

'I have learnt to stay away from office'

Stephen R Covey's *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People* has been a bestseller for nearly 20-odd years, since it was first published in 1989. The success, says Covey, "is because it has universal, timeless principles in it, that apply in any country, in any culture, throughout the world." In an interview with R Jagannathan and Vivek Kaul of DNA, Covey spoke about how he applies his principles in his own life, why he avoids email, why most executives spend their time doing things which are urgent but not so important, and how one can get more out of life. **Excerpts:**

With the advent of technology, there are so many distractions in our work lives. How do you really put First things First (the title of one of his best-sellers).

That is one of the most key questions. There are so many distractions and so many things that are urgent, but they are not really important. Research shows that most executives spend half their time doing things that are urgent but not important. And they end up neglecting their families, their personal life. Their community service suffers and their organisations are not as productive.

How do you separate the urgent from the important? Any tips?

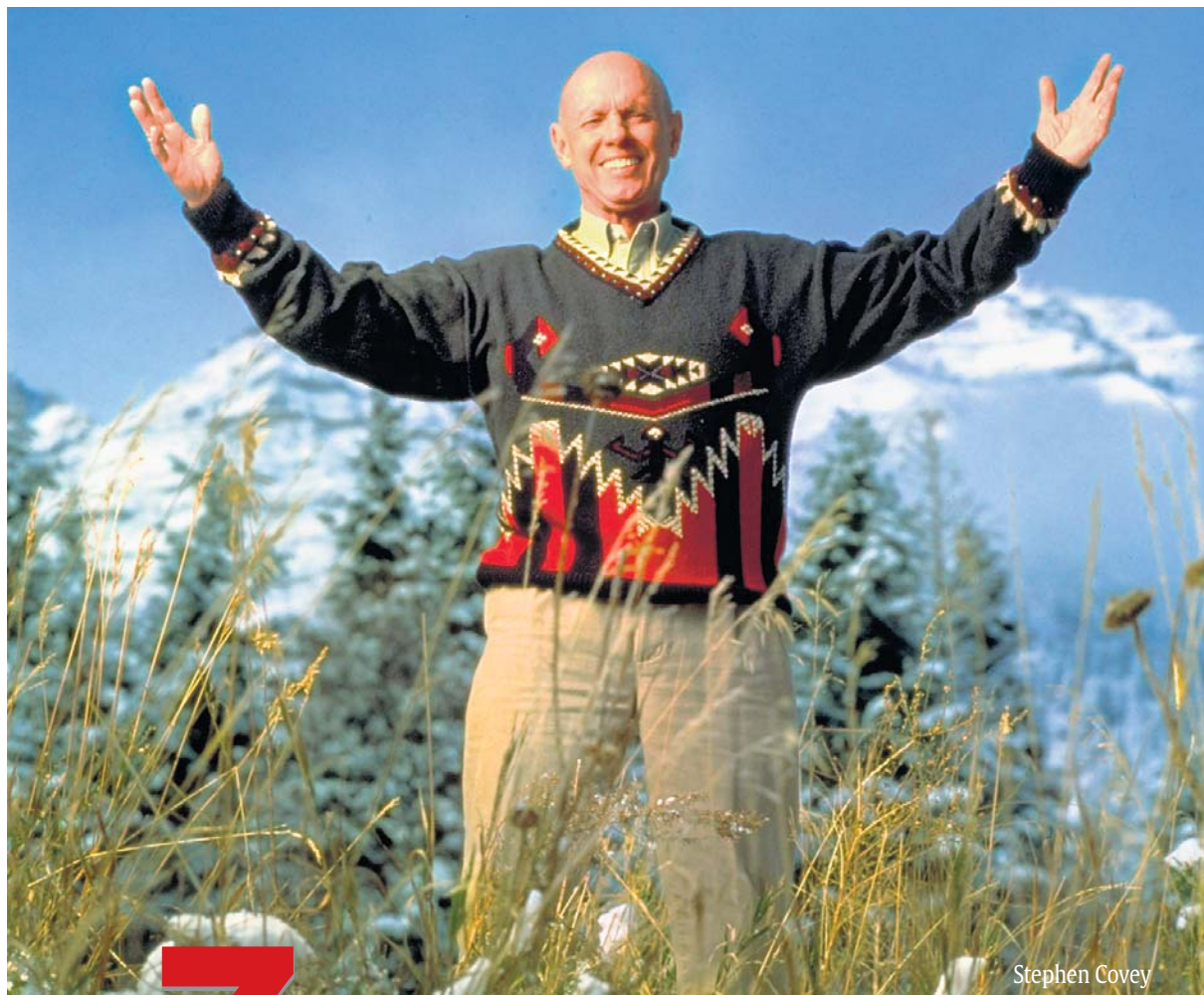
I stay away from email and from a lot of the new technology and delegate that to my staff.

