

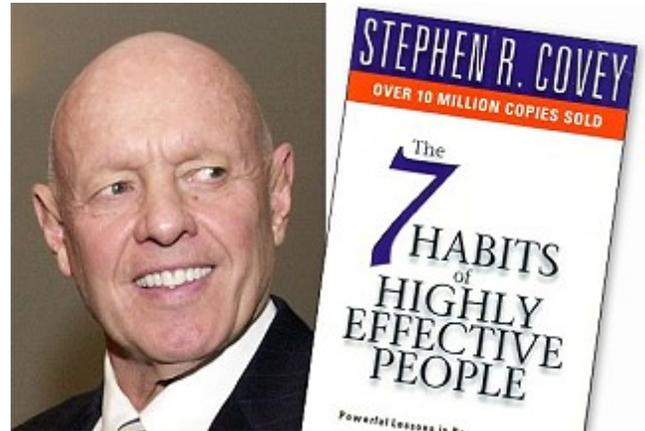
# VENTURING MAGAZINE

LeaderThoughts #21 by Michael Brown

May 2015

## Stephen Covey and His 7 Habits

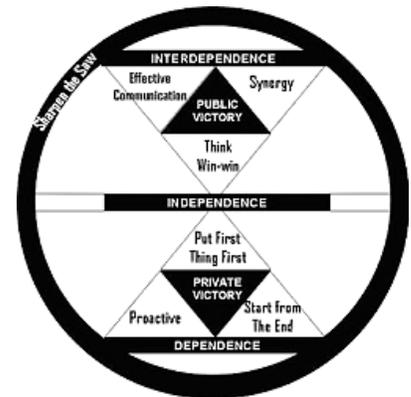
There are those works which are so popular that many people just blow them off. The works of **Stephen Covey** fall into that category. They've been around for so long that too often people overlook them. And like most popular works, he has his detractors, who are put off by numbered lists and charts (6 these and 5 those and the like). While his works seem to principally focus on managing your time, which is a skill that all leaders need, there is a lot more to his works than that. There is a lot to his works that require more than a superficial reading.



His first and major work is *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People* (1989, revised edition 2004). As the name says, it focused on 7 activities or habits (they are habits, because they are things that we should be in the habit of doing) that everyone should follow to be effective in their life and activities (that can include your job, career, school, or what have you).

What are these 7 Habits? These are them:

- |                 |  |
|-----------------|--|
| Independence    | 1 - Be Proactive                                 |
|                 | 2 - Begin with the end in Mind                   |
|                 | 3 - Put First Things First                       |
| Interdependence | 4 - Think Win-Win                                |
|                 | 5 - Seek First to Understand, then be understood |
|                 | 6 - Synergize                                    |
| Self-renewal    | 7 - Sharpen the Saw                              |



The Habits are gathered into 3 groups. The first group is about **yourself**, what some call **self mastery**. As you are responsible for your life, you need to move from being dependent on others to being independent. Being **proactive** means you determine what you do, and more importantly, that you take action on it. Proactive people don't blame others or circumstance for their behavior. They understand that that is something they are responsible for.

**Having an end in mind** means you have a goal (or goals), what you are trying to achieve. What do you want to accomplish? And once you have this, you can start putting into action what you need to do to get there.

And **putting first things first** is about managing your time wisely. Time management is a very valuable skill that most of us have never mastered. And it's not just something that only business people need.

The second group is about **working with others**. When you **think "win-win"**, you are working to come up with solutions that benefit all sides. It's really all about how we interact with others. Conflict often occurs, but if you work to understand the other side and then help them understand your side, this can minimize the conflict, and help lead to that win-win solution. This is the basis for all effective communication. And synergy is about people coming together and by doing so, achieving and doing something greater than themselves.

The third group is about self-renewal. **Sharpen the saw** is about learning and preparing yourself so you can achieve your best. It comes from an old story. Someone is asked to cut down a tree and how long it will take. He tells them 3 hours. 2 and half to sharpen his ax, a half hour to cut it down. It's the sharpening of the ax that ensures an easy half hour to cut it down. But we often times don't think of this for ourselves. And this preparation takes several forms: physical, emotional, mental, and social.

