



THE EIGHTH HABIT

Stephen Covey has brought a winning formula to leaders and teams in the corporate world with his book *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*. Both the book and his related programs give structure to learning. Our education is traditionally highly structured, as are most of our institutions, and we are generally at home with the structure of logic and reason as formulas for success.

Covey's seven habits are:

1. **Be proactive.** Base your actions on values.
2. **Begin with the end in mind.** Base your actions on a purpose, meaning and a mission.
3. **Put first things first.** Know what is most important in the moment.
4. **Think win-win.** Seek mutual benefit in all relationships.
5. **Seek first to understand, then to be understood.** Reflect understanding of the other person before seeking to be understood.
6. **Synergy.** Value different opinions, viewpoints, and perspectives of others when seeking solutions.
7. **Sharpen the saw.** Engage in continuous improvement in the physical, mental, spiritual, and social/emotional dimensions of life.

These are very good principles to live by and I have worked with clients who are successful practitioners of the Covey work. They tend to be very efficient as leaders and managers. They come to coaching for other reasons. The missing piece I notice is lack of the ability to just be. This is not to be taken as a deficiency in the Covey work; it is a deficiency in our culture and is common in structured lives.

The antidote to this missing piece might be Habit Eight: Presence. The ability to respond to people and situations creatively without a knee-jerk reaction to the committee in our head.

I am an advocate of practices. One practice for being present, which until very recently had been largely off limits in the corporate world, is meditation. In the past, the word meditation could be a challenge, but those times are changing. Connecting concepts like meditation and spirituality to work is becoming interesting in many corporate environments. The overwhelming attendance to recent appearances by the Dalai Lama speaks to an openness to a different way of viewing the world. The Dalai Lama speaks and lives from a philosophy that has meditation as a core practice.

I was speaking with a colleague recently and he said he has begun the practice of "centering prayer meditation," an almost forgotten Christian practice advocated by Thomas Keating in some of his many books.

Parker Palmer said to a group of people a few years ago that the key to the Quaker influence in his spiritual community was spending one hour a day sitting in silence. He called this "a simple but transforming practice."

Recently I added an audio program to my own meditation practice and my meditation has taken on a noticeably expanded dimension. The effects of meditation for me are an ability to remain centered in times of challenge and the ability to be clear on direction and creative choices in less challenging times. I think of meditation as a practice of opening up to essence and true nature. It is a practice of coming from the core of my humanness by looking beneath conditioned behaviors and beliefs. Meditation nurtures the power of presence.

– Dan Petersen