

# The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People

A brief guide to principles from  
the bestselling book

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# Apply timeless principles to thrive in a changing world

We live in a world that's constantly changing—and forcing us to change—in ways we can't anticipate.

**“If you apply even one of The 7 Habits today, you can see immediate results; but it's a lifetime adventure—a lifetime promise.”**

**— Stephen R. Covey**

The challenge facing us in a given moment might be to master a new technology, cope with a health crisis, navigate a career change in an uncertain economic environment, or advocate for a cause we care about in a tense political atmosphere.

The principles Stephen R. Covey taught are more relevant than ever. “People can't live with change if there's not a changeless core inside them,” he wrote in his bestselling book *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*. “The key to the ability to change is a changeless sense of who you are, what you are about, and what you value.”

In the 30 years since Covey's book was first published, millions of people have applied the principles he taught to become more effective, both at work and in their personal lives. And organisations around the world have used the *7 Habits*® framework to build a culture of personal responsibility and creative cooperation.

## **We've Reimagined the 7 Habits Course to Be Even More Relevant and Impactful for Today's Workers**

This reimagined course can help you:

- **Increase individual effectiveness, build strong character, and change behaviour in ways that are authentic and lasting.**
- **Promote a shared language and build a winning culture.**
- **Establish more collaborative, creative teams capable of breakthrough results.**
- **Create leaders at every level.**

## **The 7 Habits: A Foundation of Trust**

The 7 Habits are based on universal truths and enduring principles. They're grounded in decades of research and development—and based on the best-selling business book of all time. In fact, it's been the top leadership training framework for over 35 years. The 7 Habits have changed hundreds of millions of people's lives—and their organisations.



### One Comprehensive Program to Meet Today's Challenges

Essential human skills like emotional intelligence, proactive problem-solving, building high-trust relationships, and self-leadership don't come easily to everyone on a given team. Yet they're critical to achieving an organisation's most important goals. You need one comprehensive program to help everyone gain and improve these essential abilities.

Whether your goal is to lead an organisation through trying times or simply be a better leader and manager of your own life, applying the *7 Habits* consistently will help you respond to change in resilient, productive ways.

The *7 Habits* framework is an inside out model. It isn't about developing skills you can use in specific situations to get what you want. Rather, it's about building your character. In other words, it's about becoming the kind of person you want to be so that you can create the kind of life you want to live. Integrating these principles into your life can help you live in harmony with your most cherished values and reach your most important goals.

In formulating the *7 Habits*, Covey was inspired by Viktor E. Frankl's book *Man's Search for Meaning*, which documented Frankl's experiences while imprisoned in a concentration camp. From reading this text, Covey fully understood the principle that we have the ability to choose our attitude regardless of our circumstances.

“Habits are like a cable. We weave a strand of it every day and soon it cannot be broken.”

– Horace Mann

That insight is clearly reflected in Habit 1: Be Proactive®, which Covey described as the foundation for all of the other habits. The power of individual choice is also at the core of the other six habits. In any given circumstance, we can choose our response, we can choose our goals, we can choose how we use our time and energy, and we can choose how we communicate, negotiate, and cooperate with others. If we align our choices with proven principles of human effectiveness, we'll find better solutions to problems, and we'll be more likely to see hidden opportunities.

This guide offers a brief introduction to the *7 Habits*, along with practical tips for how you can begin using the principles right away. Each habit is based on fundamental truths about human nature and human relationships that you can test in the laboratory of your own life. One of those truths is that the best way to change our behaviour is to first examine and then change our paradigms—the way we see the world. As you apply the principles, you'll gradually replace outdated and inaccurate paradigms with more effective ways of seeing and being, one habit at a time.

# Build the habits of personal leadership

Covey described the 7 Habits as a sequential, integrated approach to the development of personal and interpersonal effectiveness.

The process starts with building the habits of personal leadership. Habits 1, 2, and 3 focus on your attitude toward life, your goals and values, and how you manage your time.

If you start to think the problem is “out there,” stop yourself. That very thought is the problem.

When you build these habits, you move across a Maturity Continuum® from *dependence* to *independence*. “True independence of character empowers us to act rather than be acted upon,” Covey wrote. “It frees us from our dependence on circumstances and other people and is a worthy, liberating goal. But it is not the ultimate goal in effective living.”

