

## Book Review

***The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, Stephen R. Covey, 1989, reviewed by Charlie, UK, March 24<sup>th</sup> 2020**

*The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People* is one of the first books we read on arriving at the ranch. It sets the foundation for us to become empowered individuals who take initiative and responsibility for ourselves and our actions. It also sets the stage for experiencing a change in our mindset as we become solution orientated instead of focusing on the problem.

The seven habits are:

### **1. Be Proactive – “You’re the creator, you can change.”**

Many people believe their actions are determined by their genetics or their environment ie. “My parents always act this way, that’s why I do” or “That’s how anybody would react to this situation.” But between the stimulus (event) and your response/ reaction (your behaviour or emotions), you have the opportunity and ability to choose how you respond. This is being **proactive** and means more than simply taking initiative. Behaviour comes from your decision, not your circumstances, you can choose to live by your values and principles, not let your feelings control you. If you are responsible you can’t blame circumstances or other people for your behaviour. The response we choose is a combination of self-awareness, independent will, consciousness and imagination.

The opposite of **proactive** is reactive. This means you are influenced by your social environment, when things are going well or others treat you good, you feel good. When things are bad, you have negative emotions and reactions. Letting other people hurt us (being reactive) is more painful than what happens to us. You can be hurt physically, but in most cases this is only temporary, you can choose not to let it affect your character. Until you accept that you are the way you are because of the decisions (unconscious or otherwise) that you made, you cannot move forward and choose another way.

It is a human desire to act, not be acted upon. This empowers us to choose our response and create positive circumstances. Taking initiative is to act, learn and get the job done yourself. But many people wait for someone else to save them or don’t act because they don’t know how. By saying they can’t do something, it often becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Being **proactive** also means you understand that success often comes after failure. Struggles and setbacks are a way to learn. Knowing this, a **proactive** person can find solutions instead of giving up and believing a problem impossible.

Being **proactive** is related to efficiency. Creating a Circle of Concern encompasses the things you have some form of emotional involvement in and excludes the things you don’t. Within this Circle, what can you do something about? By becoming more proactive, you can increase your Circle of Influence to have a greater effect on your Circle of Concern. Being reactive reduces your Circle of Influence.

We are **proactive** every day at the ranch as we take responsibility for our actions and initiative to get the job done. We know that being reactive will have a negative impact on our ranch community. We take responsibility for ourselves by maintaining a positive attitude and responding to situations with solutions instead of reacting and becoming part of the problem. We need to get the job done and with limited knowledge, experience or resources, we find a way to do this, believing everything is possible.

Several winters of heavy snow had caused one of our mountain cabins to start leaning. It wasn't a danger yet, but we knew we needed to fix it. So, we were **proactive**, packing in a come-along by horse to straighten the cabin and prevent it falling.

## **2. Begin with the End in Mind – “The first or mental creation.”**

One way to **begin with the end in mind** is to imagine the end of your life – what do you want to have achieved and what do you want people to remember you for? Brendon Burchard encapsulates this concept in his slogan “Live, Love, Matter.” This helps you define what matters most to you and will give you a focus from which you can apply **Habit 1** to help you plan what actions will get you to your goal. The concept of “All things are created twice” means that you first create your plan in your head or on paper before you act on it and implement it. This happens for all your actions, whether consciously or not. If you live reactively and with poor self-awareness, you are unconscious to the plans that are being made in your head before you react. However, it is also possible to be very busy without being effective. If you don’t have a clear plan and direction, you might find yourself progressing, only to discover you didn’t achieve what you wanted to. In this way, you can achieve many successes that feel empty.

Management looks at how best to accomplish a task and how to do it right. Leadership looks at doing the right things. The analogy of producers cutting through the jungle with machetes further illustrates this. The managers are following behind, creating procedures, ensuring everything runs smoothly. It is the leader who climbs a tree and announces they are in the wrong jungle. The managers are likely to tell the leader to shut up, they’re making progress.

Getting stuck in management means focusing on control, efficiency and rules, leadership requires direction, purpose and creativity. A balance is needed to get the job done.

Imagination allows you to create new ideas. Consciousness allows us to use our principles to create the right things.

When you act with anger or fear, although you might achieve a short term fix, the problem will resurface worse than before and in different ways. By responding consciously and appropriately, you can create positive, nurturing relationships with others that will create positive outcomes.

