


The Only Thing You Need To Remember About The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People



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Jul 24, 2012, 01:12pm • 722,844 views

Stephen Covey died last week. He pioneered the business self-help genre with the 1989 publication of his mega-hit book "The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People."

When I saw he died, I got a little panic-stricken because I couldn't remember a single one of the seven habits.

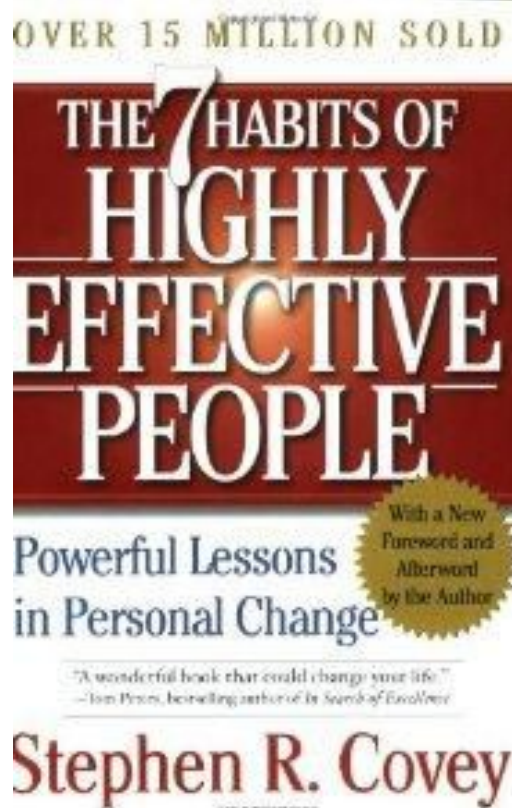
That scared me because I used to love that little book. I must have read it 4 or 5 times and tried to habitualize all of the skills.

I went to Wikipedia to look up the 7 habits [which are here](#).

Then, I got a little disappointed. Some of them weren't as great as I remember....

“ Habit 6: Synergize - combine the strengths of people through positive teamwork, so as to achieve goals no one person could have done alone. Get the best performance out of a group of people through encouraging meaningful contribution and modeling inspirational and supportive leadership.

Yeesh.



Cover of The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People

If I had to boil all these habits down to two, they'd be:

(1) Do something. Just stop sitting around and take action. Every minute you're sitting around checking [Facebook](#), you're not taking action getting you closer to your dreams

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and

(2) Plan what you're taking action about. Don't just take action willy-nilly. Actually have a plan. Think things through. Do one thing in the right order before you need to do the next thing in order to get where you want to go.

That's it.

Covey built a billion dollar empire based on those two kernels of knowledge.

But I guarantee you, two months from now, if you meet me on the street and ask, I'll probably have to confess that I've forgotten those two keys to success.

So, I sat back and realized that there was one thing I remembered from reading that book 23 years ago, which really has stayed with me through my career and has been of immeasurable help to me. It's not even a habit. It's a two-by-two matrix used to help remind you to plan things out before you take action.

Here it is:

If you remember one thing, and one thing only, about the Seven Habits of Highly Effective People book, here it is:

At the start of every week, write a two-by-two matrix on a blank sheet of paper where one side of the matrix says "urgent" and "not urgent" and the other side of the matrix says "important" and "not important." Then, write all the things you want to do that week.

Let's think of each quadrant:

Quadrant 1: Urgent-Important. These are the most pressing of tasks we'll likely get to this week. These are the crises that erupt. The most pressing meetings or deadlines fall into this category. When we do fire-fighting, it's all relating to stuff in this quadrant.

Quadrant 2: Not Urgent - Important.

These are the things that matter in the long-term but will yield no tangible benefits this week or even this year. They are things we know we need to get to but probably will push off. It's having a lunch with an important contact or client. Relationship-building. Some long-term planning. It could be attending a conference to learn about some new area that you've heard a little bit about and which sounds promising but might not pan out into anything.

Quadrant 3: Urgent - Not Important. These tasks are the biggest reason we're not more successful in the long-term. They clog up our time today but, when we look back at these things at the end of the week, we'll have to admit they were a waste of time. These are interruptions that happen, such as phone calls. These are poorly thought-out meetings that soak up our time, but which we have to attend because we already accepted the invite. These are other activities which we tell ourselves in the moment that we must do but -- if we stopped ourselves to really think about -- we'd realize they aren't that important.

Quadrant 4: Not Urgent - Not Important. These things we do because we feel like we're tired and need a break. It's watching a mindless TV show at the end of the day. It's checking and rechecking Facebook and Twitter during the day, because we think we might miss something. It mind be mindlessly eating potato chips, even though we're not hungry. We prioritize these things in the moment and obviously derive some pleasure from them, but they are really not urgent or

	Urgent	Not Urgent
Important	Crying baby Kitchen fire Some calls 1	Exercise Vacation Planning 2
Not Important	Interruptions Distractions Other calls 3	Trivia Busy work Time wasters 4

Time management matrix as described in Merrill and Covey 1994 book "First Things First," showing "quadrant two" items that are important but not urgent and so require greater attention for effective time management (Photo credit: Wikipedia)

important. Yet, we'd be amazed how much time we waste in a given week on these tasks.

If you simply spend 30 minutes at the beginning of each week thinking about these 4 quadrants and what you want to spend your time on in the coming week, you will be 10x more productive than you usually are.

What you'll quickly realize is that you've only been spending time on urgent tasks each week. It's a constant fire-drill. You're simply trying to get one thing off your plate, so you can breathe for half a second and get to the next emergency to get off your plate.

If someone stopped you and asked you whether the way you're spending your time on these urgent tasks is helping you to get to your long-term goal (whatever that is) of, for example, starting your own company, getting into a new industry, or reaching your next big job promotion, you'd probably say: "No, but I just need to get this stuff done to clear up time on my schedule so that I can do those things."

Only, guess what? You're like a hamster on the wheel. You'll never clear up time on your schedule. You'll always be drinking from the firehose on these urgent tasks.

In fact, things in business since the 7 Habits book was published in 1989 have only made us more focused on Urgent stuff. Think about it. Email, the Internet, Cell Phones, Twitter. Back in 1989, people used to pack up at 5pm on Friday and be gone until Monday morning at 9am. Now, we're always connected and ready to respond to the latest issue.

You never have to worry about the tasks in Quadrant 1 (the urgent and important tasks). You'll always have to take care of them.

You have to - as much as you can - eliminate the Quadrant 4 tasks (not urgent and not important). Just say no to Facebook. Shut them off.. They're a time suck.

[Mark Zuckerberg](#) has built a \$100 billion empire off our inability to stop doing Quadrant 4 stuff!

You also need to severely restrict the Quadrant 3 stuff (urgent and not important). Most of us don't realize how much of this stuff we do every day and we think it's important when it's really not. With better awareness and better planning, you can really cut this stuff down.

The most important thing you can do in your career relating to this simple two-by-two matrix is to do some Quadrant 2 stuff (not urgent but important) every day. At least 10% of your day needs to be devoted to this important but not urgent stuff. Ideally, you're spending 30% of every day on this.

I guarantee that you will not see flowers from planting these seeds for several months if not a year. However, if you keep with it, making it part of your regular routine, you will absolutely be blown away with the results in a year or so from now.

Opportunities will pop up. Connections will be made. A powerful relationship will blossom. All because you took the time 8 months ago to call up an old friend or contact -- or maybe because you went to conference that you were really interested in.

Maybe it's because it's a matrix and not a bunch of words, but I guarantee if you've made it this far in this article you will always remember this two-by-two matrix and start making it part of your weekly time management routine.