



Seven Habits Revisited: Seven Unique Human Endowments by Stephen R. Covey

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November 1991

I see seven unique human endowments or capabilities associated with *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*.

One way to revisit *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People* is to identify the unique human capability or endowment associated with each habit.

Those associated with Habits 1, 2 and 3 are primary human endowments. And if those endowments are well exercised, secondary endowments are bequeathed to the person through the exercise of Habits 4, 5, and 6. And the endowment associated with Habit 7 renew the process of growth and development.

Primary Endowments

The primary human endowments are 1) self-awareness or self-knowledge; 2) imagination and conscience; and 3) volition or will power. And the secondary endowments are 4) an abundance mentality; 5) courage and consideration; and 6) creativity. The seventh endowment is self-renewal. These are all unique human endowments; animals don't possess any of them, but they are all on a continuum of low to high levels.

Associated with Habit 1:

Be Proactive is the endowment of self-knowledge or self-awareness - an ability to choose your response (response-ability). At the low end of the continuum are the ineffective people who transfer responsibility by blaming themselves or others or their environment anything or anybody "out there," so that they are not responsible for results. If I blame you, in effect I have empowered you. I have given my power to your weakness. Then I can create evidence that supports my perception that you are the problem.

At the upper end of the continuum toward increasing effectiveness is self-awareness: "I know my tendencies; I know the scripts or programs that are in me; but I am not those scripts. I can rewrite my scripts." You are aware that you are the creative force of your life. You are not the victim of conditions or conditioning. You can choose your response to any situation, to any person. Between what happens to you and your response is a degree of freedom. And the more you exercise that freedom, the larger it will

become. As you work in your circle of influence and exercise that freedom, gradually you will stop being a "hot reactor" (meaning there's little separation between stimulus and response) and start being a cool, responsible chooser no matter what your genetic makeup may be, no matter how you were raised, no matter what your childhood experiences were, or what the environment is. In your freedom to choose your response lies the power to achieve growth and happiness.

Imagine what might happen if you could get every person inside a company to willingly act on the belief: "Quality begins with me, and I need to make my own decisions based on carefully selected principles and values." Proactivity cultivates this freedom. It subordinates your feelings to your values. You accept your feelings, "I'm frustrated, I'm angry, I'm upset. I accept those feelings; I don't deny or repress them. Now I know what needs to be done. I am responsible." That's the principle: "I am response-able."

So on the continuum, you go from being a victim to self-determining creative power through self-awareness of the power to choose your response to any condition or conditioning.

Associated with Habit 2:

Begin With the End In Mind is the endowment of imagination and conscience. If you are the programmer, write the program. Decide what you're going to do with the time, talent, and tools you have to work with: "Within my small circle of influence, I'm going to decide."

At the low end of the continuum is the sense of futility about goals, purposes, and improvement efforts. After all, if you are totally a victim, if you are a product of what has happened to you, then what can you realistically do about anything? So you wander through life hoping things will turn out well, that the environment may be positive, so you can have your daily bread and maybe some positive fruits.

At the other end is a sense of hope and purpose: "I have created the future in my mind. I can see it, and I can imagine what it will be like." Animals can't do that. They may instinctively gather nuts for the winter, but they can't create a nut-making machine, nor do they ask the question, "Why do I do nuts? Why don't I get someone else to gather nuts for me?" Only humans examine such questions. Only people have the capability to imagine a new course of action and pursue it conscientiously.

Why conscience? Because to be highly effective, your conscience must monitor all that you imagine, envision, and engineer. Those who attempt to exercise creativity without conscience inevitably create the unconscionable. Or, at the very least, they exchange their creative talents for "canned goods," using their creativity, their applied imagination and visual affirmations, to win material things or social rewards. And then they become hopelessly imbalanced. They may speak the lines of the life balance script, but in reality their constitutions are written on the fleshy tablets of their spleen.

