

Seven Habits for Educators and their Students

In 1989 Stephen Covey wrote his book, *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People* based on his research, it sold over 15 million copies and was followed by a book written by his son Sean, *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens*. *The Leader in Me*, is a book that details case studies of entire schools that use the principles to organize their curriculum.

There is a plenty of summary material on the net, and the books are worth reading. Here is a brief introduction of the concepts.

#1 Be proactive

Instead of responding to situations in a reactive way, the mindset I choose is the positive. I declare that God is in control of all I face. I think and pray before I act. I realize that I can't control everything, but I am able to do something positive with the realms of the world where I can make choices and exert influence. And prayer gives me reach and impact into zones where I have no power, e.g. the weather. I take responsibility for all my choices, I am not a fatalist. I put energy and focus into what I can do about things rather than worry and complain. I am determined to rise above abuse and setbacks. My "can do" attitude makes me a change agent in my world. I listen to my conscience, use my imagination, look for solutions and exert sustained willpower to push through obstacles.

#1 Activities

1. Pretend to be a reactive person. Respond in a reactive way to the teacher saying "You all have a 3 000 word essay on Covey's Habits. It is due in by the end of the week". Discuss then list your responses. Share them using dramatic voice with the class.
2. What is your "comfort zone" in terms of public speaking/sport/eating exotic unknown cuisine? Choose one of these areas or another where you are overly cautious. Write down something you can accomplish in the next two weeks that will extend you out of your self imposed barrier. Then set a goal for where you will be and what you will do to advance yourself even further. Share this with someone so you are committed to the goal and have an individual to be accountable to about the matter. What scriptures come to mind that might encourage you? (e.g. I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me)
3. List several things that you worry about which are beyond your circle of control. Share them with a partner. Pray about releasing them to God and start to block worrying thoughts in this area by switching to prayer. (e.g. God I am worrying about employment when I leave school and graduate, I take captive this line of thought now and put under the grace and care of Jesus)

2 Begin with the end in mind

This question is foundational to the education movement *Schooling by Design* of Wiggings and McTighe. It causes the educator to ask “Explicitly what skills, attitudes and understanding do I want from my students at the conclusion of this unit?” For the Christian school the ultimate question is , “What skills, attitudes, understanding and spiritual disciplines do I want to see in most of the graduates from our school?”

Covey encourages students to write their own personal mission statement so that they have expressed, and regularly referred to, their life plan. This means when confronted by the choice of drugs, illicit sex, diversions and rebellious behaviour, the choices have already been made long ago and reinforced repeatedly. The critical life questions then, are about our goals and dreams. We must articulate them and then make short-term targets to move us in that direction. Negative predictions and prophesy over our lives are broken; we are new creations in Christ and reject stereotypes based on our gender, postcode, race or family history.

#2 Activities

1. List several lives of people who are an inspiration to you. What enabled them to break through and exert influence? How did they push through routine, lack, barriers and challenges?
2. To go in the direction of the vocation that God is calling me towards, what skills and experiences do I need to have? List these and consider the pathway towards them.
3. Write a eulogy for yourself; make a comment on your character, career, family life, friendships, sport and recreation pursuits, and influence via the church.
4. Use the eulogy to help you write your personal mission statement so that you become *that* person spoken of above.

#3 Put First Things First

So much competes for your time, and you have limited resources. You can't do everything. You can't please everyone. You have to say lots of firm and consistent “No” responses to good opportunities and offers in order to pursue *your best*. A people pleaser won't be a world changer. Your value doesn't reside in the gallery of people who affirm and applaud you. Your value resides in God, your duty and real satisfaction resides in pleasing Him.

Procrastination robs us. Not prioritizing means that our best energies and resources won't go into achieving our main goals. My diary needs to have entered into it prayer and spiritual development periods as a first. Then in go all that I must do to achieve my life goals. I won't change these regardless of the diversions and attractive temptations which come my way. One of these may well be sleep. I need to set an alarm to get up and work to a schedule, I can't allow myself to drift. A sports kit company, Nike, has the great motto, “Just do it!” I need to put on my running shoes and get out and clock up the kilometers, I need to go to my study desk now, and I need to turn off the TV and PC now! The diet begins today. I am going to make contact with the person I offended and apologize and mend fences tonight.

#3 Activities

1. Suggest some concrete occasions where peer pressure mitigates against the pursuit of your goals. List peer pressures that work against spiritual growth.
2. List excuses a procrastinator would use to put off revision study for exams.
3. Name a fear which may be at work in your life or that of your peers preventing you doing what you want and know you should.
4. Check your diary for this month. Are the essential things in place and logged to ensure that the most important things/projects are intentionally set in place?

#4 Think Win-Win

Comparing ourselves with our siblings competing for our parents' love, is based on the assumption that their love is limited and a scarce resource. Competing with our peers for the attention of the opposite sex, for dominance in conversations, for sport, study or arts glory, all serves to alienate us. We need to genuinely celebrate the successes of others, and to try to find a way through lock up situations where we can compromise and get a dimension of what we want but also allow the person/s competing for their desire, to gain a degree of satisfaction too. We are to be neither the egotist nor the doormat; instead our role is to be the diplomat who works for the best return possible in the circumstances for all engaged in the demand for a resolution.

#4 Activities

1. Capitalism lauds the rugged and selfish individual; socialism idealizes group pursuits where there are no tall poppies. Where does a Christian stand on this continuum?
2. You and your friend want to go to different movies on Saturday night. List several win-win scenarios
3. Rather than arbitrate and choose between competing demands/people Jesus used Socratic questions to open up win-win options. Can you give an example from the gospels of this type of response?