You stay away from email?

I have an email source. But it comes from my assistant. And she knows how to distinguish what is important from what is just urgent and not important. I have learnt to stay away from office. I don't go to meetings. Occasionally, I will (go to office) if it is a strategic meeting because I am the co-chairman of our company. I mostly work out of my home and not at an office because you are pressed there by urgencies and not by important things. I also get up early and I sharpen the saw every morning, getting onto a stationary bike, by swimming and doing some yoga and strength exercises - and that takes me an hour. And I plan my day during that hour as well. I win my victories privately.

How do you spend your day normally?

Well, I try to practice what I teach. So I spend my day working on six book projects - books that I am working on right now. One of them is how to overcome crime. I am presenting this to the president of Mexico. We have cities all over the world that have reduced crime by 80-90%. Another one deals with how universities can transform commu-



Stephen Covey

The 7 Habits

- Be proactive
- Begin with the end in mind
- Put first things first
- Think win/win
- Seek First to Understand, Then to be Understood
- Synergise
- Sharpen the Saw

will buried in the industrial age. Toyota is moving so much more rapidly towards the knowledge worker age. They have more of a complementary team where strengths are made productive and weaknesses are made irrelevant through the strengths of other people. Less top down, less authoritarian, more empowerment and more synergy, where the whole is greater than the sum of the parts. And that is why Toyota is succeeding all around the world.

We have seen several US financial services firms go under. Is this because of their failure to observe these habits that has caused this?

Definitely. And it also comes from people not living by principles. Now the trust has gone down so low, that people have very little confidence in them. So they need to focus a great deal on how to inspire trust and to do that you have to live by principles and have the organisation live by principles.

Once you have people inspired and trust is very high, then you can involve them in coming up with a common vision and mission and value system. Then they align all the structures and systems based on principles. Then you help people find their voice. Every person has the opportunity to do what they love doing and, if they do it well, that serves the needs of the organisation. So we will focus on those four imperative of leadership: inspire trust, verify purpose, align systems and unleash talent.

What kind of leaders have really internalised the habits you have talked about?

Look at Mahatma Gandhi. He never held a position and was the leader of the largest democracy in the world. I just had a great personal visit with Nelson Mandela down in South Africa. He got his moral authority in prison. And then de Klerk opened the path for him to be released and become the first president of the new South Africa. Leadership is moral authority whereas management is formal authority that is conferred from the top. But leadership is earned from below, based on high trust and getting people emotionally connected with the strategic goals because they were involved and they understand them and they emotionally connect to them.

Do you have a personal hero, who would embody these things?

Gandhi.

What are your impressions about India?

Well. One thing is that there are so many different interests that it is difficult to make changes. And there is a

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plemented, and what process went through and what were the results. And then I teach it. And as I teach, I walk around the audience and interact a great deal. So I understand what their minds are at, what they are thinking about, what their concerns and challenges are. This way the material becomes very relevant, and I know it works before I even publish the book. And I am sent books all the time for endorsement purposes and I can tell within 15 minutes whether it will sell or not. And usually most of them won't sell because they are in the mind of the writer, not in the mind of the reader.

What kind of food do you eat?

Mostly fruits vegetables and wheat. Very little meat.

What time do you get up and what time do you turn in for the night?

I usually get up at around 6.30 am and I turn in at around midnight.

So you manage with just five or six hours of sleep?

Yeah.

That just shows you are really following your own advice very closely.

Well, I am turned on by my mission. I have a real sense of calling and mission towards what I am doing and the opportunity to influence different countries and to influence these leaders.

Most people are confused about what to do with their lives. They just trudge along and take what comes along their way. How do we discover the inner purpose of our lives?

You have to ask the question: What is it that you love doing and that you do well, and that serves a human need and that you feel called to do almost by your conscience. When those four things overlap - talent, passion, conscience and need - then people would have found their voice. But most people are never asked those questions. They are more told (what to do). They are given a job description.

How did you come up with the number seven for seven habits of highly effective people? Why not eight or five?

There was no particular reason. It just worked out that way. The first three habits represented the personal, the next three habits represented relationships with others. The seventh one, sharpen the saw (improving on one's

strengths), deals with four parts of our nature: our body, our mind, our heart and our spirit. And I find that when people personally continue to sharpen the saw, it helps all the other six habits.

How does an individual incorporate the seven habits in his or her daily life?

Most people have never found their voice. Seriously they are in jobs where they just go through the motions. They have not moved to complementary teams where people's voices or strengths are made productive and weaknesses are made irrelevant through the strengths of other people. And unless they get a new mindset in moving towards this kind of open, genuine communication, they won't find their voice.

