

A GUIDE TO INTENTIONAL LIVING

Living the *7 Habits*.

Inspired by Stephen Covey's The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People.

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Seek first to understand rather than to be understood.

— Stephen R. Covey



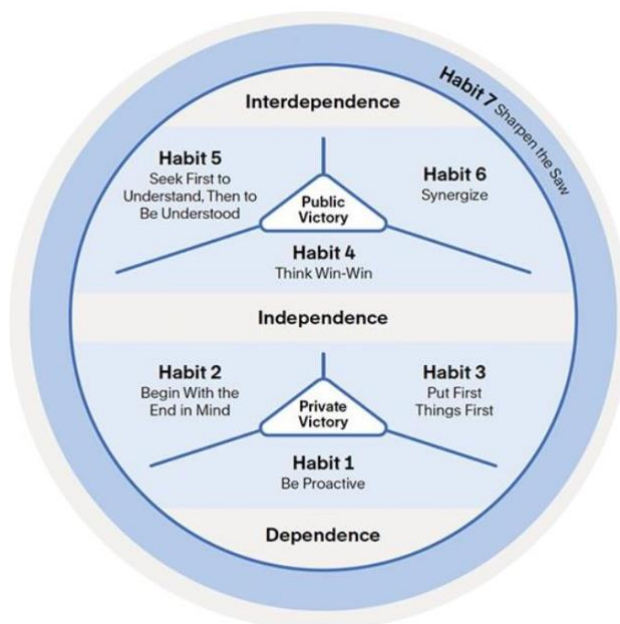
Living the 7 Habits.

Stephen Covey published *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People* decades ago, yet the questions underneath those habits may be even more relevant today.

In a world that constantly competes for our attention, it is remarkably easy to live reactively. We respond to the email, the deadline, the expectation, the opinion, the crisis, and whatever is demanding our attention next. We can spend our days being very busy without stopping to ask whether the way we are living reflects what actually matters to us.

Covey's seven habits invite us to do something different. They ask us to take responsibility for our choices, become intentional about where we're going, protect what matters, and learn how to live and work well with other people. And they remind us that none of this is sustainable if we never stop to renew ourselves.

This isn't a summary of everything Covey taught. Think of it instead as a reflection guide. Seven habits. Seven questions. Seven opportunities to notice how you're living and choose what you want to do next.



The habits build from the inside out — private victory before public victory, and renewal running underneath all of it.

Habit 1 BE PROACTIVE

Be Proactive.

What is mine to do?

I am not a product of my circumstances. I am a product of my decisions.

— Stephen R. Covey

Life gives us plenty we did not choose. Other people's behavior. Their opinions. Decisions made by organizations. The economy. The weather. The past. Unexpected losses and disappointments. The email we wish had never arrived.

We don't control all of it. But we are not powerless within it.

One of Covey's most important ideas is what he called response-ability — our ability to choose our response. Proactivity doesn't mean pretending circumstances don't matter or that we can control how everything affects us. It means recognizing that even when we cannot control what is happening around us, we can become more intentional about what happens next.

We can notice where we place our attention. We can examine the story we're telling ourselves about what is happening. We can choose our boundaries and our words. We can decide what action — if any — is ours to take.

Sometimes our influence is significant. Sometimes it is very small. But there is usually something that remains ours.

The problem is that we can spend enormous amounts of energy fighting things we cannot change while neglecting the places where we actually have agency.

So when you find yourself frustrated, worried, angry, or stuck, ask: What is mine to do here?

Not, how do I control this? Not, how do I get everyone else to behave differently? Simply, What is mine?

Agency is not having control over everything. It is recognizing where you still have choice.



A useful way to sort what's yours: is this something I can control, something I can influence, or simply something I care about? Those are not the same thing, and mixing them up is exhausting.

And when something genuinely isn't yours to control, you still have a choice — it just changes shape.

Act — identify what is yours to do. **Reframe** — change how you're interpreting it. **Accept** — stop fighting reality as it is. **Release** — decide it no longer deserves your energy.

YOUR TURN

Think about something currently taking up more of your mental or emotional energy than you would like. What is outside your control? What can you influence? What is one thing that is yours to do?

Then put your energy there.

Habit 2 BEGIN WITH THE END IN MIND

Begin With the End in Mind.

What am I building toward?

It is entirely possible to be successful at building a life you never consciously chose.

We get busy. We respond to opportunities. We meet expectations. We pursue the next promotion, achievement, house, credential, or milestone. And because we're moving, we assume we're headed somewhere we want to go.

Covey challenges us to begin with a picture of where we want our choices to lead. His teaching goes beyond traditional goal setting to include our principles, roles, vision, mission, and the legacy we hope to leave.

The point isn't to predict your future perfectly. It's to live today with some awareness of the direction you're heading.

Think beyond what you want to accomplish. Consider the person you want to become, the relationships you want to nurture, the contribution you want to make, and the way you hope people experience you. A meaningful life isn't built only from what we achieve. It is also built from what we give our attention to along the way.

