

THE 7 HABITS OF HIGHLY EFFECTIVE PEOPLE

BOOK DIGEST

Habit 6 : SYNERGIZE

- Principles of creative cooperation

*“I take as my guide the hope of a saint:
in crucial things, unity - in important things, diversity - in all things, generosity
--Inaugural address of President George H.W. Bush”*

SYNERGY is the **highest activity** once properly understood, and both the **test and manifestation of all the other habits** put together.

Indeed it focuses the four human endowments, the Win/Win philosophy and the skill of empathetic listening on the most challenging situations we face.

“Synergy is the essence of principle-centered leadership. It is the essence of principle-centered parenting. It catalyzes, unifies, and unleashes the greatest powers within people. All the habits we have covered prepare us to create the miracle of synergy.”

So here's the author's definition of Synergy:

“It means that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. It means that the relationship that the parts have to each other is part in and of itself. It is not only a part, but the most catalytic, the most empowering, the most unifying, and the most exciting part.”

When diving into a creative process, and **creativity is part of synergy**, we must face our fear of the unknown and **relinquish control**. This is why we had to build tremendous amounts of **internal security** first. We leave our comfort zone and must enter the wilderness, and that's how whole new possibilities can be opened and harnessed. Nature teaches us synergy everywhere we look, and the challenge is to apply this principle of creative cooperation into our social interactions.

*“The essence of synergy is to value differences—
to respect them, to build on strengths, to compensate for weaknesses.”*

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We can learn to value the physical, social, mental and emotional differences that set us apart and see them as sources of new, exciting forms of life and foundations for environments fulfilling for each person, where everyone's self-esteem and self-worth can be protected and enhanced, and where opportunities foster our independence and our path into interdependence. **Synergy can inspire new scripts for generations to come**, where trust and generosity can replace defensiveness and judgements, with a more caring and loving approach centered on service and contribution.

Synergistic communication

It can seem at first that we're casting aside habit 2 and our choice to begin with the end in mind, but here the end is simply the will to make sure that both parties gain more insights, learning and growth than anyone could have achieved alone.

Most people have never seen modeled any kind of synergy. They've been scripted into protective and defensive patterns and tend to believe that life or other people cannot be trusted. This is the cause of tremendous amounts of untapped potentials, with people trapped into inefficiency.

Synergy is freeing and transformative but it requires first a deep sense of internal security and openness to a spirit of adventure. **Creative endeavors are always somewhat unpredictable**, and call for tolerance for ambiguity. People need to tap into their integrity and personal values to find the grounding necessary to release the need for structure, certainty and predictability.

Synergy in the classroom

For synergy to exist, **a safe environment** is required to enable people to be open to learning and to listen to each other. It allows for brainstorming where no evaluation is held and imagination and creativity can thrive. This creates **momentum and excitement**, and suddenly a whole new way of thinking can appear, in place of old scripts and habits.

A lot of us carry wounds around missed opportunities for synergy. As Stephen Covey describes:

"It's like administrators who set up new rules and regulations based on the abuses of a few people inside an organization, thus limiting the freedom and creative possibilities for many—or business partners who imagine the worst scenarios possible and write them up in legal language, killing the whole spirit of creativity, enterprise, and synergistic possibility."

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The first steps of synergy require **tremendous courage** because they call for deep authenticity, which means a need for vulnerability.

The author then quotes Carl Rogers saying “That which is more personal is most general.” He adds:

“The more authentic you become, the more genuine in your expression, particularly regarding personal experiences and even self-doubts, the more people can relate to your expression and the safer it makes them feel to express themselves.”

That’s how **creative empathy** can enter the room and exciting **new solutions** can be born.

Synergy and communication

Stephen Covey described how the United States nominated David Lilienthal to head the Atomic Energy Commission, and how he chose to spend the first few weeks focusing only on building the team’s EBA, regardless of all the criticism he was receiving for lack of efficiency. This example shows us how that brave choice created a culture of trust and collaboration, a culture of synergy:

“That attitude was “If a person of your intelligence and competence and commitment disagrees with me, then there must be something to your disagreement that I don’t understand, and I need to understand it. You have a perspective, a frame of reference I need to look at.”

Indeed where there is **low trust and low cooperation**, there can only be defensiveness. Protective and often legalized language is used. People default to Win/Lose or Lose/Win paradigms, and there’s no P/PC consideration.

When there are **medium amounts of both**, there’s room for respectful communication and the lowest form of Win/Win agreements: compromises. Ugly confrontations are avoided and people do not communicate emphatically but they’re polite. They understand each other intellectually and base their decisions on that. However creativity cannot be unleashed.

Only where there is **high trust and high cooperation** can synergy thrive and the Win/Win philosophy rule.

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Fishing for the third alternative

Buddhism speaks about a **middle way** and that can be misinterpreted: they're not talking about compromise. They're talking about a third way, a **better one**. They're envisioning the apex of the triangle.

