

The where they
would want to be in



The Seven Habits of Highly Successful People by Stephen Covey was a bestseller book in the late 80s and early 90s; it sold more than 15 million copies and was translated to more than 38 foreign languages (Covey 1).

The author remains a very influential management guru of his times and indeed even in today's world because not only was his book used as a blueprint to personal development in organizational contexts but also in other disciplines such as social sciences, psychology and the likes (Covey 1). In the book, the author presents a set of ideas that if applied, aligns one towards the attainment of success by following a guideline of habits which he notes, are universal and timeless. However, observers note that the book is quite simple to understand but not necessarily simple to put into practice. Based on the analysis of the book, this study will provide a detailed summary, analysis and critique of the book's principles with regards to its inspirational and aspiration teachings.

Summary

Habit 1: Being Proactive

Stephen purports that the destiny of an individual is usually dictated by the choices he/she makes (Covey 11). This means that people are often empowered to choose their status; say, happiness, sadness, decisiveness, failure, ambivalence, courage, success, fear or any other attribute that defines a person.

Of importance is peoples' acknowledgement that every new opportunity gives an individual the chance to make a better choice. In so doing, people get a new opportunity to do things differently so that they can increase their productivity levels.

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Habit 2: Considering the End

Covey notes that people should always consider where they would want to be in future while undertaking their daily duties. This should be done alongside an analysis of the current position they are in, their dreams, ambitions, goals and the likes. This is important because Covey notes that people often find themselves in positions of success but they derive very little satisfaction from it. In fact, some people always achieve these high levels of success by trampling over the things they valued most in their lives (Covey 12). Such things could be family, friends, a dream career and the likes. Covey therefore gives an example by noting that “ If your ladder is not leaning against the right wall, every step you take gets you to the wrong place faster” (12).

This exposes an important aspect of imagination for the determination of the future.

Habit 3: Prioritizing Issues

Covey observes that human beings cannot do everything that comes along their way, at the same time. This is okay because it prevents overstraining oneself. Prioritization empowers individuals to decline taking up things they can't do and instead focus their energies on matters of higher importance. Covey observes that people are usually the creators of their lives and therefore they are in charge of their destiny.

Habit 4: Think Win-Win

Thinking of a win-win strategy is not really about being extra nice or losing one's edge, but more of collaborating and negotiating with third parties (Covey 14). Many people adopt a wrong way of living by comparing

themselves to others and evaluating their actions in the eyes of others. This has created a negative culture of basing success on the failure of another person. For example, people often see themselves as a success when a fellow person falls. The same is also true where some people perceive themselves as failures just because they have seen another person succeed.

This is created by the variation in human potential and the inequality in opportunities. Some people therefore ensure that if they fail, they have to bring other people down with them, and if they succeed, they cut links with those who've failed or in some cases; they succeed as a way of revenging. Covey notes that many people like to play this game because it is part of human nature but he questions what fun there is in doing so. Through this trail of thought, he proposes that a win-win situation needs to be upheld because it eliminates the animosity in human relationships and fosters cooperation.

Habit 5: Seek to Understand and then to be Understood

Highly effective people always don't rush to explain their side of the story before they get to understand another person's point of view. This fact elevates the most important skill to human interaction and understanding; communication (Covey 18).

Partly, the societal system is to blame because people spend endless years learning how to read, write; but little time is dedicated to listening. In fact, people rarely get life training lessons on the importance of listening to other people. Because of these shortcomings, most people often rush to be understood first and their points put across before others can air their views.

In doing so, many people become very inconsiderate because they totally disregard the views of other people, pretend to listen or selectively understand a person's views, thereby letting many points go unheard.

Habit 6: Synergy

Synergy is a common trait among highly effective people. Majorly, it underlies the premise that two heads are better than one and team work is an integral component to the success of any business.

