



BOOK REVIEW

The 8th Habit From Effectiveness to Greatness

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Stephen R Covey adds one more dimension to the 7 Habits of Highly Effective People. The eighth habit refers to harnessing the potential energy of human beings in tackling the core challenges faced by humanity. It enables the individual and the organization not only to do things right but also to do right things. Tapping these higher reaches of human genius calls for a new mindset and out-of-the-box solutions. The author exemplifies the initiatives taken by people like Muhammad Yunus who envisioned a microfinance institution to bring succour to the hapless poor.

From the bestselling author of *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, *The 8th Habit* represents Stephen R Covey's long and purposeful journey in which he opens up an entirely new dimension of human potential and shows how people can achieve greatness regardless of position and setting. Covey strongly feels that each one of us has tremendous potential to become great. The means are within us and it is only a matter of finding the right balance of four human attributes:

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talent, need, conscience and passion. At the nexus of the four attributes is what Covey calls voice—the unique personal significance with which each one of us is blessed.

Covey says that the world has changed dramatically since he wrote *The 7 Habits* in 1989. The challenges and complexities for us—both at personal and professional front—are of a different magnitude and dimension and call for a paradigm shift in our thinking.

The three introductory chapters are titled as “The Pain”, “The Problem” and “The Solution”, respectively, through which Covey provides a bird’s-eye view of the saga of human potential scaling the heights of greatness. Being effective, both individually and organizationally, is not optional but is the entry price we have to pay for entering the playing field in this new era of greatness, calls for a new mindset, a new skill-set and a new tool-set.

The book characterizes the 8th habit as potential energy that is a timeless part of human beings and has often gone unnoticed and unrealized. It’s the voice of human spirit and hope that is embodied in people like Muhammad Yunus who had a vision of a world, free of poverty. Finding the inner voice enables the individuals and the organizations not to do things right but do right things.

The 8th Habit is about harnessing the power of a third dimension to the 7 habits and it is about to “Finding your voice and inspiring others to find theirs.” The story of voice is effectively portrayed by the author through the eyes of Muhammad Yunus, a brilliant economist who was teaching at a university in Bangladesh.

The country was going through a terrible famine and people were dying from utter poverty. Prof. Yunus was disturbed to the core and his inner voice kept urging him to find a solution to arrest the hapless deaths due to famine and poverty. After a great deal of struggle with red tape and bureaucracy, the professor could set up a Grameena Bank—a micro credit institution to help the poor to avail bank loan without collateral.

The bank has become a household name for the poor in Bangladesh and a huge success story in providing institutional credit to the poor and needy to lift them from the morass of poverty. In the second chapter, Covey gives the overarching reason why so many people and organizations are unhappy and unsatisfied on account of sub-optimal use of resources.

This stems from an incomplete paradigm of viewing human nature that has four important dimensions of body, mind, heart and spirit. If we neglect any one of the four parts of human nature, we turn the person into a thing and the essential unlimited human potential is lost. The fundamental problems at the workplace arise due to our incomplete and wrong paradigm of human nature.

In the third chapter, the author describes how certain people—regardless of their position in the organizational hierarchy—first change themselves from the inside out. Their character, competence and positive energy inspire others. In the author's words, they become islands of excellence in a sea of mediocrity. And it is contagious. Such people tap their higher motivations and they find and use their voice. They understand the “whole person” concept and are not only inspired by their own voice but influence others to find their voices.

They apply principles that govern growth and prosperity in human beings. Find your voice and inspire others to find theirs is a roadmap for individuals at any organizational level to maximize human potential.

According to Covey, people need to move out of the comfort zone and the new challenge requires new response and a new habit. Habits, according to the author, lie at the intersection of knowledge, attitude and skill. Once we are able to master these three dimensions of the 8th habit, we will increasingly be prepared to take the new challenge with the unlimited possibilities.

Chapter four and five focus on “Find Your Voice”. They describe the unopened gifts that each one of us is blessed with. The power to discover our voice lies in the potential that is bequeathed to us at birth. The first gift is the freedom to choose and Covey says that the essence of being a human being is being able to direct our own life. Human beings act while animals react. The power to choose excites our sense of possibility and potential and is the fundamental basis of our action.

The second gift is the natural laws and principles. They are timeless and they never change—principles such as fairness, kindness, respect, honesty and integrity. The third birth gift relates to four capacities—Physical Quotient (PQ), Intelligence Quotient (IQ), Emotional Intelligence (EI) and Spiritual Quotient (SQ) that correspond to our four magnificent parts of body, mind, heart and spirit.

Inspiring others to find their own voice is the focus of the sixth chapter. According to the author, “leadership is communicating to people their worth and potential so clearly that they come to see it in themselves”. It is essentially an enabling art. He makes an important difference between leadership and management process. While people are led and empowered, things are managed and controlled.