As you make progress in these areas, you’ll gain the satisfaction of personal growth and self-mastery. If you can internalise the habits of personal leadership, you’ll soon see the benefits in your own life. And you’ll be ready to move on to Habits 4, 5, and 6, which can help you further evolve from *independence* to *interdependence*.

“Private Victories precede Public Victories,” Covey wrote. “You can’t invert that process any more than you can harvest a crop before you plant it.”

**“The power to make and keep commitments to ourselves is the essence of developing the basic habits of effectiveness.”**

**— Stephen R. Covey**

# Habit 1: Be Proactive®

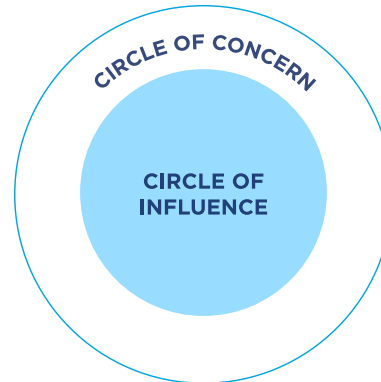
The first habit is based on this fundamental truth; *between stimulus and response, lies the freedom to choose.*



**Proactive people are driven by values—carefully thought about, selected, and internalised values.**

Human beings are free to choose because we possess four unique attributes: self-awareness, imagination, conscience, and independent will.

**Proactive people** understand that because we're free to choose, we're responsible for our own lives. When you have a proactive attitude toward life, you make intentional decisions based on your values, and you focus on your Circle of Influence®, which means you spend most of your time and energy on factors you can actually control or influence.



**Reactive people**, on the other hand, are driven by their emotions, as well as by their circumstances, conditions, and environment. They focus on their Circle of Concern™ and spend a lot of time worrying about things they can't change.

→ **Tip to try: Choose a problem from your work or personal life that is frustrating to you. Decide whether it's a direct-control, indirect-control, or no-control problem. Identify the first step you can take in your Circle of Influence to solve it, or at least improve it, and then take that step.**

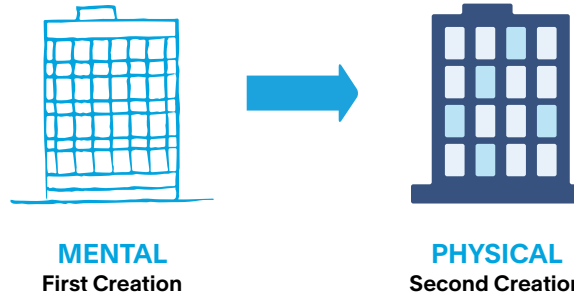
# Habit 2: Begin With the End in Mind®

The second habit is based on the insight that *all things are created twice — first mentally and then physically.*



**It is possible to be busy—  
very busy—without being  
very effective.**

If we don't have a clear vision for our lives, we tend to reactively live out the scripts handed to us by other people or repeat old patterns in an endless loop.



While this habit can be applied to effective meetings, negotiations, and difficult conversations, Habit 2 is primarily about mentally creating our own lives. Writing a personal mission statement is a great place to start.

Your mission statement is an expression of the person you want to be, the things you want to achieve, and the contributions you want to make. It defines your most deeply held values and explains how you will manifest them in your life. It becomes a blueprint for your life.

“You could call a personal mission statement a personal constitution,” Covey wrote. “Like the United States Constitution, it’s fundamentally changeless.”

→ **Tip to try:** Set up time to completely separate yourself from daily activities and begin work on your personal [mission statement](#). Describe how you will fulfill your mission, as well as the most important roles you play and how each contributes to your overall mission.

[Use our tool to build your mission statement.](#)



“

It is not enough to be industrious; so are the ants. What are you industrious about?”

– Henry David Thoreau

# Habit 3: Put First Things First®

Habit 3 is about putting your life’s “blueprint” into action. It’s the moment-by-moment process of managing yourself.



**To say yes to important Quadrant 2 priorities, you have to learn to say no to other activities.**

Habit 2 helps you envision a life that’s congruent with your values. Habit 3 helps you manifest those values in how you choose to spend your time.

The fourth uniquely human gift—independent will—is what makes effective self-management possible. When you Put First Things First, you demonstrate that you have the personal integrity to keep the commitments you’ve made to yourself.

FranklinCovey’s Time Matrix® can help you distinguish activities that are truly important from those that aren’t. The two factors to consider are urgency and importance. Urgent matters press upon us, but some of them aren’t truly important. If something is important, it should contribute to your mission, your values, and your high-priority goals.

