

Another look at the 7 habits of highly effective people

I attended a training course a couple of weeks ago and I was amazed at how many times Steven Covey's '7 habits of highly effective people' was quoted. Covey originally published his research in 1989 and, although the book is somewhat cheesy in places, I think that the 7 habits have stood the test of time. More recent research by Daniel Goleman into emotional intelligence and leadership seems to me to reinforce many of Covey's messages. Like Covey, Goleman has found that emotional intelligence (EI) is more important than IQ in determining the success of highly effective people. So I think it is worth revisiting the 7 habits.

Habit 1: Be proactive By this Covey means basing your actions upon your own self chosen values rather than your moods, feelings or circumstances. However, to achieve this you need to have enough self awareness to know what is driving your actions. Interestingly Goleman's research backs up Covey by suggesting that two of the cornerstones of EI are self awareness and personal management. (These two themes are inherent in the next two habits also.) How self aware are we? How much self control do we show?

Habit 2: Begin with the end in mind Covey sees this habit as, not just having individual project plans, but having an overarching personal mission towards which all action is ultimately directed. Research has shown that people who have written down goals are far more likely to succeed than those who don't. What goals have you committed to and written down? How often do we start things without having a clear goal?

Habit 3: Put First Things First Covey challenges us to say no to the unimportant, no matter how urgent, and yes to the important. Do we really know what is important to make us succeed in our roles?

Habit 4: Think Win-Win Covey defines 'win-win' as seeking mutual benefit in all interdependent relationships. How often do we try to get 'one up' on someone or ignore the feelings of someone we are dealing with? How do you feel when you think you have been taken advantage of or your feelings have not been taken into account? Being socially aware is also, Goleman argues, another cornerstone of EI.

Habit 5: Seek first to understand then to be understood For many people this is perhaps the hardest of Covey's 'habits' to take on board; so keen are we sometimes to put our own point of view across instead of truly understanding the other person first. Goleman also argues that relationship management (the final cornerstone of EI) is key, and yet how many of us approach relationships without taking time to truly understand the other party?

Habit 6: Synergise Synergy according to Covey means valuing opinions, viewpoints and perspectives of others when seeking solutions. Are we self aware, and socially aware, to truly seek and value the opinions of others?

Habit 7: Sharpen the Saw Covey recognises that highly effective people continually try to improve in all areas of their life. Reading this means you are aware of the need to 'sharpen the saw' and yet are there areas of your life you neglect to work on?

Food for thought?