#5 Seek First to understand, then to be understood

We pretend to listen to others, daydream, start formulating our answer response without hearing the entirety, slap down a scripture prescription and don't ask God for discernment. We need to replace self-centred listening with 'others-centred' listening, genuine tuning into others and listening with our spiritually discerning ear. If we seek to understand our responses will be much more effective, and others respond so positively to us when they recognize we dignify their communication with true hearing and processing.

#5 Activities

1. List the body language you expect of an active genuine listener and compare that to someone who is giving scant regard to your communication
2. Ask a partner how they are feeling/going. Then reflect this back to them, "I take it from what you are saying is that you feel....."
3. Ask a partner for their opinion on a controversial subject. Reflect back to them what they say, "So I understand your opinion as being that....."

#6 Synergize

2 plus 2 can equal 10. The sum of ingredients can be greater than their individual worth. In biology two organisms can coexist and the resultant relationship is much more efficient than two separate lives. A small bird gets fat on a big meal each day; it picks the left over food from between a crocodile's teeth. Lichen prospers; it is a coalition of symbiotic organisms. We learn differently, process information in alternating ways, have different mixes of giftings, and carry with us unique things from our DNA and upbringing. To synergize is to use the combined gifts of others, and to use habits #4 and #5 to bring about team success. The New Testament speaks of unity within the body of Christ, His followers. Out of the combination of gifts resident in the believers God puts in your social circle, are great riches. It is the same with group work with non-believers. Teamwork produces a better result and shares the load of delivery, allowing for the individual strengths of members to come into play.

#6 Activities

1. Your group has received a gift of \$100 that has to be spent in the next hour. Get each group member to state how it is to be spent. Then take turns restating what each person says so it's clear all understand the suggested course of action and why its proponent wants it. Then look for a win-win solution e.g. two sub groups are formed , each spending \$50
2. Birds fly in a V formation, cyclists try to ride in packs and in close proximity. Why? How does these two illustrations support understanding of the term *synergize*
3. We tithe our money, give up time to go to church, and pursue faith life activities, which would seem to deplete our time and energies compared with non-believers. How does God's economy seem to produce unexpected results much as a symbiotic relationship in biology does?

#7 Sharpen the saw

If I stop to sharpen my axe, I lose time and may seem to cut less timber than a colleague who doesn't sit out and sharpen his blade. But once I restart chopping I soon exceed his productivity quotient. When running a marathon I lose my place and others race by me as I pick up a cup of water. But the refreshment and temporary change in pace mean I can regain my original position and in time overtake the athletes who are not adequately hydrated.

I need to take time to rest, time to eat properly, and time to exercise. I need to ensure that I have recreation time to laugh and engage in entertainment. This all

optimizes my brain and body functioning. Also I need to sharpen my spiritual saw. This means rigorous bible study, fasting, prayer, and engagement in church activities. I never know when God will call on me to release a miracle, to discern and give prophetic advice, to respond and be his hands and feet in a situation. If my spiritual tank is empty, I can only fake it and deal out platitudes. I am not able to respond out of an empowered anointing. I don't have fresh manna for fuel. Engagement in the arts, music, inspirational movies, outdoor experiences in creation, reading motivating books, engaging in hobbies that renew me---all serve to equip me to proceed at my best and enhance my optimal capacities. I need the company and encouragement of mentors. I hang out with people who are going somewhere in their lives, people with vision. This rubs off on me. The company I keep affects my destiny.

#7 Activities

1. Our diet is my fuel. Junk in- junk out. List what you can do to improve the fuel that you put in to run your brain/body.. How does food affect your mood?(Think of chocolate, coffee, alcohol)
2. What am I reading recreationally that is clutter? What books, magazines, blogs etc. can I regularly read which is both recreational but also positive and constructive?
3. Am I listening to music or watching a TV series, which is negative in its message, and thereby putting a viral message in my mind and spirit?
4. What can I add to my spiritual disciplines and lifestyle that will cause me to rise up and be sharp? When did I last watch a sunrise/set and pray through the experience?

#8 Find your voice and encourage others to find theirs

Cynicism, competing, criticism, complaining and contending and comparing are six "cancers" which impede our ability to walk strongly into the destiny God has prepared for us. We and the organizations we work for, need to foster trust and to consistently live up to the values we espouse publicly. Our job is act with integrity, just like Jesus did. Also we are to assist and encourage others to live with integrity. Depersonalized work situations and a litigious society can militate against leaders and individuals operating out of their highest motivations. But someone who always chooses according to their moral compass pointing towards true north will find ultimate fulfillment and change the world around them. Choosing to live by gospel values and empowering others to live to the high standards of the kingdom is our calling.

#8 Activities

1. What can I do to enable others to break free of restraints and start to reach for their goals?
2. What is the work of Amnesty International? The Barnabus organization? Exodus? www.amnesty.org

www.barnabusfund.org www.exodusinternational.org

3. “Its dog eat dog out there in the real world”, and “Life is not all black and white, there are lots of grey areas in business” are comments made to argue that consistent integrity militates against business success. Create answers that respond to this.
4. What happened to the huge corporation *Enron*? What are the lessons for all churches and business organizations that arise from this?
5. Memorize the eight habits. Teach them, without notes, to someone who doesn’t know them. This empowers them and imprints the learning deeper in you.

References

www.stephencovey.com

www.franklincovey.com

Wiggins G p and McTighe *Schooling by Design and Understanding by Design*