Then look at the life you're living now.

Is the way I am living taking me toward the life I actually want?

YOUR TURN

Imagine yourself several years from now. Don't think only about what you've accomplished. Think about who you have become. What do you hope is true about that person? What matters enough that you don't want to lose it along the way?

What is one choice you could make now that points you in that direction?

You don't need the entire map. You need to know which direction you want to walk.

Habit 3 PUT FIRST THINGS FIRST

Put First Things First.

Does the way I spend my time reflect what I say matters?

The urgent is very good at getting our attention. It buzzes. Rings. Sends notifications. Schedules meetings. Creates deadlines. Appears in the inbox with an exclamation point.

The important is often much quieter.

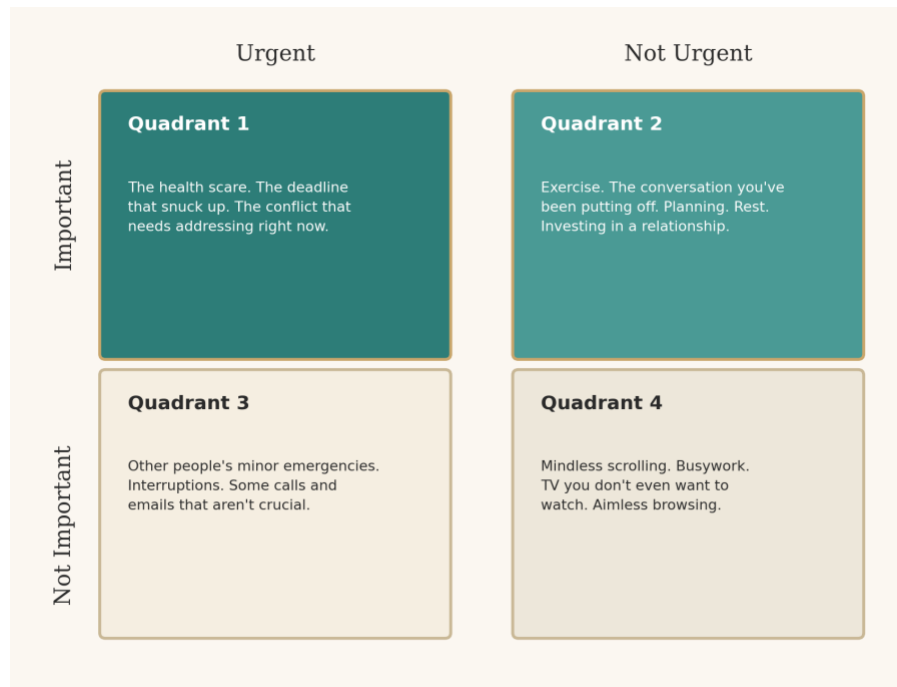
Relationships. Health. Reflection. Planning. Growth. Rest. Meaningful work. The conversation we've been meaning to have. The person we've been meaning to call.

These things don't always demand our attention.

Until one day they do.

Covey's Time Management Matrix distinguishes between what is urgent and what is important. He argued that many of the activities that create a meaningful and effective life live in Quadrant II: they are important, but they aren't yet urgent.

That's why prioritizing isn't simply about getting more done. It's about protecting what matters before it becomes urgent.



Take a look at your calendar. Not the calendar you wish you had. The real one.

Our calendars can be surprisingly honest.

The question isn't simply, What do I need to get done? It is: What deserves a place in my life before it becomes an emergency?

YOUR TURN

What matters deeply to you but keeps getting crowded out by what feels urgent? What are you giving time to that no longer deserves as much of it?

What is one important thing you want to protect this week?

Sometimes putting first things first begins by deciding what gets a no.

Habit 4 THINK WIN-WIN

Think Win-Win.

Am I living from scarcity or abundance?

It is easy to fall into the belief that life is a competition. Someone else's opportunity means one fewer opportunity for me. Someone else's recognition diminishes mine. If someone wins, someone else must lose.

Covey called this a scarcity mentality. An abundance mentality begins with a different assumption: another person's success does not automatically diminish our own. From that mindset, relationships become less about protecting our position and more about finding possibilities that honor both people.

But win-win is more than positive thinking. It asks us to hold two truths at the same time: what matters to me matters, and what matters to you matters too.

That requires both courage and consideration. Without courage, we may abandon our own needs to keep the peace. Without consideration, we may pursue what we want without regard for the other person.

Win-win looks for another possibility.

It doesn't mean avoiding difficult conversations, abandoning boundaries, or agreeing with everyone. Sometimes there isn't a perfect outcome that gives everyone exactly what they want. But we can still enter the conversation asking whether there is a way forward that respects both people.

YOUR TURN

Think about a relationship, disagreement, or decision where you currently feel tension. What outcome are you hoping for? What might matter to the other person?

What would change if you entered the conversation genuinely looking for a way forward that respected both of you?

Habit 5 SEEK FIRST TO UNDERSTAND

Seek First to Understand, Then to Be Understood.

