personal, positive, present tense, visual and emotional. “Almost all of the world-class athletes and other peak performers are visualizers. They see it; they feel it; they experience it before they actually do it. They begin with the end in mind.” (p.134)

Personal mission statements focus on roles and goals, and may be easier to compose if specific roles are identified so specific goals can be created for each. We are clearly responsible for writing such statements, but organizational mission statements cannot be effective if only leaders write them. In the business world, this means that in some way everyone in the organization must be involved in creating it. This complicates the process, taking more time and skill than an individual mission statement takes, and must be accompanied with patience and empathy. “Without involvement, there is no commitment. Mark it down, asterisk it, circle it, underline it. NO INVOLVEMENT, NO COMMITMENT.” (p.143)

The Third Habit

The third habit is “Put First Things First – Principles of Personal Management.” Building on habits one and two, this principle focuses on implementing the priorities established.

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It requires discipline to organize and execute, focusing on the important things which are not the urgent things, and saying no to the unimportant, whether urgent or not.

Covey suggests a very practical way of doing this is to use a weekly (not daily or yearly) planner. To ensure the important things are a part of every day, four key activities (identifying roles, selecting Goals, scheduling, and daily adapting) will keep them in focus. It is an oversimplification to think that all activities of our week can be labeled important or unimportant; each are on a continuum between the two so priorities can be established. It is tempting when using a weekly planner to become too time-oriented. Allow space for flexibility because working with people demands it. “You simply can’t think EFFICIENCY with people. You think EFFECTIVENESS with PEOPLE and EFFICIENCY with THINGS” (p.169). The latest advance of self-management are superior and practical to previous models because of the primary focus on relationships and results, with a secondary focus on time. This is because: 1) It is principle-centered, 2) It is conscience-directed, 3) It defines your unique mission, including values and long-term goals, 4) It helps you balance your life by identifying roles, and 5) It gives greater context through weekly organizing.

“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” (p.171). There is a big difference between “Go-fer” delegation (do what I say) and “Stewardship” delegation (focused on results instead of methods). It gives people a choice regarding methodology, but makes it clear they are responsible for the results. This sort of delegation is “a job with trust” and demands careful communication about the desired results, any existing guidelines or resources available, how accountability will be tracked and what consequences will be for success or failure. “Trust is the highest form of human motivation. It brings out the very best in people. But it takes time and patience, and it doesn’t preclude the necessity to train and develop people so that their competency can rise to the level of that trust” (p.178).

Emotional Bank Account

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Part three begins the section covering the next three habits and deals with the public victory that can follow the private victory of part two. Covey introduces the “Emotional Bank Account” metaphor describing the trust balance in relationships and how this defines the P/PC balance necessary for interdependence; there is no quick fix to get out of debt when you borrow from this bank.

Pages 190-199 describe six ways to make major deposits in the Emotional Bank Account: 1) Understand the individual (discover what their interpretation of a “deposit” would be, making what is important to them important to you – the true meaning of the Golden Rule), 2) Attend to the little things (faithfulness in the insignificant, daily stuff is like regular, even if it’s small, long-term investment savings), 3) Keep commitments (this is either a big deposit/trust builder or a big withdrawal/trust breaker), 4) Clarify expectations (“The cause of almost all relationship difficulties is rooted in conflicting or ambiguous expectations around roles and goals”), 5) Show personal integrity (Reject duplicity: for example, being “loyal to those who are not present”), 6) Apologize sincerely when you make a withdrawal (“People will forgive mistakes, because mistakes are usually of the mind, mistakes of judgment. But people will not easily forgive the mistakes of the heart, the ill intention, the bad motives, the prideful justifying cover-up of the first mistake”).