Now, for something that is so successful, there are a LOT of add-ons to this. Covey and his associates have come up with journals and notebooks and the like for people to use to put this to use. Covey merged his company with Franklin, a maker of planners, so a lot of product should be expected. His younger son Sean has put out a version for teens (which is probably the work that Venturers should want to check out) and another for kids. There is a version for family. There are also books giving success stories (*Living the 7 Habits*).

A different book is *First Things First* (1994), which focuses on the issue of time management, expanded on that Habit, something that all of us face. Covey's method is that all the things we want to do can be categories into one of four groups. These groups are put into a quadrant of urgency & importance:

- 1 - Crisis
- 2 - Exercise, vocation, practice [WHERE WE WANT TO BE]
- 3 - Interruptions, distractions
- 4 - Busy work, time wasters

The idea is that by understanding what category something falls, we can better management things. We want to manage our activities so we are doing #2 items at the right time (not allowing them to become urgent). #1 items may come up without our control. By better managing (helped by realizing this) the #3 and 4 items, we can better focus on the #2 items.

	Urgent	Not Urgent
Important	<b>I</b> ACTIVITIES: Crises Pressing problems Deadline-driven projects	<b>II</b> ACTIVITIES: Prevention Relationship building Recreation New opportunities
Not Important	<b>III</b> ACTIVITIES: Interruptions Some phone calls Some mail Some meetings Popular activities	<b>IV</b> ACTIVITIES: Trivia Some mail Some phone calls Time wasters Pleasure activities

This is a great video that illustrates some of his concepts of time management:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RE5geO3GDtk>

*Principle-Centered Leadership* (1990) is Covey's work on leadership. His view is that leadership should be based on certain principles. Instead of 7 Habits, his concept is built on 4 levels, each with a principle. These 4 levels and principles are:

- Personal- Trustworthiness
- Interpersonal- Trust
- Managerial- Empowerment
- Organizational- Alignment

The personal level is your relationship with yourself. Interpersonal is your relationships and interactions with others. Managerial is your responsibility to get the job done with others. Organizational is your need to organize people (recruit, train, compensate, build teams, solve problems, etc).

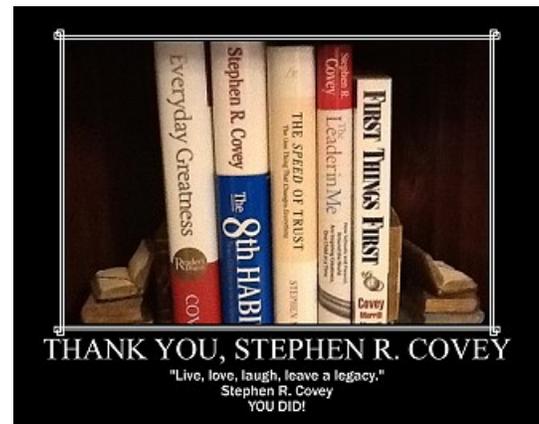
The principles are characteristics you need to master. And many of them build on each other. Trust builds on Trustworthiness, which is based on character (what you are as a person) and competence (what you can do). If one lacks either character or competence, you won't be trusted. While not expressly stated, I think that Covey's "principle-based leadership" has overlap with servant leadership. Just reading over his characteristics of principle-center leaders, you see a lot of matchup.

*The 8th Habit* (2004) is a true sequel to the 7 Habits. It adds a new habit to the mix:

### **8th Habit- Find your voice and help others find theirs**

The purpose of this Habit is to help people achieve "greatness". Greatness being fulfillment, passionate execution, and significant contribution. This in many ways ties into new attitudes regarding leadership, such as servant leadership. This book may be for some a more philosophical work than the original 7 Habits, but there are some good material in here of interest.

The book also talks of "6 Cancers" that inhibit people's greatness: **Cynicism, Criticism, Comparing, Competing, Complaining, Contending.**



One of Covey's last works is *The 3rd Alternative* (2011). This work deals with conflict and conflict resolution, and again builds off the Win-Win Habit, but goes much further. The 1st Alternative is "my way" and the 2nd Alternative is "your way". 3rd Alternative is the one that moves \*beyond\* your way or my way to a higher and better way-one that allows both parties to emerge from debate or even heated conflict in a far better place than either had envisioned. With the 3rd Alternative, nobody has to give up anything, and everyone wins. But for many of us, it's hard to get there.