To Put First Things First, you must have the discipline to say no to other things, including things that urgently demand your attention. “You have to decide what your highest priorities are and have the courage — pleasantly, smilingly, nonapologetically—to say no to other things,” said Covey. “And the way to do that is by having a bigger ‘yes’ burning inside.”

→ **Tip to try: Identify a Quadrant 2 activity you’ve been neglecting—one that, if done well, would have a significant impact in your life. Write it down. Commit to do something in the next week to start implementing it.**

# Time Matrix





“

Things which matter most must never be at the mercy of things which matter least.”

– Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

# Build the habits of interpersonal effectiveness

Habits 4, 5, and 6 focus on cooperation and communication. As you develop these habits, you move from *independence* to *interdependence*.

**“What you are shouts so loudly in my ears I cannot hear what you say.”**

**— Ralph Waldo Emerson**

As an interdependent person, you can create and nurture deeply meaningful relationships. You can influence people—and they can influence you—in positive ways. And you can work with others to find better solutions to complex problems.

The Public Victories of Habits 4, 5, and 6 grow out of the Private Victories of Habits 1, 2, and 3. Living the habits of interpersonal effectiveness requires an ongoing commitment to character growth and personal integrity. In other words, you can't fake it. And if you try to practice a habit like “Think Win-Win®” simply as a technique for getting what you want, your efforts will fail.

On the other hand, if you commit your heart and mind to a paradigm of mutual benefit, mutual understanding, and creative cooperation, you'll unlock the power of trust. Covey called trust “the highest form of human motivation.” When you do something to build trust in a relationship, you're making a deposit in the other person's Emotional Bank Account. You make deposits by being courteous, kind, and honest, and by keeping your commitments. When trust is high, communication is easy, fast, and effective.

# Habit 4: Think Win-Win®

Habit 4 is based on the insight that most of life is an interdependent, not an independent, reality.



**To go for win-win, you not only need consideration, you also need courage.**

To get the results you want, you need to cooperate with other people. And that means you'll get better results by looking for solutions that benefit all parties.

"Win-win is not a technique; it's a total philosophy of human interaction," Covey wrote.

He described six paradigms of human interaction:

- Win-Win
- Win-Lose
- Lose-Win
- Lose-Lose
- Win
- Win-Win or No Deal

Most of us have been deeply scripted in the win-lose mentality, which is based on the scarcity mindset—the idea that life is a zero-sum game. To build Habit 4, we have to let go of old scripts and replace them with new ones.

Three character traits are essential to win-win:

**Integrity:** The value you place on yourself.

**Maturity:** The balance between courage and consideration.

**Abundance Mentality:** The idea that there's enough for everyone.

→ **Tip to try: Think about an upcoming interaction where you'll be attempting to reach an agreement or negotiate a solution. Commit to maintain a balance between courage and consideration.**



“

The Abundance  
Mentality flows out of  
a deep inner sense of  
personal worth and  
security.”

— Stephen R. Covey

# Habit 5: Seek First to Understand, Then to Be Understood®

Habit 5 is about empathic communication. Covey called it “the single most important principle I have learned in the field of interpersonal relations.



**Empathic listening gets inside another person’s frame of reference.**

Most of us have a natural tendency to listen autobiographically. We filter what we’re hearing through our own experiences, then we evaluate, probe, advise, or interpret based on our own frame of reference.

When you listen empathically, you try to understand people within the context of their experiences, motives, and behaviour. Instead of thinking about how you’ll respond, you suspend your views and opinions long enough to focus on understanding what the other person is saying and feeling. You rephrase the content and reflect back the emotion to verify you’ve understood correctly. In doing so, you give them the priceless gift of feeling heard and understood. You learn. You build trust. And you can often help the other person solve a problem without giving any advice at all.

“Often when people are really given the chance to open up,” Covey wrote, “they unravel their own problems and the solutions become clear to them in the process.”

→ **Tip to try: Discuss the concept of empathy with someone close to you. Tell him or her you want to work on really listening to others and ask for feedback in a week. How did you do? How did it make that person feel?**



“

When you listen with empathy to another person, you give that person psychological air.”

– Stephen R. Covey

# Habit 6: Synergise®

Habit 6 is about creative cooperation. In Covey's words, it is "the true test and manifestation of all of the other habits put together." Synergy happens when people respect and value each other's differences.