Fourth Habit

Habit four begins the set of habits that moves us from successful independence to successful interdependence. This is “Think Win/Win – Principles of Interpersonal Leadership.” Any attempt at motivating employees or volunteers to greater impact or contribution through any form of competition is doomed to failure. You can’t harvest “the fruit of cooperation from a paradigm of competition.” (p.206)

Six Paradigms – Win/Win Paradigm and Others

This sets the stage for Covey’s Six Paradigms of Human Interaction found on pages 206-216: 1) Win/Win (“a frame of the mind and heart that constantly seeks mutual benefit in all human interactions... cooperative, not competitive...belief in the Third Alternative – not your

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way or my way; it's a better way, a higher way"), 2) Win/Lose ("the authoritarian approach...most of life is not a competition"), 3) Lose/Win ("capitulation, indulgence, appeasement, lack of courage" result in unhealthy repression... Win/Lose and Lose/Win are both weak positions), 4) Lose/Lose ("the philosophy of adversarial conflict, the philosophy of war...the philosophy of the highly dependent person without inner direction who is miserable and thinks everyone else should be, too"), 5) Win (no consideration, regard or concern for others), and 6) Win/Win or No Deal ("NO DEAL basically means that if we can't find a solution that would benefit us both, we agree to disagree agreeably – No Deal." If your objective is to be an effective leader, the Win/Win paradigm is the only option to nurture interdependent relationships. The "No Deal" option takes the long-term relationship into consideration, so it is also an alternative, but works best at the beginning of a partnership.

There are five dimensions of the Win/Win paradigm: "It begins with character and moves toward relationships, out of which flow agreements. It is nurtured in an environment where structure and systems are based on Win/Win. And it involves process; we cannot achieve Win/Win ends with Win/Lose or Lose/Win means" (p.216). The first and foundational dimension is character, which must include traits of integrity, maturity and an "abundance" mentality. The second is that relationships are built on trust and a commitment to pursue the mutually beneficial results of a Win/Win interaction. The third is clearly communicated agreements that spell out all the conditions whose focus is results, not methodology. Fourth is the nature of the supportive systems which must be aligned with the values in the mission statement. And the fifth dimension is the processes, the steps you must take to achieve Win/Win solutions. The quality of processes, like the systems, must also be aligned with the values of the organization.

Habit Five

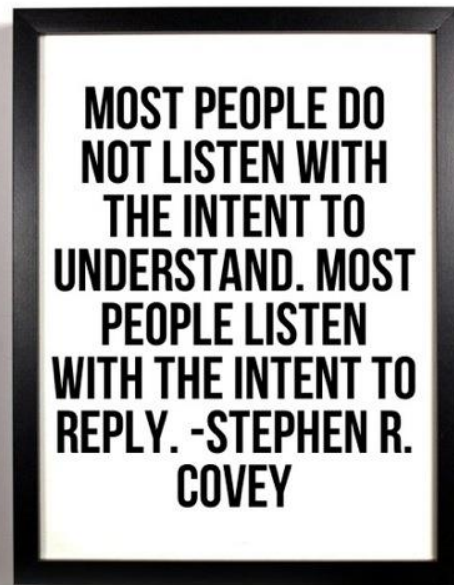
Habit five is "Seek First to Understand, Then to Be Understood – Principles of Empathic Communication." We spend lots of time learning how to read, write and speak, but hardly any time learning to listen. We often do very low-level listening, described by Covey in one of five

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ways. Ignoring, pretending, selective listening and attentive listening are progressively better approaches, but the fifth level, empathic listening, requires that we listen with the intention to understand their perspective and feelings and actually attempt to see what they see and feel what they feel. “Empathic listening is the key to making deposits in Emotional Bank Account, because nothing you do is a deposit unless the other person perceives it as such” (p.241). Only empathic listening can give such insight.



Courtesy: www.favething.com

There is a personal risk involved in this type of listening because you are putting yourself in a position to be influenced. This vulnerability is necessary to demonstrate you have the character to be trusted and therefore prove that you are one who should be listened to. If we don't listen this way, conversations are marked by autobiographical responses. This means “we EVALUATE (we either agree or disagree); we PROBE (we ask questions from our own frame of reference); we ADVISE (we give counsel based on our own experience); or we INTERPRET (we try to figure people out, to explain their motives, their behavior, based on our own motives and behavior)” (p.245). These responses do NOT promote empathic listening.

