

Book Review

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

The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People is one of the first books we read on joining the community. 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 eg. “My parents always act this way, that's why I do”. 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.

We are **proactive** every day in our community 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.

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. 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.

In our community, 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 culture.

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. 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.

In our community, 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.

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.

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.

In our community, 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. 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.

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. 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. Now you understand the other person, you can be understood.

Habit 5 is practised every day in every conversation we have in our community. 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.

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.

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. Once you've experienced true **synergy**, you can never go back. You've seen the difference and now you know how it works.

Life in our community 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.

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 well. 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. 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. 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.

In our community, sharpening the saw is a vital 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.

7 Habits of Highly Effective People is essential for orientating us to the community 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.