When we choose to synergize, we commit to communicate back and forth UNTIL we reach a solution that both parties feel good about. **Nothing else is acceptable**. It's not a transaction, it's a transformation; and it builds the relationship while solving the issue.

Negative synergy

Let's all pause and reflect on the amount of negative energy we typically spend on solving problems, making decisions in our interdependent relationships. How quickly it can become adversarial, and how logic and eloquence can take over empathy and love. It's because most of us are still scripted in manipulative ways where we, consciously or not, try to apply Win/Lose or Lose/Win tactics to an interdependent reality. We try to clone others and to mold them into who we want them to be. We resent our differences... when synergy teaches us to value them even more than our similarities.

We need to develop interpersonal and intrapersonal synergy—synergy within ourselves. It is achieved by building the internal security to remain open and vulnerable and by developing the Win/Win mentality, abundance maturity and authenticity of habit 5 (seeking to understand first and having the courage to be understood too). This allows us to acknowledge that life is not only logical, it is also emotional.

Valuing the differences

“Valuing the differences is the essence of synergy—the mental, the emotional, the psychological differences between people. And the key to valuing those differences is to realize that all people see the world, not as it is, but as they are.”

If we trick ourselves into thinking that the way we see the world is the way the world is, we cannot value any differences of opinions or perspectives, because we make it mean that they are wrong. We're convinced we're objective. That there is a fact and that we're attuned to it. There's no room for discussion.

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We need to harness the humility and reverence to recognize that our perceptions are limited ones and to appreciate the depth of the resources available through everybody's heart and mind. That's true effectiveness.

"When we're left to our experiences, we constantly suffer from a shortage of data."

It's important to remember that facing the same white and black lines, our conditioning will lead us to make up a different picture (as it happened with the young vs old woman in the first chapter). We need to realize that, as the author writes:

"Unless we value the differences in our perceptions, unless we value each other and give credence to the possibility that we're both right, that life is not always a dichotomous either/or, that there are almost always third alternatives, we will never be able to transcend the limits of that conditioning."

Yes we see things differently but if I value you, if I value your perception, I don't want to judge you, I want to understand. I want you to help me see what you see. After all, S.C. reminds us that:

"If two people have the same opinion, one is unnecessary."

Force field analysis

Synergy is particularly useful in **dealing with the negative forces** that work against growth and change in interdependent situations. The author describes sociologist Kurt Lewin's model where any current level of performance is the result of an equilibrium between the positive, reasonable, logical conscious and economic driving forces and the negative, unconscious, illogical, social and/or psychological restraining forces facing them.

Synergy creates the safety to talk about those forces, and by bringing the restraining forces into light we can transform them into driving ones. Everyone sees the problem as their own and everyone wants to solve it together. This creates new goals and more potent ones because they are shared.

All nature is synergistic

"Ecology is a word that basically describes the synergism in nature—everything is related to everything else. It's in the relationship that creative powers are maximized, just as the real power in these 7 habits is in their relationship to each other, not just in the individual habits themselves."

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This **relationship between parts** is key in creating synergy everywhere including in families and organizations.

Synergy is another name for effectiveness when considering an interdependent reality: in teamwork, team building or within any unit where unity and creativity between human beings is needed. And most of our contribution to a synergistic process is part of our circle of influence.

The author reminds us that:

“Your own internal synergy is completely within the circle. You can respect both sides of your own nature—the analytical and the creative side. You can value the differences between them and use that difference to catalyze creativity.”

Synergy with ourselves serves us well in a very adversarial environment where we can remember not to take insults personally, to sidestep negative energy and to look for the good in others and utilize that good. No matter how different someone’s point of view is, it can always enlarge our own perspective.

And synergy with ourselves drives us to tap into our courage to be open, true and authentic about our thoughts, feelings and experiences and to inspire others to do the same.

*“You can value the difference in other people (...).
You don’t have to agree with them; you can simply affirm them.
And you can seek to understand.”*

*“When you see only two alternatives—yours and the “wrong” one—
you can look for a synergistic third alternative.*

*There’s almost always a third alternative.
and if you don’t work with a Win/Lose philosophy and really seek to understand,
you usually can find a solution that will be better for everyone concerned.”*

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Here are our homework:

- To think about a person that sees things differently than we do and reframe these differences into stepping-stones.
- To make a list of those people that irritate us and see how with greater intrinsic security we could value our differences and find synergy.
- To identify a situation where we want to foster synergy and identify how.
- To use synergy the next time we face conflict in a conversation and to try and understand the concerns of the other persons in order to find creative mutually beneficial solutions.

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BOOK CLUB DISCUSSIONS

SAVE THE DATE

You're invited

Tuesday, October 24th

from 7pm-8pm

Virtual Zoom Meeting

OR

Friday, October 27th

from 12pm-1pm

Virtual Zoom Meeting