It is reaffirming to me to see that winners of the Academy Awards, for the most part, exhibit creativity with conscience. For example, Kevin Costner's *Dances with Wolves* made a beautiful statement about native Americans. The Academy knows that the film industry has enormous influence, and with that creative power must come conscientious social responsibility.

Practice using these two unique human capacities: First, see yourself going to the office this afternoon, or home tonight, and finding it in a terrible situation. The house is a total disaster. No one has done his or her job; all the commitments made have been unfulfilled. And you're tired and beat up.

Now, imagine yourself responding to that reality in a mature, wise, self-controlled manner. See the effect that has on someone else. You didn't confess their sins. You started to pitch in. You were cheerful, helpful, pleasant. And your behavior will prick the conscience of others and allow the consequences agreed upon to happen.

You just used two unique human capacities: imagination and conscience. You didn't rely on memory; if you had relied on memory or history, you might have lost your cool, made judgments of other people, and exacerbated conditions. Memory is built into your past responses to the same or similar stimuli. Memory ties you to your past. Imagination points you to your future. Your potential is unlimited, but to potentiate is to actualize your capabilities no matter what the conditions are.

In the book *Man's Search For Meaning*, Viktor Frankl, the Austrian psychiatrist imprisoned in the death camps of Nazi Germany in World War II, tells how he exercised the power to choose his response to his terrible conditions. One day he was subjected to experiments on his body and he discovered, "I have the power to choose." And he looked for meaning. He believed that if you have a meaning (purpose or cause), if you have a why, you can live with any what.

The development of his professional life came out of that one insight. He was raised in the Freudian tradition of psychic determinism. He learned it was a lie. It wasn't based on science. It came from the study of sick people, neurotics, and psychotics, not from the study of healthy, creative, effective people. He didn't go to his memory; he went to his imagination and conscience. You, too, can progress along the continuum from futility and old habits to faith, hope, and inner security through the exercise of conscience and imagination.

Associated with Habit 3:

Put First Things First is the endowment of willpower. At the low end of the continuum is the ineffective, flaky life of floating and coasting, avoiding responsibility and taking the easy way out, exercising little initiative or willpower. And at the top end is a highly disciplined life that focuses heavily on the highly important but not necessarily urgent activities of life. It's a life of leverage and influence.

You go from victim to creative resource, from futility to hope and anchorage, and from flaky to disciplined Habits 1, 2 and 3. One draws on self-awareness or self-knowledge; two draws on conscience and imagination; and three draws on willpower. These are unique human endowments that animals don't possess. On the continuum, you go from being driven by crises and having can't and won't power to being focused on the important but not necessarily urgent matters of your life and having the willpower to realize them.

From Primary to Secondary Endowments

The exercise of primary human endowments empowers you to use the secondary endowments more effectively.

Associated with Habit 4:

Think Win-Win is the endowment of an abundance mentality. Why? Because your security comes from principles. Everything is seen through principles. When your wife makes a mistake, you're not accusatory. Why? Your security does not come from your wife living up to your expectations. If your son, your husband, your friend, or your boss makes a mistake, you don't become accusatory, you look with compassion. Why? Your security does not come from them. It comes from within yourself. You're principle-centered.

As people become increasingly principle-centered, they love to share recognition and power. Why? It's not a limited pie. It's an ever-enlarging pie. The basic paradigm and assumption about limited resources is flawed. The great capabilities of people are hardly even tapped. The abundance mentality produces more profit, power, and recognition for everybody.

On the continuum, you go from a scarcity to an abundance mentality through feelings of intrinsic self-worth and a benevolent desire for mutual benefit.

Associated with Habit 5:

Seek First to Understand, Then to Be Understood is the endowment of courage balanced with consideration. Does it take courage and consideration to not be understood first? Think about it. Think about the problems you face. You tend to think, "You need to understand me, but you don't understand. I understand you, but you don't understand me. So let me tell you my story first, and then you can say what you want." And the other person says, "Okay, I'll try to understand." But the whole time they're "listening," they're preparing their reply. They are just pretending to listen, selective listening. When you show your home movies or tell some chapter of your autobiography "let me tell you my experience," the other person is tuned out unless he feels understood.

