

# THE 7 HABITS OF HIGHLY EFFECTIVE PEOPLE

## BOOK DIGEST

### RENEWAL

#### Habit 7 : SHARPEN THE SAW

##### - Principles of balanced self-renewal

*“Sometimes when I consider what tremendous consequences come from little things...  
I am tempted to think... there are no little things—Bruce Barton”*

Stephen Covey starts this chapter with the metaphor of an exhausted man sawing a tree relentlessly. Someone asks him why he doesn't take a small breath to catch his breath and sharpen his saw, pointing out that he would work much faster afterwards! But the woodworker replies that he does not have time to sharpen his saw... he has too much sawing to do for that.

Habit 7 is the **foundation of all the others** because it enables all of them! It's meant to **enhance and preserve our greatest asset, ourselves**.

We need to renew the **four dimensions** of our nature daily. Those dimensions are **physical** (through exercise, nutrition and stress management), **spiritual** (through value clarification and commitment, study and meditation), **mental** (through reading, visualizing, planning and writing) and **social/emotional** (through service, empathy, synergy and intrinsic security).

Those four dimensions have been highlighted by the work of many others, including the philosopher Herb Shepherd who grounds a healthy balanced life on four values: tone (**physical**), perspective (**spiritual**), autonomy (**mental**) and connectedness (**social**).

It is also at the root of organization theory where we need to account for the economic (**physical**), the contribution made (**spiritual**), how people contribute (**mental**) and how people are treated (**social**).

*“SHARPEN THE SAW basically means expressing all four motivations.  
It means exercising all four dimensions of our nature, regularly and consistently in wise and balanced ways.”*

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It asks us to be proactive, since sharpening the saw is a **quadrant II activity**. We must turn it into a healthy addiction, and remember that is 100% **within our circle of influence**. This is our **DUTY** to ourselves.

*“This is the single most powerful investment we can ever make in life—investment in ourselves, in the only instrument we have with which to deal with life and to contribute. We are the instruments of our own performance, and to be effective, we need to recognize the importance of taking time regularly to sharpen the saw in all four ways.”*

### The physical dimension

We must care effectively for our physical body, which includes our need for nutritious food, rest and relaxation, and regular exercise. Exercise, especially, must be a quadrant II activity before becoming a quadrant I obligation! We trick ourselves into thinking we don't have time to exercise, but we actually don't have time not to. We need to develop and nurture our endurance, flexibility and strength very regularly.

*“Probably the greatest benefit you will experience from exercising will be the development of your habit 1 muscles of proactivity. As you act based on the value of physical well-being instead of reacting to all the forces that keep you from exercising, your paradigm of yourself, your self-esteem, your self-confidence, and your integrity will be profoundly affected.”*

### The spiritual dimension

This can take very different forms and does not have to be done through religion. Great literature, great music can connect us to our reverence for Life and our sense of awe, just as well. And of course, so can Nature.

*“The spiritual dimension is your core, your center, your commitment to your value system. It's a very private area of life and a supremely important one. It draws upon the sources that inspire and uplift you and tie you to the timeless truths of all humanity.”*

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### The mental dimension

After leaving the discipline of school, many of us lose their drive to learn, to stretch our minds, to read seriously, to think critically or write in a way that harnesses and hones our communication skills, outside of our action and work-related fields.

The power of television and social media to influence us in the most subtle and imperceptible ways is still underestimated, and it takes great mastery of habit 3 to be able to select entertainment programs that serve and sources of information that also inspire us and connect us to our agency and values.

We must remember to **expose ourselves to great minds** repeatedly, in order to nurture and expand ours, and the best way to do so is by reading at the very least a book a month and ideally a book a week: He quotes Mark Twain who reminded us that **“The person who doesn’t read is no better off than the person who doesn’t read”**.

It will be even more impactful if we remember habit 5 and to seek first to understand the author’s point of view. He points out that:

*“If we use our own autobiography to make early judgments before we really understand what an author has to say, we limit the benefits of the reading experience.”*

Writing is another great way to sharpen our mental saw. It leads us to hone our ability to think clearly, reason accurately and to learn how to be understood effectively.

Finally organizing and planning (and habit 2 + 3!) are powerful activities to develop and maintain our mental sharpness.

S.C. advises building into our lives a practice he calls the **Daily Private Victory**, when we dedicate one hour each day to sharpen those first three dimensions. He quotes Phillips Brooks who wrote that **“Character cannot be made except by a steady, long continued process.”**

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### The social/emotional dimension

*“The social and the emotional dimensions of our lives are tied together, because our emotional life is primarily, but not exclusively, developed out of and manifested in our relationships with others.”*

It doesn't take the same singled out dedicated time as the three others, but it is still a skill we get to hone everyday, because relationships take practice. It requires us to master the habits of interdependence (4, 5 and 6).

*“Success in Habits 4,5 and 6 is not primarily a matter of intellect: it's primarily a matter of emotion. It's highly related to our sense of personal security”*

We need to make sure that **our source of personal security** comes from within ourselves. Being intellectually advanced will never be enough for our relationships to thrive if we're emotionally immature. Especially when some tough conversations are needed on a triggering issue, the process can rapidly become too threatening for our system. The author reminds us that intrinsic security cannot come from the scripts that were handed to us , our circumstances nor our position. In his own words:

*“It comes from within. It comes from accurate paradigms and correct principles deep in our own mind and heart. It comes from inside-out congruence, from living a life of integrity in which our daily habits reflect our deepest values.”*

*“I deeply believe that a life of integrity is the most fundamental source of personal worth.”*

S.C. does not believe that self-esteem is a matter of mindset, attitude, or that we can just decide to find peace of mind. He believes we need to be in harmony with our values and principles and that **self-esteem** then occurs **naturally**. Moreover, **intrinsic security** comes **organically** as a result of effective interdependent living, from knowing that Win/Win solutions exist in almost any situation. It grows when we realize we can step out of our frame of reference without losing it or giving it up! And that it is possible to deeply understand other human beings. That we can interact interdependently and with authenticity, creativity and cooperation. Intrinsic security also comes from contribution and from being in service to others, feeling like we can make a difference. Finally, it comes from anonymous service where the only concern is to bless the lives of others.