This concept also embraces open-mindedness to induce creativity so that new solutions can be found towards solving old problems. However, this process is not easy at all. Most importantly, it doesn't happen overnight because people have to come together to contribute pieces of information and varied experiences towards the overall attainment of their ultimate goal. In this manner, a very comprehensive and hybrid solution can be obtained; better than one which could be obtained if only individual effort was employed.

Habit 7: Emphasis on Strengths

Covey sometimes refers to the emphasis on strengths to "sharpening of the saw" (19). This primarily means capitalizing on one's greatest asset. It is also what highly effective people thrive on. It means achieving a balance between various functional areas on ones life for self renewal (Covey 21). First, one area of core competence is the physical aspect of it, where people practice beneficial eating; exercising and resting to improve their physical fitness. Secondly, improvement can be done in areas of social and emotional wellbeing where interpersonal relationships can be enhanced to improve personal effectiveness. Thirdly, people can improve their mental wellbeing

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by learning to write, read, and learn and lastly, one can improve his/her physical wellbeing by engaging in natural mediation through music, art, prayer and other forms of self mediation (Covey 21).

Analysis

Habit 1

With regards to being proactive as the first characteristic of highly effective people, people should be in a position to take responsibility for their actions at all times.

In other words, it is not wise to keep blaming other people for one's shortcomings; like managers blaming lower level employees for their failure; or employees blaming the managers for their failure. Proactive people are therefore able to take a proactive stand and accept their responsibilities and shortcomings. This fact deters people from blaming their living environments, working conditions, genetics, circumstances or other parameters which may pose as an excuse for their shortcomings. Proactive people understand that their actions and behaviors all depend on their intuition. The opposite of such kind of people are reactive people who are more likely to blame their primary environments as opposed to their actions (Covey 21). These are the kind of people who always seek external factors to use a scapegoat for their shortcomings.

Habit 2

Having the end scenario in mind entails having a wild imagination.

Imagination is the ability to envision where one would be in the future because the eyes cannot see it at the moment. This element also observes

that most things are always created twice; one, in the mind and two, in reality. Just like a building follows a construction plan, the physical creation of a dream or goal follows the mental picture of it. The second habit therefore notes that if people fail to have the strategic foresight or dream about their destiny, they allow other people to control their future. Imagination therefore needs to incorporate unique attributes within an individual which ought to be nourished within the framework of ethical guidelines, moral upbringing, and personal principles towards the achievement of the final goal. Also with the end in mind, one can be able to wake up each morning with the aim of accomplishing the desired goal by flexing personal will towards the attainment of a desirable end result.

Habit 3

Recapping the first two habits of an effective person, we realize that the choice of being proactive is voluntary while in the second habit, the ability to create an end vision about one's life is imaginary; however, this third habit makes the imaginary aspect to one's destiny, real.

The third habit therefore encompasses the first and second habit and normalizes the process because it outlines that efforts need to be factored into the overall process on a daily basis. Many dilemmas regarding time management are also addressed in this context but this is just a fragment of the whole analysis. More specifically, this third habit revolves around the management of one's life.

In detail, it involves a deep analysis of one's life, values and purpose.

Emphasis should therefore be made on the things which appear to have

most importance in value. People therefore need to utilize most of their time in doing the things they find most value in; through organization and time management (in line with the resolutions made in the second habit).

Habit 4

The fourth habit being adopting a win - win scenario; it is not essentially easy to quantify it because its success lies in the hands of men and in the hearts of people who endeavor seek to foster mutual benefits (Covey 21). This is the attribute which effective people have been able to master. Effective people therefore ensure that human relationships are to a great extent beneficial to all and have a mutual benefit to all parties involved as well. If opportunities were equated to one big pie, everyone would have a share and it would taste really good if everyone were a part of it. Covey points out that people who have properly mastered the art of adopting a win-win scenario in contemporary business set ups, possess a number of traits.