Creating a personal mission statement is a highly effective way to **begin with the end in mind**, then you’ve clearly defined what you want to achieve and from here can plan how to achieve this. To write your mission statement, begin from what is in the centre of your Circle of Influence. From here, you determine your security (self-worth and identity), power (capacity to act and overcome old habits), wisdom (perspective, balance and understanding of life) and guidance (internal reference for the direction you are going in). Together, these things create a balanced character, the foundation from which you act. There are lots of things people centre their lives around including work, family, money, possessions or

pleasure. It is possible to centre on a person or event to the extent it becomes destructive to yourself, such as resentment for your ex-spouse. Being **proactive** means you take responsibility to change this. Being principle centred allows you to remove yourself from the emotion of the situation and act congruently with your standards and values, not be moved by external factors. Acting through principles means you can respond instead of react. This creates “personal power”; self-awareness, knowledge and proactivity.

At the ranch, we apply the concept of having a clear direction by choosing the mountain in the distance (our goal) and work out backwards how to get there (our plan). We are all leaders and managers, that means we are all responsible for making sure we are in the right forest and that we’re walking through it the right way. Becoming empowered encourages us to make decisions and ensure we are committed to our ranch culture. We are value- and principle-driven, allowing us to respond instead of react to situations. Being involved is essential to commitment, everybody who works on a project needs to be central to the decision making progress so they know they are valuable members of the team. Our purpose, the end we have in mind, is to grow personally, connect to nature and conserve it, making our contribution and sharing with others.

### **3. Put First Things First – “The Second or Physical Creation.”**

Being in integrity with yourself (“walking your talk”) helps you define your priorities and get them done right. This is based on time management and can be organized into four quadrants. Quadrant One is both Urgent and Important, such as crises, pressing issues or deadlines. Quadrant Two is Important but Not Urgent, such as prevention, planning and relationship building. Quadrant Three is Not Important but Urgent, such as interruptions, distractions and other activities. Quadrant Four is Not Important and Not Urgent, such as purposeless activities and time wasters. Acting as much as possible in Quadrant Two and working to minimize Quadrants Three and Four will ensure the best use of your time, generating vision, perspective, discipline, self-control and fewer crises. Responding appropriately to Quadrant One problems as they arise is essential, but if you spend all your time in this Quadrant, you become stressed and suffer burn out. Being in Quadrant Three but believing you are in Quadrant One leads to feeling victimized and out of control.

Effective people are opportunity-minded, not problem-minded and work preventively to reduce crises. Spending the majority of your time in Quadrant Two involves learning how and when to say “No”. Taking on projects that aren’t important just to please other people reduces your effectiveness and can even lead to strain on the relationship you were trying to placate if you feel resentful about what you are doing. Daily planning helps you focus on the “now” and schedule things for the future, knowing when tasks need to be completed, assigning times and prioritizing.

Spending more time in Quadrant Two allows for balance, flexibility and coherence as you know what you need to do and when, the options for changing plans and achieving a balance. Identifying your roles and goals generates more focus and sense of being in control of yourself.

The difference between a producer and manager is seen in output. A producer can only achieve what they can do alone. A manager can delegate tasks to others and the overall success is greater. However, there

are two types of delegation. There is gofer delegation, where you tell the other people exactly what to do and when. Because you are so busy micro-managing them, you don't get anything done yourself, it's not very effective. Stewardship delegation, on the other hand, focuses on results. If you look at each individual person's skills and competencies, you can delegate them an appropriate task that they can carry out unsupervised. You will generate much greater results in this way. This relies on trust from the manager and responsibility from the person doing the task. Providing the support they need to succeed and your trust in them to get the job done is often all that's needed for the other person to take responsibility.

At the ranch, learning to prioritize is an essential skill. Making daily, weekly and monthly to-do lists is just one of the ways we determine what needs to be done and when. We strongly believe in being interdependent. Each person is capable of acting independently or in a team. We can each complete our own tasks towards a shared goal, or work together, this stewardship delegation allows us to achieve more than we could if we acted alone. Being mentors to each other is the most effective way of increasing everybody's skills meaning stewardship delegation can happen more effectively in future situations as more people know how to perform each task or have the self-confidence and problem solving skills to find solutions.