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### Scripting others

Most of us are a function of our social mirrors and we are part of the social mirrors of all of those who surround us. Therefore we have the opportunity to reflect back to others all their uniqueness, potential and talents. We can affirm them as proactive people and remind them of their agency. We can treat them in a way that recognizes that they are responsible people and help script them as “principle-centered, value-based, independent, worthwhile individuals.” We can model the abundance mentality.

“AT SOME TIME IN YOUR LIFE, YOU PROBABLY HAD  
SOMEONE BELIEVE IN YOU WHEN YOU DIDN'T BELIEVE IN YOURSELF.

THEY SCRIPTED YOU.”

We can listen to others, empathize with them and shy away from absolving them of responsibility helping, thereby reminding them of all they can be as proactive and effective beings.

It is important for us to consider what we reflect to others about themselves and whether we like our answer or not. We can be mindful of the influence we have on our social circle and make sure that we fill their EBA. In Stephen Covey's words:

*“We can refuse to label them—we can “see” them in new, fresh ways each time we're with them. We can help them become independent, fulfilled people capable of deeply satisfying, enriching, and productive relationships with others.”*

### Balance in renewal

A balance between the four dimensions is needed. Neglecting any one of those will negatively impact all the others. It is true for the individual and for organizations. Indeed, when creative energies are not harnessed to create synergy, they can be spent out against the organization (or ourselves) and turn into restraining forces of productivity and growth.

“We can't effectively thrive without making money, but that's not sufficient reason for organizational existence. We can't live without eating, but we don't live to eat.”

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### Synergy in renewal

Balanced renewal is **synergy** at its best! Sharpening the saw in any direction will benefit all the others, all of whom are highly interconnected.

“Although the habits are sequential, improvement in one habit synergistically increases your ability to live the rest. The more proactive you are (habit 1), the more effectively you can exercise personal leadership (habit 2) and management (habit 3) in your life. The more effectively you manage your life (habit 3), the more quadrant II renewing activities you can do (habit 7). The more you seek first to understand (habit 5), the more effectively you can go for synergetic Win/Win solutions (habit 4 and 6). The more you improve in any habits that lead to independence (habit 1, 2 and 3), the more effective you will be in interdependent situations (habit 4, 5 and 6). And renewal (habit 7) is the process of renewing all the habits.”

Renewing the physical dimension reinforces our personal vision and self-esteem (habit 1). Renewing our spiritual dimension reinforces our personal leadership (habit 2). Renewing our mental dimension reinforces our personal management (habit 3). All of those make tremendous deposits into our intrinsic security account. And that in turn allows us to reinforce our social/emotional dimension, giving the strength to focus on our circle of influence in interdependent situations.

“Your economic security does not lie in your job; it lies in your own power to produce—to think, to create, to adapt. That’s true financial independence. It’s not having wealth; it’s having the power to produce wealth. It’s intrinsic.”

The Daily Private Victory also builds our sense of intrinsic security. And it is the foundation of Daily Public Victory.

### The upward spiral

“The voice of conscience is so delicate that it is easy to stifle it:  
but it is also so clear that it is impossible to mistake it.”

Educating our own conscience is vital for our effectiveness and to be truly proactive. If we don’t choose the purposes and principles we want to live by, the void will be filled by default through outside scripting and out of survivalism. Only by increasing our educated conscience regularly can we find the freedom, security, wisdom and power that lie within us.

The upward spiral asks us to **learn, commit, and do** ON REPEAT.

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### Here is our homework:

- List physical activities that we will enjoy and that fit our lifestyle,
- Make one of those activities our goal for the upcoming week,
- Make similar lists for our mental and spiritual dimensions, and identify which relationships we wish to develop and improve.
- Committing to choose specific “sharpen the saw” activities for each of the four dimensions and to tend to them each week, with regular evaluations of our results and performance.

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### INSIDE OUT AGAIN

“Change—real change—comes from the inside out.

It doesn't come from hacking at the leaves of attitude and behavior with quick-fix Personality Ethic techniques.

It comes from striking at the root—the fabric of our thought, the fundamental, essential paradigms, which give definition to our character and create the lens through which we see the world.”

The author reminds us that:

*“Achieving UNITY—oneness—with ourselves, with our loved ones, with our friends and working associates, is the highest and best and most delicious fruit of the 7 habits.”*

And no, building a character of total integrity isn't easy and neither is living a life of love and service. But it's possible and begins with our choice to center ourselves on our values and principles and by breaking free from the paradigms we inherited from others and our circumstances.

Planting the seeds and working from the inside out, we can ground through the Daily Private Victory and use the 7 habits to build a congruent and effective life. Doing so, one rapidly feels the excitement of real growth and tastes the incomparable fruits of all these efforts.

“By centering our lives on correct principles and creating balanced focus between doing and increasing our ability to do, we become empowered in the task of creating effective, useful, and peaceful lives... for ourselves, and for our posterity.”



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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*