

# THE 7 HABITS OF HIGHLY EFFECTIVE PEOPLE

## BOOK DIGEST

### PRIVATE VICTORY

#### Habit 1 : BE PROACTIVE – Principles of personal vision

*"I know no more encouraging fact than the unquestionable ability of man to elevate his life by conscious endeavor  
–Henry David Thoreau"*

Self-awareness is a strictly human feature. It allows us to look at ourselves, stepping into the role of the observer, examining our mood and mental state, and understanding our thought process. And this is how we can break our current habits and choose to create new ones. As Stephen Covey writes:

*"We are not our feelings. We are not our moods. We are not even our thoughts.*

*The very fact that we can think about these things separate us from them and from the animal world. Self-awareness enables us to stand apart and examine even the way we "see" ourselves–our self-paradigm. the most fundamental paradigm of effectiveness. (...) it becomes our map of the basic nature of mankind"*

The author invites us to **examine our paradigms** and determine whether we operate from our conditioning and conditions or if our paradigms are reality, which means principle based:

*"In fact, until we take how we see ourselves (and how we see others) into account, we will be unable to understand how others see and feel about themselves and their world. Unaware, we will project our intentions on their behavior and call ourselves objective."*

#### The social mirror

We tend to only have reflections of ourselves through our social mirrors, but those **reflections** are actually **mostly projections**, and the product of the concerns and character weaknesses **of the people giving the input**, not an accurate reflection of the one observed.

We must become aware of **three social maps** we tend to disempower ourselves:

- **Genetic** determinism: where we believe that everything is due to our DNA,
- **Psychic** determinism: where we believe we are irremediably shaped by our upbringing and childhood experience,
- **Environmental** determinism: where we believe an external situation is controlling us.



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We only acknowledge the fact that we have been conditioned to respond in a certain way to external stimulus, forgetting that we have also the **ability to revisit our conditioning and make different choices**, not realizing that those beliefs can become self-fulfilling prophecies.

### Between stimulus and response

S.C. retells the story of **Viktor Frankl**. V. Frankl, a German Jewish psychiatrist was imprisoned in Nazi death camp and lost most of his family during WW2, with the exception of his sister. **In his awe inspiring book, "A Man's Search for Meaning"**, he walks us through his experience and explains how he then realized that **"the last of the human freedoms"** is **our ability to choose our response** to any situation, even the most horrendous one... and that no guard could ever govern what he was thinking. In realizing this, he gained a sense of liberty--despite his complete lack of freedom--which, he believed, was far wider than the liberty of his Nazi captors, no matter how FREE they were. He realized that **between stimulus and response, there is a space in which man has the freedom to choose.**

S.C. then adds that:

*"Within the freedom to choose are those endowments that make us uniquely human. In addition to self-awareness, we have imagination--the ability to create in our minds beyond our present reality. We have conscience--a deep inner awareness of right and wrong, of the principles that govern our behavior, and a sense of the degree to which our thoughts and actions are in harmony with them. And we have independent will--the ability to act based on our self-awareness, free of all other influences."*

It is by using these endowments that we can truly **fulfill our human potential.**

### Proactivity defined

Proactivity is a habit, and it implies more than merely taking initiative. In the author's words:

*"It means that as human beings, we are responsible for our own lives. **Our behavior is a function of our decisions, not our conditions.** We CAN subordinate feelings to values. We have the initiative and the RESPONSIBILITY to make things happen."*

For S.C. we need to read "response-ability" in the word responsibility. We must stop blaming our circumstances, conditions or conditioning for our behaviors, and make our behaviors a result of our own conscious choice--a choice based on our values.



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We are **by nature proactive**, which implies that if our lives are a function of our conditioning and conditions, we unconsciously chose to let them be. We **became** reactive. We let ourselves be affected by our environment which includes the literal weather and the social weather. Our mood becomes driven by the sun, the rain, the behaviors of others, the weaknesses of other people... The author explains:

*"The ability to subordinate an impulse to a value is the essence of the proactive person. Reactive people are driven by feelings, by circumstances, by conditions, by their environment. Proactive people are driven by values—carefully thought about, selected, and internalized values."*

Of course external stimuli affect everyone, but proactive people make a value based choice in response.