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Pages 248-253 outline four developmental stages of empathic listening: 1) Mimic content, 2) Rephrase the content, 3) Reflect feeling, 4) Rephrase the content and reflect the feeling. Clearly this sort of listening takes more time than the other ways, but in the long run it eliminates misunderstandings, discovers problems otherwise unexpressed or unknown, and gives them “psychological air.” Psychological air describes what happens when our psychological needs are met, the need “to be understood, to be affirmed, to be validated, to be appreciated.” (p.241) Empathic listening takes courage and a willingness to risk, but the benefits seen in communication are worth it. Differences will always exist, but “our differences are no longer stumbling blocks to communication and progress. Instead, they become the stepping stones to synergy.” (p.259)

Sixth Habit

The sixth habit follows those stepping stones. “Synergize – Principles of Creative Cooperation” is this sixth habit and is the culmination of the previous five. “The essence of synergy is to value differences – to respect them, to build on strengths, to compensate for weaknesses.” (p.263) It is the relationships that multiply value to the whole by opening up “new possibilities, new alternatives, new options” that wouldn’t exist without working together. As difficult as it may seem to believe, the differences that people have that are often the source of conflict are also the source of creativity and synergy. When we value the individual, we must also value those things about them that are different than us, because it is by truly embracing those qualities that we complement one another.

Seventh Habit

The seventh habit begins the fourth part of the book which deals with renewal. “Sharpen the Saw – Principles of Balanced Self-Renewal” is the way we maintain and strengthen our greatest asset – ourselves. Because we are multi-dimensional beings, there are at least four dimensions to give attention to: 1) Physical (by exercise, nutrition, stress management), 2) Spiritual (by value clarification and commitment, study and meditation), 3) Mental (by reading, visualizing, planning, writing), and 4) Social/Emotional (by service, empathy, synergy, intrinsic security). All of these are Quadrant 2 activities – important, but not urgent.

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The focus on our physical body should be directed towards building endurance, flexibility, and strength. We cannot ignore this aspect – we live, work and die in a physical world. It is sad to note that Mr. Covey actually lost his life while working on this dimension. At 79 years old he was still a committed bicyclist, and it was a biking accident that eventually took his life.

The spiritual dimension is understandably presented in a pluralistic manner. While Covey clearly comes from a fundamentally biblical perspective on values (he ends his book with a “personal note”, briefly spelling out these convictions on page 319), he leaves the particulars of this very important life center up to the individual. Some of his suggestions can certainly be followed by Christians and practitioners of other religions (prayerful meditation, reading scripture or other great literature, listening to music, spending time in nature), and are good reminders to invest daily in such healthy spiritually-renewing practices.

The mental dimension for those out of formal education has to take place in informal or non-formal learning environments. Covey attacks our entertainment addiction by challenging us to read! “The person who doesn’t read is no better off than the person who can’t read” (p.296). There are many ways to continue learning and a proactive person makes looking for them a regular practice. Keeping our mind sharp, like keeping our bodies strong, demands exercise. Covey also issues a challenge to spend an hour everyday “sharpening” these first three dimensions. This daily habit is what prepares you to face temptation or difficulty. “Character cannot be made except by a steady, long continued process” (p.297). Covey says later, “The Daily Private Victory – a minimum of one hour a day in renewal of the physical, spiritual, and mental dimensions – is the key to the development of the Seven Habits and it’s completely within your Circle of Influence.” (p.304)

Assigning Dimensions

The first three dimensions (the physical, spiritual and mental) are related to habits one, two and three and the fourth relates to habits four, five and six. “The social and the emotional

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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.” This dimension can be exercised “in our normal everyday interactions with other people.” (p.297) What this means is that we practice these principles of interpersonal leadership, empathic communication and creative cooperation that habits four, five and six suggest will lead to healthy interdependence. The only way to make progress is to follow the cycle of learn, commit, and do; none of those steps can be skipped.

The Goal – Become a Transitional Person

The concluding chapter returns to the foundational principle of this book. To become a “transitional person”, to be someone that brings positive change to himself, family, business or any association of people, that person must be willing to accept the responsibility and possibility that it can be done. “Change – real change – comes from the inside out. It doesn’t come from hacking at the leaves of attitude and behavior with quick fix personality ethic techniques. It comes from striking at the root – the fabric of our thought, the fundamental, essential paradigms, which give definition to our character and create the lens through which we see the world” (p. 317).

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