First, they possess a high integrity; meaning that they adhere to their strong moral values and principles. Secondly, they have a high level of maturity which means that they have a lot of courage when expressing themselves, and they also consider other people's feelings while doing so. Lastly, these kind of people have a lot of abundance in terms of mental capability because they operate under the belief that everyone will get a share of whatever resources there is to divide (Covey 29).

Habit 5

The lack of ability to listen to other people often occurs because many people are tuned to listen just so they can respond to a given issue instead of understanding. People therefore spend most of their time listening to

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others while preparing to ask another question. This is wrong because important issues pass by without proper consideration. Also, people should refrain from listening to other people through their life experiences and comparing other people's stories with their own autobiography to see how it measures up. This leads to premature conclusions of what other people intent to put across.

Covey gives examples of common statements people make such as " Oh, I know just how you feel..... I felt the same way..... I had that same thing happen to me..... Let me tell you what I did in a similar situation" (25). This is wrong.

Because many people listen to others through their own selves, their reactions fall within a given set of responses. These responses are outlined through the processes of judging, evaluation, probing, advising and interpreting other people's information.

Habit 6

Synergy is a process that effective people employ to help them discover new solutions as a group (a goal which they wouldn't have otherwise achieved through individual effort). Synergy firmly embraces the idea that the whole is always greater than the combination of different segments towards a solution. Covey asserts that " One plus one equals three, or six, or sixty-you name it" (31). Synergy therefore thrives on open interaction and honest exchange of ideas so that new insights can be obtained. In fact, since everyone has a different opinion towards the achievement of a common task, the probability of inventing a new approach is very high.

In fact, the diversity of opinion is the real driver towards accomplishment of productive synergy.

Habit 7

An emphasis of strengths as the seventh attribute requires one to engage in a rejuvenation of the four functional areas of human life. These areas as outlined above include physical rejuvenation, social and emotional rejuvenation, learning to write, read, and learn plus natural mediation through music, art, prayer and other forms of self mediation. Improving in these core competency areas means that one can effectively improve in the other six functional areas. One's capacity to handle new challenges and problems can also be enhanced in this manner. A lack of rejuvenation in these functional areas means that the body will become weak, the mind mechanical, the emotional status in disarray, the spirit dead and ultimately, someone is bound to be very selfish in nature. These attributes lower the effectiveness of a person.

Critical Analysis

Becoming a highly effective person is a process of internal self analysis. Most of the issues identified in this study are internally motivated and largely depend on self-will. They also largely outline areas which concentrate on strengthening the functional areas of human growth. The first habit of being proactive seeks to motivate people to take responsibility for their actions and helps them focus on areas they would best make a change; as opposed to areas they have very little impact on. The habit of end consideration empowers people to know the direction they are following and expend their energy towards the accomplishment of their ultimate goals in life. This

principle also encourages people to appreciate what is of importance to their lives and concentrate less on what is unimportant.

Covey talks of issue prioritization which more or less revolves around accomplishment of specific goals but it encourages people to take up what they can do and avoid situations of burnout where they try to do everything at the same time. The fifth habit as identified in the book is however closely associated with the fourth because it encourages people to understand others' point of view as opposed to theirs. The sixth and seventh habits can also be employed concurrently because they incorporate the employment of synergy and emphasize on the strengths of an individual (because the latter can be used to develop synergy if used collectively). Comprehensively, the development of a highly effective person revolves around the 7 key areas of competence described above.

Conclusion

The most unique attribute human beings have is the ability to choose the kind of channel they will take when dealing with issues that plague their lives. Even though conditioning the different circumstances they faced with will probably have an impact in changing the course of their lives, it doesn't necessarily happen in a huge way. Covey points out that an individual is totally responsible for the type of events that characterize his/her life. In other words, the power to feel happy, sad, annoyed or such like attributes all depend on the individual involved. The book explains how human beings can achieve a positive attitude and acquire traits that make them effective. Collectively, this book is quite captivating and has the potential to change lives if applied in the right spirit.

Works Cited

Covey, Stephen. The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People. 2010. Web. 12 November. 2010.