Summary of Stephen Covey’s 7 Habits of Highly Effective People
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“Successful people have the habit of doing the things failures don’t like to do. They don’t like doing them either, but their disliking is subordinated to the strength of their purpose.”

Albert E. Gray, in The Common Denominator of Success

Habit 1: Be Proactive
This is the habit of personal vision, means taking responsibility for your attitudes and actions. It’s helpful to break the work “responsibility” into two parts:

Response + Ability = Ability to choose responses

The more we exercise our freedom to choose the more proactive we become. The key is to be a light, not a judge; a model, not a critic; to offer opportunities and starve problems, to keep promises and not make excuses, and to focus upon our circle of influence, not upon the larger circle of concern.

Habit 2: Begin With The End in Mind
This is the habit of personal leadership, meaning begin each day with a clear understanding of your desired direction and destination.

Effective people realize that things are created mentally before they are created physically. They write a mission or purpose statement and use it for making decisions. They clarify values and set priorities before selecting goals and going about their work.

Ineffective people allow old habits, other people, and environmental conditions to dictate this first creation. They adopt values and goals from their culture and climb the ladder of success, only to find upon reaching the top rung that the ladder is leaning against the wrong wall.

The second, or physical creation follows the first, like building from a blueprint. If the design is good, the construction will go faster and better. Quality can’t be inserted into an end product; it must be designed and built into it from the beginning.

Habit 3: Put First Things First
This is the habit of personal management, which involves organizing and managing time and events around the personal priorities identified in Habit 2.

Habit 4: Think Win-Win
Think Win-Win is the habit of interpersonal leadership. In families and businesses, effectiveness is often achieved through the cooperative efforts of two or more people. Win-Win is the attitude of seeking mutual benefit. It begins with a commitment to explore all options until a mutually satisfactory solution is reached, or to make no deal at all. It begins with an abundance mentality, a belief that by synergistically increasing the “pie” so there are enough pieces for everybody. People with a scarcity mentality believe there is only enough for the best; they seek win-lose solutions. The Win-Win Agreement clarifies expectations by making the following five elements very explicit: desired results, guidelines, resources, accountability and consequences.

Habit 5: Seek First to Understand, Then to be Understood
This is the habit of communication – one of the master skills in life, the key to building win-win relationships, and the essence of professionalism. We see the world as we are, not as it is. Our perceptions come out of our experiences. Empathic listening is deeply therapeutic, because once people are understood they lower their defenses.

Hammering emotionally rooted problems by probing is often counterproductive. Evaluation, sympathy, and advising are also ineffective as means of gaining understanding and influence, but they may have value once the other person feels understood.

Habit 6: Synergize
This is the habit of creative cooperation or teamwork. For those who have a win-win abundance mentality and exercise empathy, differences in any relationship can produce synergy – where the whole is greater than the sum of its parts.

1 + 1 = 3 Synergy results from valuing differences by bringing different perspectives together in the spirit of mutual respect. People then feel free to seek the best possible alternative, often the “3rd alternative”, which may be substantially different and better than either of the original proposals.

Habit 7: Sharpen the Saw
This is the habit of self-renewal. Sharpening the Saw means having a balanced, systematic program for self-renewal in the 4 areas of our lives: physical, mental, social/emotional, and spiritual.

It is the law of the harvest: we reap what we sow. We will enjoy a successful harvest if we cultivate these 7 Habits of effectiveness and live in accordance with the underlying principles.