What happens when you truly listen to another person? The whole relationship is transformed: "Someone started listening to me and they seemed to savor my words. They didn't agree or disagree, they just were listening and I felt as if they were seeing how I saw the world. And in that process, I found myself listening to myself. I started to feel a worth in myself."

The root cause of almost all people problems is the basic communication problem: people do not listen with empathy. They listen from within their autobiography. They lack the skill and attitude of empathy. They need approval; they lack courage. Within their frame of reference, they say, "What can I do to please that person. He has this high need for control. Wait a minute, I'm the manager in control. I didn't come to listen I came to tell. When I want your opinion, I'll give it to you." The ability to listen first requires restraint, respect, and reverence. And the ability to make yourself understood requires courage and consideration. On the continuum, you go from fight and flight instincts to mature two-way communication where courage is balanced with consideration.

Associated with Habit 6:

Synergize is the endowment of creativity the creation of something. How? By yourself? No, through two respectful minds communicating, producing solutions that are far better than what either originally proposed. Most negotiation is positional bargaining and results at best in compromise. But when you get into synergistic communication, you leave position. You understand basic underlying needs and interests and find solutions to satisfy them both.

Two Harvard professors, Roger Fisher and William Ury, in their book *Getting to Yes* outline a whole new approach to negotiation. Instead of assuming two opposing positions ("I want that window open." "No, closed." "No, open.") with occasional compromise half open half the time they saw the possibility of synergy. "Why do you want it open?" "Well, I like the fresh air." "Why do you want it closed?" "I don't like the draft." "What can we do that would give the fresh air without the draft."

Now, two creative people who have respect for each other and who understand each other's needs might say, "Let's open the window in the next room. Let's rearrange the furniture. Let's open the top part of the window. Let's turn on the air conditioning."

They seek new alternatives because they are not defending positions. Whenever there's a difference, they say, "Let's go for a synergistic win-win. Let's listen to each other. What is your need?" "Well, I'm in just the mood for this kind of a movie. What would you like?" Maybe you can find a movie or some other activity that would satisfy both. And you get people thinking. And if you get the spirit of teamwork, you start to build a very powerful bond, an emotional bank account, and people are willing to subordinate their immediate wants for long-term relationships.

One of the most important commitments in a family or a business is never to badmouth. Always be loyal to those who are absent if you want to retain those who are present. And if you have problems, you go directly to the person to resolve them. If you refuse to badmouth someone behind their back to another person, what does that person know? When somebody badmouths him behind his back, you won't join in.

For example, during times of death, divorce, and remarriages, there are typically many strained feelings in families over the settlements. Family members who feel slighted or cheated often say nasty things about other family members. Think how much pain and anguish might be spared if members of the family would adhere to two basic principles: 1) People and relationships in our family are more important than things (people on their deathbed never talk about spending more time at the office, they talk about relationships); and 2) When we have any difficulty or difference, we will go directly to the person. We are responsible for our own attitudes and behaviors, and we can choose our responses to this circumstance.

With courage and consideration, we will communicate openly with each other and try to create win-win solutions. On the continuum, you go from defensive communication to compromise transactions to synergistic and creative alternatives and transformations.

Associated with Habit 7:

Sharpen the Saw is the unique endowment of continuous improvement or self-renewal to overcome entropy. If you don't constantly improve and renew yourself, you'll fall into entropy, closed systems and styles. At one end of the continuum is entropy (everything breaks down), and the other end is continuous improvement, innovation, and refinement. On the continuum, you go from a condition of entropy to a condition of continuous renewal, improvement, innovation, and refinement.

My hope in revisiting the Seven Habits is that you will use the seven unique human endowments associated with them to bless and benefit the lives of many other people.