Do people feel understood by me?

Most of us know how to be quiet while another person is talking.

That doesn't necessarily mean we're listening.

Sometimes we're preparing our response. Solving the problem. Forming our defense. Comparing what they're saying to something that happened to us. Waiting for a pause long enough to jump in.

We may hear every word and still miss the person.

Covey called us toward empathic listening — listening not simply for information, but to understand another person's perspective, emotions, and meaning before rushing to communicate our own.

Understanding does not require agreement. You can understand why someone feels the way they do without deciding they're right. You can listen deeply without surrendering your own perspective.

Being heard is not the same as being agreed with. Sometimes what people need most is to know that we have made the effort to understand their experience.

People are often much more willing to hear us after they believe we have genuinely heard them.

The next time someone important to you is talking, notice what happens inside you. Are you curious? Or are you rehearsing?

YOUR TURN

Think about one of your most important relationships. When this person talks to you, what do you tend to do — listen, fix, advise, defend, compare, or interrupt? What might you understand if you became a little more curious?

Try one simple sentence: “Help me understand.” And then listen.

Habit 6 SYNERGIZE

Synergize.

What can someone else see that I cannot?

Difference can irritate us. Someone approaches a problem differently. Communicates differently. Moves faster or slower. Sees risks we don't see. Questions something we thought was obvious.

Our instinct can be to convince them to see things our way.

But what if their difference isn't the problem? What if it contains information?

Covey describes synergy as creative cooperation — the possibility that people with different strengths and perspectives can create something together that neither could have created alone.

This requires more than tolerance. It requires curiosity and humility.

We tend to notice the cost of other people's differences before we notice the limitations of our own perspective. Synergy requires enough confidence to bring what we know and enough humility to recognize that we don't know everything.

The person who frustrates you because they ask a hundred questions may see a risk you've overlooked. The person who wants to move before everything is perfect may see an opportunity you're analyzing to death. The quiet person in the room may be noticing something everyone else is missing.

We don't need everyone around us to think like us.

Our perspective is a perspective, not the perspective.

YOUR TURN

Think about someone whose approach is very different from yours. Instead of asking what they need to change, ask what this person might see that you don't. What strength might be underneath the difference that frustrates you?

What could become possible if you used both perspectives?

Sometimes the better answer isn't yours or mine. It's the one we couldn't see until we worked together.

Habit 7 SHARPEN THE SAW

Sharpen the Saw.

What needs renewal in me?

There is a particular kind of exhaustion that comes from continually producing without replenishing.

We keep going because there is work to finish, someone who needs us, another deadline, another responsibility. And because we can keep going, we assume we should.

We often treat renewal as something we'll get to when everything else is done.

Everything else is never done.

There will always be another email, another responsibility, another person who needs something, another reason to postpone ourselves.

Covey uses the metaphor of sharpening a saw to describe the need for regular renewal across the physical, mental, emotional/social, and spiritual dimensions of our lives.

The principle is beautifully simple: the person doing the work needs care too.

Eventually, the question isn't whether we can keep going. Human beings can keep going for a remarkably long time.

The better question is: Who am I becoming while I do?

Renewal isn't simply about recovering enough energy to become productive again. It is about caring for the whole person who is living this life.

Renewal may mean movement or rest. Reading something that stretches your mind. Prayer. Solitude. Time in nature. A long conversation with someone who knows you. Creating something. Laughing. Sleeping.

It doesn't always mean doing more. Sometimes renewal means finally stopping.

YOUR TURN

Consider yourself as a whole person. What part of you feels most depleted right now? What genuinely restores you — not merely distracts you?

What is one way you could make room for that this week?

Rest and renewal aren't interruptions to a meaningful life. They help make one sustainable.

Closing SEVEN HABITS, ONE LIFE

Seven Habits. One Life.

Covey's habits were never meant to be seven boxes we check.

They build on one another. We learn to recognize our ability to choose. We become clearer about where we're going. We make room for what matters. Then our attention begins to move outward — toward relationships, understanding, collaboration, and what becomes possible when we stop trying to do everything alone.

And throughout it all, we renew the person doing the living.

You don't need to master all seven habits this week. In fact, please don't try.

Look back over the questions in this guide. Which one made you uncomfortable? Which one made you stop? Which one feels particularly relevant to the season you're in?

Start there.

One Habit. One Choice.

Choose the habit that seems to be asking for your attention right now. What are you noticing about yourself? What is one choice you want to make differently? What could help you remember when the moment comes?

You don't have to change your entire life.

Pay attention to one choice. One conversation. One boundary. One priority. One response.

Then practice again tomorrow.

A more intentional life isn't built in one defining moment. It is built in the ordinary moments when we remember that we still have a choice about how we want to live.

*This guide is inspired by Stephen R. Covey's *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*. It is designed as a reflection and application companion, not a replacement for the book. If one of these habits particularly speaks to you, go back to Covey's original work and explore it more deeply — there is far more wisdom behind each habit than any short guide could, or should, try to contain.*