Consequently, they won't do quality work which they otherwise could. And they don't like it. In most cases most of the people at the lower ends of organisations don't even know what the strategic goals are. And they don't even care. How to help a person find his or her voice takes more than just interpersonal skills. It takes formalization of principles inside the structure, systems and organizations. Otherwise, it's not going to be durable. It will not endure.

Where did you get the inspiration to write The Seven Habits?

It came from 20 years of research and consulting with organisations. The key insight was the separation between the private victory, which represents first three habits, and the public victory, which represents the next three habits. **You advise people to be proactive but governments are always reactive. Is there a disconnect between organisations and the advice?**

There is a disconnect. And that's true with governments and with organisations that do not have competition in the marketplace. But those who are proactive can make great things happen, can anticipate problems, can get into a preventive mindset rather than just reacting to problems as they come up. Successful people are opportunity-minded and not problem-minded.

Can you name any companies that have moved successfully to the knowledge age?

I was just with Toyota over in Japan, and they are so far ahead of Ford and General Motors and Chrysler, who are

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lot of heavy tradition and a lot of industrial age thinking going on from my experience.

Any plans to come to India?

I am coming to India in the end of January, 2009. Visiting five cities and then come back.

Any one message that you would like to give to our readers?

I would say for your body: assume you would have had a heart attack. Now eat and exercise accordingly. For your mind: assume that the half life of your profession is only two years, so prepare accordingly.

For your heart: assume that everything is shared by another person. They can overhear and now speak accordingly. For your spirit: assume that you are going to have a one-on-one visit with your creator every three months. Now live accordingly.

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C K Prahalad to help set up research network for Indian B-schools



School ahoy! The research model the B-school professors are working on would be distributed and there would be no single umbrella body to organise or control the activity

KV Ramana, Hyderabad

Indian business schools hardly do any cutting management research. If efforts of management guru C K Prahalad and other Indian professors working in the United States (US) have their way, that might change in the days to come. Management professors of Indian origin working in various B-schools abroad are willing to create a network along with the management schools in India. With this, the hope is that

The excitement we have about the model is that there is no set agenda. We don't know where we are going and that would give room for more innovation. We don't want to set any agenda for the research. The network we plan to set in place will evolve issues for the research

the research activity in India will take off.

"We have just started the process of putting things together. But, it is a fact that there is an urgent need for the B-schools to focus on research and it has to be in a collaborative form," said C K Prahalad, the Paul and Ruth McCracken distinguished university professor at the Ross School of Business, University of Michigan.

Interestingly, the research model these professors are working on would be distributed and there would be no single umbrella body to organise or control the activity. "We deliberately want to keep things fluid so that the flow of events would be smooth. We will not set up a centre or any other set up to do research. It would be a distributed research but with a continuous interaction between the researchers in various institutions," Prahalad explained.

Fifty five deans of various B-Schools within the country and abroad have already shown interest in taking things for-

ward and a formal roll out of the programme would begin shortly.

"Research is clearly lacking in Indian B-schools. For the phase II growth of India, there is an urgent need to encourage research. There is also a need to set up an intellectual venture fund on the lines of innovation fund," says M B Sarkar, an associate professor of strategy at the University of Central Florida. According to him, several students and faculty members from IIMs too are keen on joining the exercise.

"The excitement we have about the model is that there is no set agenda. We don't know where we are going and that would give room for more innovation. We don't want to set any agenda for the research. The network we plan to set in place will evolve issues for the research," said Prahalad.

Harbir Singh, the William and Phyllis Mack professor of management and co-director of the Mack Centre for Technological Innovation at the Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania, says "The next five years are going to be interesting. We are setting out on a journey without knowing where we are going. In the process of we are sure of coming up with great research within the network of these institu-

Alma mater

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Headstart

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tions. "The Indian School of Business (ISB), which has its campus in Hyderabad, too is pledging its support to the collaborative research model. "I think the future of management education lies in the focus the institutions have on research. The process is just beginning and the ISB will participate in the effort," said Rammoan Rao, the dean of ISB.

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GIZMO BAY

Android in vogue

Fourteen of the world's largest mobile phones including Sony Ericsson, Vodafone and ARM Holdings, joined the Open Handset Alliance to support Android mobile platform by Google Inc.



Music games in

With more than \$1 billion in sales and on a base of about 350 songs, the "Guitar Hero" and "Rock Band" videogame franchises emerged as serious moneymakers for the music industry.



Chrome out of beta

Google yanked the "beta" test label off Chrome, quickly putting a stamp of approval on its Web browser released in a direct challenge to Microsoft's ubiquitous Internet Explorer.



E-books get cheaper

After years of false start, e-books seem to be getting cheap enough for mass use. Thanks to the new technology called e-ink, they can function for weeks without a battery recharge.



Sony sued by US govt

Sony BMG, which is changing its name to Sony Music Entertainment, was sued by the US government, which accused the company of violating rules to protect online privacy of children.