**Trust is the highest form of human motivation. It brings out the best in people.**

Synergy means the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. To achieve it, you must bring to bear Habit 1—self-awareness, imagination, conscience, and independent will—the motive or attitude of win-win (Habit 4), and the skills of empathic communication (Habit 5). When you apply these elements to an especially tough challenge, the results can feel almost miraculous.

In low-trust environments, people use a defensive communication style that produces low levels of cooperation. When there's a medium level of trust, people communicate respectfully, but the best outcome is usually a compromise—the lowest form of win-win. In high-trust situations, people are willing to take risks and explore a broader range of options, and it's possible to create solutions that are far better than what any of the participants could have imagined on their own.



**Tip to try: Think about a person who typically sees things differently than you do. Consider how those differences might be used as stepping stones to creative solutions.**



“

We tend to judge ourselves by our intent and others by their observable behaviour.”

– Stephen R. Covey

# Build a pattern of self-renewal

In the *7 Habits* framework, Habit 7 surrounds the other six habits because it's the habit that makes all the others possible.

**“Renewal is the principle—and the process—that empowers us to move on an upward spiral of growth and change.”**

**– Stephen R. Covey**

It's about renewing your energy in a balanced way, across the following four dimensions of your life: physical, spiritual, mental, and social/emotional. Some of the activities or areas of focus in each of these dimensions might be:

- **Physical:** Exercise, nutrition, stress management
- **Spiritual:** Value clarification and commitment, activities in which you find a sense of meaning greater than yourself

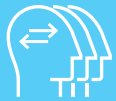
- **Mental:** Reading, visualising, planning, writing, learning, meditation
- **Social/Emotional:** Service, empathy, synergy, community

Covey illustrated this principle with his now-famous metaphor of a man who spends hours hacking away at a tree with a saw that's grown dull. When someone suggests that he take a break to sharpen the saw, the man replies, "I can't—I'm too busy sawing!"

When you pursue a balanced approach to self-renewal, you unlock the benefits of synergy. The things you do to Sharpen the Saw® in any one dimension will positively impact the other dimensions as well.

# Habit 7: Sharpen the Saw®

Habit 7 gives you the energy, focus, and inner security to practice the other six habits on a consistent basis. Sharpening the saw is a Quadrant 2 activity.



**If our personal security comes from sources within ourselves, then we have the strength to practice the habits of Public Victory®.**

The physical, spiritual, and mental dimensions are closely tied to the habits of personal leadership. Covey said everyone should spend at least one hour a day sharpening the saw in those first three dimensions—a practice he called the “Daily Private Victory.”

The social/emotional dimension is closely tied to the habits of interpersonal effectiveness. But it’s important to remember that your success at Habits 4, 5, and 6 is related to your sense of personal security. When you’re feeling insecure, it’s impossible to Think Win-Win, listen empathically, or pursue synergistic cooperation. And that means the Daily Private Victory is also the foundation of the Daily Public Victory.

Intrinsic security doesn’t come from what other people think of us or from our social position or circumstances. “It comes from accurate paradigms and correct principles deep in our own mind and heart,” Covey wrote. “It comes from inside out congruence, from living a life of integrity in which our daily habits reflect our deepest values.”

→ **Tip to try: Make a list of Sharpen the Saw activities in each of the four dimensions: physical, spiritual, mental, and social/emotional. In each area, choose one activity that you will commit to do for a full week. At the end of the week, evaluate your experience.**

# Unlock Potential. Unleash Performance.

We've reimagined the *7 Habits* course to be even more relevant and impactful for today's workers.

Among the benefits on a personal level are the principles that can increase individual effectiveness, build strong character, and change behaviour in ways that are authentic and lasting. The *7 Habits* are based on universal truths and enduring principles. They're grounded in decades of research and development—and based on the best-selling business book of all time. In fact, it's been the top leadership training framework for over 35 years.

FranklinCovey is the most trusted leadership company in the world, with operations in over 150+ countries. We transform organisations by building exceptional leaders, teams, and cultures that get breakthrough results. Available through the FranklinCovey All Access Pass®, our best-in-class content, experts, technology, and metrics seamlessly integrate to ensure lasting behaviour change at scale. Our approach to leadership has been tested and refined by working with tens of thousands of teams and organisations over the past 30 years.

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