#### **4. Think Win/Win - “The Third Alternative.”**

If you **think win/win** you work together and in everybody's best interests, you don't act selfishly because that only benefits yourself. Win/win means solutions are mutually beneficial for everybody involved, this is based on cooperation, not competition. It's based not on your way or my way, but on a better or higher way, the Third Alternative. Win/Lose is where you gain a victory at the expense of another. This is competition and is based on position, power or personality. Lose/Win is where you give into the demands of another, do anything to avoid conflict and as such have no standards or visions because you will do anything to placate or please the other, this can lead to resentment and psychosomatic illness. Lose/Lose is a result of two stubborn, ego-centred people who become vindictive and the consequences of their actions mean neither person gains any benefit, it can also occur in highly miserable people who think that everybody else should be miserable too. Win is where a person thinks nothing about the consequences to others, they seek only to win for themselves at any cost and leave it to other people to sort out their own winning.

But there is another option, Win/Win or No Deal. You go into a situation working for Win/Win but with the deal that if you don't find something you both agree on, you decide to disagree calmly and without resentment, knowing that your goals are in opposite directions and you would be better off working with people with more similar goals. This means you can go into a situation without needing to manipulate people or have a second agenda because if you can't both agree, you have the No Deal option. This is emotional freedom. A compromise is a low form of Win/Win and can be used in a stalemate situation such as a family who need a deal.

To **think Win/Win** takes both courage and consideration. This is made up of the character traits of

integrity, maturity and an abundance mentality. You stand by your principles, strike the balance between courage and consideration and believe there is plenty for everybody. Win/Win benefits from a relationship that is based on trust. Trust allows both parties to be open and put everything on the table, knowing their ideas will be respected. Partnership agreements allow for vertical progression, self-supervision and being partners in success. Seeing the situation from the other person's point of view gives you a better idea of what they want to achieve and why. Identifying the key issues, possible solutions and how to implement them ensures negotiation is proactive.

At the ranch, we operate on a Win/Win mentality. We are a strong, supportive community and so any individual success is a group success. And for everybody who takes initiative and responsibility to contribute, every group success is also an individual success. A solution that benefits everybody involved leads to a stronger sense of community, because everybody benefits, we have all faced a common challenge together and overcome it. Thinking about the bigger picture includes the needs and interests of others, striving for a solution that benefits everybody contributes to this: there is more positivity, the work gets done by people who are motivated and enthusiastic about the task, we can work together to achieve our success. Another layer of this is a **Win/Win** mentality related to the wilderness we benefit from. If nature loses, ultimately we do too.

## **5. Seek First to Understand, then to Be Understood - “Empathic Communication.”**

Empathic communication is the most effective way for everybody involved to be understood and for a positive, constructive solution to be reached. Often, people appear to listen while really they are thinking about how they will respond and how to make their point and project their experiences onto others: “I know exactly how you feel, let me tell you about what I did.” They make assumptions before they’ve heard what the other person has to say and this colours their responses. Other times, they listen and then wade in with an opinion that only worsens the situation when the other person doesn’t feel listened to, or is made to feel stupid.

Rushing in with (good intentioned) advice without taking the time to understand the situation creates ineffective interpersonal communication.

Reading, writing, speaking and listening are the four key components of communication and the ability to do them well is critical to your effectiveness as a communicator. But few people have any form of training in how to listen effectively.

Before having any form of influence or impact on another person, you need to understand them. But if the other person senses you are using some form of technique, they will feel manipulated, wonder what your motivations are and don’t want to open up to the speaker. So how do you influence someone? With your character. Your natural character flows out of you, this is evidently authentic to the person seeing this. Actions, not words that make the other person feel like you appreciate them.

Empathic listening is a huge paradigm shift for many people, to mentally put on the other person's shoes and walk around in them – you see the world as they see it and feel as they feel. Only then do you truly understand them.

Seeking first to understand can be a risky position to take. It makes you vulnerable as you have to first open yourself up to listening. To influence somebody else, they need to first influence you. Then you know you've really understood them. Here, **Habits, 1, 2 and 3** come into play. They create a solid foundation, the “changeless inner core” meaning you can handle vulnerable situations from a position of inner peace and strength.