*"As Eleanor Roosevelt observed, "no one can hurt you without your consent. In the words of Ghandi, "They cannot take away our self-respect if we do not give it to them." It is our willing permission, our consent to what happens to us, that hurts us far more than what happens to us in the first place."*

It is a very **hard concept to accept emotionally** and yet it is a most profound one and very good news, because when we realize that we are where we are today because of the choices we made yesterday, we understand that we can choose today differently and meet a whole new tomorrow.

It is not to deny the hurt that we may experience physically, economically or that sorrow is part of Life. But we can acknowledge that our basic character and identity does not have to suffer. It is actually the most trying times that allow us to develop our internal powers and forge our character. They are potent drivers to the paradigm shifts that allow us to change and grow for the better.

*"Nothing has a greater, long-lasting impression upon another person than the awareness that someone has transcended suffering, has transcended circumstance, and is embodying and expressing a value that inspires and ennobles and lifts life."*

V. Frankl described **three central values in life**: the experiential, the creative and the attitudinal. S.C. believes that attitudinal is the highest of the three.

### Taking the initiative

Once we learn how to choose our responses, we feel **empowered to create our circumstances**. We want to take initiative which does NOT mean being pushy, aggressive or obnoxious. It means taking responsibility to make things happen. A lot of us got stuck, waiting for something to happen or for someone to come along to take care of us. But we can **use our own resourcefulness and initiative** to reach our goals.

*"Holding people to the responsible course is not demeaning; it is affirming."*



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### Act or be acted upon

S.C. compares the difference between those who take initiative and those who don't to the difference between day and night. We can either decide to act or default to be acted upon. And that does not mean denying reality and relying uniquely on positive thinking. It means facing our current reality and using it to create our future circumstances.

### Listening to our language

Our language will **betray** where we **lack proactivity**. The author gives many examples, but here are two highly relatable ones: Thinking we don't have time, as if time was indeed controlling us/Saying we have to do something, as if other people could actually force us to do what we do.

And the risk with reactive language is that it becomes a **self-fulfilling prophecy**, reinforcing the belief that we are determined and leading us to produce evidence to support the belief. It makes people feel victimized, out of control, controlled by outside forces and therefore not in charge of their own lives.

Proactive people apply different meanings on words and especially on words such as love. When so many define it as a feeling, proactive people realize that love is a verb and a value actualized through loving actions.

### Circle of CONCERN/Circle of INFLUENCE

S. Covey urges us to consider **two circles** that greatly influence our lives: our circle of concern and our circle of influence. We can assess our own level of proactivity by determining on which of the two we focus the most. **A proactive person will work on what they can do, their circle of influence**. It fuels them with a positive, enlarging, magnifying energy which in turn allows them to increase that circle incrementally. **Reactive** people are stuck in their circle of **concern**, focusing on people's weaknesses, environmental problems and other circumstances on which they have currently no control over. All of this leads to blaming tendencies, reactive choice of words, accusation and a sense of victimization. It creates negative energy that shrinks their circle of influence even more.

Of note, if we find ourselves in a situation of privilege where we have allowed to have a circle of influence that is bigger than our circle of concern, we must realize that we have what the author calls "self-inflicted emotional myopia" and that it is time to reassess our ability to take into account our surroundings.



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### Direct, indirect, and no control

Our problems fall in one of three areas: **direct control** (our own behavior: DCP), **indirect control** (other people's: ICP) or **no control** (the past or situational realities: NCP) problems. Proactivity leads us to stay within our circle of influence and to work on our DCP by changing our habits, on our ICP by changing our methods of influence, and on our NCP by taking responsibility for our attitude towards them, by genuinely accepting them peacefully and by learning how to live with them and by not allowing them to control us.