Both leadership and management are vital for organizational functioning. One cannot be pursued at the cost of the other. It is extremely important that one understands human nature well and this holds the key to unlock the potential of people that could be harnessed for the individual’s benefit as well as for serving the larger cause for the society.

The paradigm of spirit, mind, heart and body is used as encore throughout the book as a reinforcement of the author’s macro approach to the human predicament. The chronic problems that arise are low trust (spirit), no shared vision (mind), disempowerment (heart), and misalignment (body). In the organizational setting of people working together, these symptoms of chronic problems will lead to failure at the marketplace. A culture of blame, instead of culture of responsibility, ensues.

Leadership plays a critical role in pulling out of such morass. Again, such leadership in the organization is not a leadership of position but it is a proactive intention to repose trust in people and affirm their worth. There must be a sincere intention to unite the people as a complementary team to increase the positive jibes and make people realize their true potential. By demonstrating personal character, mobilizing individual’s commitment and engendering organizational capabilities leaders set direction and vision of the company.

Modeling and path finding is the broad thrust of the next five chapters spanning from chapter seven to chapter eleven. The author uses the metaphor of Trim-Tab

to describe people who lead and spread their influence, no matter what position they hold in an organization. People like Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King or Nelson Mandela are examples of trim tabs. The trim tab leader exercises initiative within his own circle of influence, however small it may be.

The supreme quality of a leader is unquestionably his integrity without which no real success is possible. Quite often, the main reason of all leadership failures is character failures. Integrity refers to the person integrated around principles and natural laws that ultimately govern the consequences of our behavior. Honesty is the principle of telling truth while integrity is keeping the promises to self and others.

The author reiterates the seven principles of effective people. They are: Be proactive; begin with the end in mind; put first things first; think win-win; seek first to understand, then to be understood; synergize; and sharpen the saw. The first three habits can be summarized as make and keep promises. The essence of the next three habits is to involve people in the problem and work out the solution together.

According to Covey, moral authority and speed of trust is tremendous and the reality is that relationships are governed by natural laws. He asserts that enduring trust in a relationship cannot be faked and it is the fruit of regular actions inspired by the conscience and heart. He defines moral authority “as the principled exercise of free choice, which almost always involves some form of sacrifice”.

Covey also uses effectively the question answer format at the end of each chapter. We pick one of the important questions.

Q: How important are the lifecycles of organizations, and is there a third alternative to their eventual decay and death?

Good management teams should have people with qualities that match the needs at various stages of the organization. Weaknesses should be made irrelevant and consolidate on the strengths. The entrepreneur, the producer, the manager and a team leader—all help create the norm of mutual respect and create a complementary team with the power to reinvent itself and take into new lifecycles.

On Change Management

The author says that the fundamental problem is not the validity of the ideas that he is propounding. He says people doubt themselves. Leaving one's comfort zone and taking initiatives are critical. He tells the story of the Chinese bamboo that has a peculiar feature of first growing at the root underground and then take off to a dramatic growth above the ground once the roots are in place. The personal level of character development always precedes the trust building in interpersonal relationships. This is preceded by the creation of culture. Life is a mission, not a career.

(Stephen R Covey is a renowned authority on leadership, a family expert, teacher, organizational consultant, and Vice Chairman of Franklin Covey Co. The author of several acclaimed books, he has also received numerous honors and awards, including being named one of TIME magazine's 25 most influential people. Covey lives with his wife, Sandra, and their family in the Rocky Mountains of Utah.

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Book Excerpts

- At the core, there is one simple, overarching reason why so many people remain unsatisfied with their work and why most organizations fail to draw out the greatest talent, ingenuity and creativity of their people and never become truly great, enduring organizations. It stems from an incomplete paradigm of who we are and what is our fundamental view of human nature.
- People who are “star-struck” (celebrity obsessed) are an example of those whose values may not be anchored to principles. Popularity shapes their moral center. They don’t know who they are and don’t know which way “north” is. They don’t know what principles to follow because their lives are based on social values.
- Most of us don’t envision or realize our own potential. William James said, “Most people live in a very restricted circle of their potential being. We all have reservoirs of energy and genius to draw upon of which we do not dream”.
- The habit of responding to the inner desire to make a difference, to matter, to extend our influence to the people and causes we most value, all begin with a mindset or ATTITUDE, a choice—the choice to use the voice of influence.
- You’ll notice that the power of this Think Win-Win or No Deal deposit lies in the initial willingness to sacrifice—to suspend your own interests long enough to understand what the other person wants most, and why, so that you can then go to work together on a new, creative solution that encompasses both of your interests.
- Taking initiative is a form of self-empowerment. No formal leader has empowered you. The organizational structure hasn’t empowered you. Your job description hasn’t empowered you. You empower yourself based on the issue or the problem or the challenge at hand. You exercise the appropriate level of initiative or self-empowerment.