Listening from an empathic point of view can take more time than listening to reply as the conversation is less likely to shut down and it also takes time to learn to listen to understand. But it is much easier than having to correct misunderstanding further down the line. The more you practice empathic listening, the more you can “read” the person effectively and the more they will understand this and open up to you. Now you understand the other person, you can be understood. This is critical for practising **Habit 4**, to reduce misunderstandings by either party. Seeking first to understand is something you can control, as such it expands your Circle of Influence. As you develop this circle, you can influence more things in your Circle of Concern and create a positive impact (if you choose to, you can of course, also create a negative impact). And you will experience a personal transformation too, as you get to know people better, you will feel more appreciative for them and deeply connect with them.

**Habit 5** is practised every day in every conversation we have at the ranch. Our community is open and accepting. Our interactions are based in empathy, in supporting each other to grow and evolve. Because we are all on the same journey, just at different stages, we have a strong common goal and bond. Every community partner is central to having visions, sharing them with others and making decisions. But for everybody to all pull in the same direction, we need to understand how the other people are thinking and feeling. We can do this on the most basic level by triple-checking each others content, ensuring we all understand the vision. We define our own roles and understand each other which allows us to work on tasks that are most suited to us. Part of our culture is talking about everything and anything up front, if you don't understand another person's position, you ask for clarification. If you see where something could be improved, you express this, find a solution and share this with others.

### **Habit 6: Synergize - “The Whole is Greater than the Sum of its Parts.”**

**Synergy** can be defined simply as “the whole is greater than the sum of its parts.” **Habit 6** is the coming together of the previous five habits and creates powerful result. From here, you have the courage to face the unknown with creativity. You leave your comfort zone and become a trailblazer, not knowing exactly what you might find, but being excited by the experience. This doesn't mean you are throwing aside **Habit 2**: the end you have in mind is positive outcomes.

Creative cooperation is everywhere in nature. It's the symbiosis of two plants growing together that intermingle their roots and improve the soil quality. The challenge for humans is to implement it in everyday life. Because **synergy** is not only internal, it is in your interactions with others too. **Synergy** allows people to value differences, build strengths and compensate for weaknesses.

Many people don't know how to **synergize** or don't recognize their opportunities. They might have memories of teamwork, in sport or an emergency situation perhaps, but these experiences seem unusual

or miraculous. A great deal of emotional security is needed to **synergize**.

Sometimes, it might only take one person to start the **synergistic** relationship. But it's contagious, other people "feel" the energy, it becomes almost palpable. In some ways, this is throwing aside the script and making a new one. It is a process of team creativity and excitement: the results can be exceptional. The more authentic you are in sharing your ideas, the more other people will be affected by them, the more they will relate to them.

Once you've experienced true **synergy**, you can never go back. You've seen the difference and now you know how it works. It's rare to be able to recreate the exact experience, but the principle and purpose of it can be repeated. Recreating past experiences isn't the answer, creating new ones around the same principle but higher purposes is.

If a group of people are assigned to work on a common task, from an efficiency perspective, they will probably be told to just get on with it. But if the group first take the time to create an emotional bond, they are better connected. Their ideas will flow more in tandem with each other, people will feed on others' ideas. The results of this will be phenomenal. Taking the time to create an emotional connection makes a group into a team, community or family and creates better results than if the group had been told to create something with no connection between them.

Here the **Win/Win** mentality comes in. Two people have different opinions. What is the alternative you can create that benefits everybody and doesn't just result in compromise? Here, synergizing means you can incorporate all of the first five habits and combine these with the perspectives of all the other people in the discussion. If you come from a point of being **proactive**, having clear goals, knowing what the priorities are, wanting to find a solution that works for everybody and empathically listening to the other people, you are much more likely to find a solution.

There can also be negative **synergy**, the equivalent of driving with one foot on the brake and one on the gas. People might preach Win/Win but work on Win/Lose or Lose/Win. The foundation of good interpersonal **synergy** is to have good intrapersonal **synergy** (with yourself).

The effectiveness of a **synergistic** relationship can be measured in terms of restraining and driving forces. Restraining forces are often negative, illogical, based in emotion, unconscious and social. Driving forces are positive, logical, conscious and economic. With more driving force factors, your project or conversation is more likely to generate positive **synergy** and constructive results. But creating more driving forces isn't enough. If the restraining forces are still there, they will eventually negate the driving forces. The only way to remove them is to talk about them, that's where **Habits 4 and 5** come in.