### Expanding the circle of influence

**Reactive** people **absolve** themselves of responsibility. It protects them from having to acknowledge that their own choices led them into negative, collusive environments, especially if they've been blaming their circumstances on other people's shortcomings for years.

Proactive people are value driven, grounded in reality and aware of what the situation requires from them. And by doing so they see their circle of influence expand exponentially.

### The Haves and the Bes

Our circle of **concerns** is filled with **HAVEs** ("if only I had []") and our circle of **influence** is filled with **BEs**; that's an easy formula to differentiate them ("I can be more []").

*"Anytime we think the problem is "out there", that thought is the problem."*

Because we then empower our surroundings and disempower ourselves. And something outside of us has to change before we can.

Proactivity allows us to realize that we need to change from the inside out and that by BEING different, we'll effect positive change on our environment.

**"We are responsible-response-able-to control our lives  
and to powerfully influence our circumstances by working on BE, on what we are."**



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### The other end of the stick

In our circle of **concerns** lie **consequences** and **mistakes**. Indeed, even if we are free to choose our actions, we cannot control or dictate their consequences. They are out of our circle of influence. And sometimes, despite our best intentions, we make the wrong choice. We make mistakes. Those mistakes too are out of our circle of influence now, they're in the past, we can't undo them nor can we control their consequences now.

We need to be aware of those two facts and understand that **it's pointless to try to control any of them**. All we can do is **acknowledge** the situation, **correct** what we can and **learn** from it. That's how we can turn so-called failures into successes. Of note, not acknowledging them or correcting them is a mistake of its own kind: our response to our mistake affects the quality of the ulterior moments, this is why admitting them and correcting them is the only way to find our way back to empowerment.

### Making and keeping commitments

**"At the very heart of our circle of influence is our ability to make and keep commitments and promises. The commitments we make to ourselves and to others, and our integrity to those commitments, are the essence and clearest manifestation of our proactivity.**

**It is also the essence of our growth. Through our human endowments of self-awareness and conscience, we become conscious of areas of weakness, areas of improvement, areas of talent that could be developed, areas that need to be changed or eliminated from our lives.**

**Then, as we recognize and use our imagination and independent will to act on that awareness-making promises, setting goals, and being true to them—we build the strength of character, the being, that makes possible every other positive thing in our lives."**

That's **how we regain control** of our lives: by making promises and keeping them and by setting goals and working to achieve them. That's how we build our inner integrity and gain awareness of self-control and the courage and strength to accept more responsibility in our own stories.

**"By making and keeping promises to ourselves and others, little by little, our honor becomes greater than our moods."**

That's also how we build our habits of effectiveness.



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### Proactivity: the thirty day test

Let's test our proactivity! Let's review how we view our problems, where we focus our energies, our language, let's work only on our circle of influence for thirty days. Let's make small commitments to ourselves and let's keep them. Let's be a light, a model and part of the solution (not a judge, a critic or part of the problem.)

*"Try it in your marriage, in your family, in your job. Don't argue for other people's weaknesses, don't argue for your own. When you make a mistake, admit it, correct it, and learn from it—immediately. Don't get into blaming, accusing mode. Work on things you have control over. Work on you. On BE."*

Once again, Stephen Covey warns us:

*"If you start to think the problem; is "out there", stop yourself. That thought is the problem."*

*"People who exercise their embryonic freedom day after day will, little by little, expand that freedom. People who do not will find that it withers until they are literally "being lived". They are acting out the scripts written by parents, associates and society."*

### So here are our homeworks:

- To listen to our **language** and all our HAVEs for a full day.
- To identify a **situation** in our near future where we would have default to reactivity in the past: How can we now focus on our circle of influence and respond proactively?
- To select a **problem** at work and classify it as a DCP, ICP or NCP and then choose our first proactive step to solve it.
- Try proactivity for **30 days**! And watch our circle of influence change.



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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*