Life at the ranch is all about applying **synergy**. We work interdependently with each other by bringing our own unique skills to whatever situation we are working on. We understand the value of the whole being greater than the sum of its parts, our ideas feed off each other and being community partners means we have a strong emotional and intellectual connection, through common interests, goals and purpose. Yet we also recognize each others differences in personalities, emotional responses and reactions, skill sets or long suits. Having a combination means between us we can cover all aspects of a challenge. One of our ranch sayings is "You can never go back." That means once you've evolved, the changes are

permanent. Now we know the difference, how much more effective acting interdependently is than acting alone or in contradiction with each other, we are motivated to maintain this positive working and learning environment. As we are all committed to our personal and professional development, we are constantly practising and developing our intrapersonal **synergy**.

Our best ideas come to reality when our community of equals work together on it. Among our community partners, we have visionaries who come up with the original idea. We have writers and communicators who understand this vision and run with it, to develop and put it into words that anybody outside the project can understand. We have our proofreaders and editors who can look from outside the visionaries' and communicators' perspectives and assess if the content is clear for all to understand. We have big-picture keepers who can keep track of what needs doing, when and by who. And we have those who can help us focus, remind us to keep things simple then work to expand it and ensure the job gets done.

### **Habit 7: Sharpen the Saw – Balance and Self-Renewal**

Sometimes you have to take a step back and assess your situation. Is what you're doing effective and efficient? Do you need to take a break to renew your emotional, mental, spiritual and emotional circuits? Can you do something now that would make the overall process better?

Physical renewal ensures you are eating, sleeping and exercising good. Exercise is a Quadrant Two activity (**Habit 3**), most people put it off because it isn't urgent. But when it becomes a Quadrant One activity – heart disease, diabetes – then it is urgent. For half an hour a day, it's better to work on it now preemptively than therapeutically deal with the problems.

Spiritual renewal helps you take leadership of your life, your non-physical self. There are many ways to renew this, from meditation, to reading to spending time in nature. Like physical renewal, spiritual renewal is a Quadrant Two activity but it's essential to take time for this. A good spiritual level brings you inner strength, power and peace from which you can act more constructively and proactively.

Mental renewal can be difficult for some people once they've left school. That means it has to be on your own initiative to make time for this. Learning a new skill, reading a good book, working on personal development or creating new projects are all ways to renew your mental functions.

Emotional renewal relates to the last three habits, physical, spiritual and mental renewal are related to the first three habits. This helps ensure we respond maturely and courageously to our interactions with others. This helps us create third alternatives and act from a foundation of peace, clarity and emotional maturity.

These four dimensions need to be renewed in balance or you will not be balanced over all, again, the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. Renewal is the key to upward growth and self-development. This helps generate positivity. The more positivity you have, the less room there is for negatives and the more the positive can grow. Once you become self-aware, you have to continue to live from this mindset or you will return to an unaware life, where you are reacting, not responding.

Running the chainsaw causes the chain to get blunt. It takes five minutes to sharpen it or the saw's effectiveness slows down. Reminding ourselves to take the time to sharpen it when we notice it's getting

blunt doesn't just help us get the job done. It also reminds us to take time to sharpen our own internal saws.

At the ranch, sharpening the saw is a real important concept. We can use this time to refine our plans, check in with each other that we are on the same wavelength, assess our goals and purpose for creating something or determine if the tool we are using is the right one for the job, if not, what can we use instead? Sharpening the saw requires a mental shift. We're focused on getting the job done, but know it's just as important to take a step back and assess we are actually doing what we set out to do, that we have our balance and are working from our best mental, physical, spiritual and emotional selves.

We know the restorative powers of nature, how it can calm us, allow us to appreciate our surroundings and help us feel connected to the world. The physiological sensations of feeling calm, motivated, appreciative and connected can include a warm feeling our bellies, butterflies in our stomach or an overall feeling of well-being or excitement, caused by the release of the hormone oxytocin.

*7 Habits of Highly Effective People* is essential for orientating us to the ranch mentality: work as a team, understand others, be proactive, assess priorities and create a whole that is greater than the sum of its parts. It also sets us up for reading many more of the books that are central to our philosophy. Have you read our other book reviews yet?

What can you do to apply the seven habits in your daily life?