

IMPROVING PERSONAL EFFECTIVENESS BY INFLUENCING PEOPLE AND DEVELOPING HABITS

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ABSTRACT

Life is more complex, more stressful, more demanding than ever before. We have transitioned from the Industrial Age into the Knowledge Worker Age. We are encountered with challenges and problems in our personal, social and professional lives which are of a new order of magnitude. Personal effectiveness is a branch of self-help movement dealing with success, goals and related concepts. Dale Carnegie and Stephen R. Covey are the leading proponents of improving personal effectiveness. The paper discusses on how to improve personal effectiveness as suggested by Dale Carnegie and Stephen R. Covey.

Keywords: Personal Effectiveness, Seven Habits, Dependence, Interdependence

INTRODUCTION

*“I know of no more encouraging fact
than the unquestionable ability of man
to elevate his life by conscious endeavor”*

Henry David Thoreau

Life is more complex, more stressful, more demanding than ever before. We have transitioned from the Industrial Age into the Knowledge Worker Age – with all its profound consequences. We face challenges and problems in our personal lives, our families, and our organizations unimagined even one decade ago. These challenges are not only of a new order of magnitude, they are altogether different in kind. Improving our personal effectiveness is one of the ways to face such tribulations.

What is Personal Effectiveness?

Personal effectiveness is a branch of the self-help movement dealing with success, goals, and related concepts. Personal effectiveness integrates some ideas from “the power of positive thinking” and Positive Psychology. A primary differentiating factor is that Personal Effectiveness proponents generally take a more systematic approach including a number of factors besides simple positive thinking. Some proponents take an approach with similarities

to business process management techniques. Others may take a holistic spiritual and physical wellness approach (wikipedia).

Many of the ideas behind personal effectiveness movement are derived from the field of business and management. Peter Drucker, Edwards Deming, Genichi Taguchi, Ken Blanchard and Jim Collins have been the major contributors in the field of personal effectiveness. In this article, emphasis is given on two authors, Dale Carnegie and Stephen R. Covey, who have suggested practical solutions to improve personal effectiveness.

Dale Carnegie: How to Win Friends and Influence People

Dale Carnegie (1936), in his book “How to Win Friends and Influence People” suggests the following areas to improve personal effectiveness.

A. Ways to Make People Like You

- Become genuinely interested in other people
- Smile
- Remember that a person's name is, to that person, the sweetest and most important sound in any language
- Be a good listener. Encourage others to talk about themselves
- Talk in terms of the other person's interest
- Make the other person feel important – and do it sincerely.

B. Ways to Win People to Your Way of Thinking

- Avoid arguments
- Show respect for the other person's opinions. Never say "You're Wrong."
- If you're wrong, admit it quickly and emphatically
- Begin in a friendly way
- Start with questions to which the other person will answer yes
- Let the other person do a great deal of the talking
- Be sympathetic with the other person's ideas and desires
- Appeal to the nobler motives

C. Be a Leader: How to Change People without Giving Offense or Arousing Resentment

- Begin with praise and honest appreciation
- Call attention to people's mistakes indirectly
- Talk about your own mistakes before criticizing the other person
- Ask questions instead of giving direct orders

- Praise every improvement
- Give the other person a fine reputation to live up to
- Use encouragement.

D. Fundamental Techniques in Handling People

- Don't criticize, condemn, or complain
- Give honest and sincere appreciation
- Arouse in the other person an eager want.

Stephen R. Covey: Seven Habits of Highly Effective People

“The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People” is recognized as one of the most influential books ever written. In this seminal work, Stephen R. Covey (1989) presents a holistic, integrated, principle-centered approach for solving personal and professional problems to finally improve personal effectiveness. Stephen R. Covey suggests we should develop seven habits. The seven habits are habits of effectiveness. These habits help every individual to move from Dependence to Independence and then Interdependence. Let us understand each habit in brief.

A. INDEPENDENCE

The First Three Habits surround moving from dependence to independence (i.e., self-mastery):

Habit 1: Be Proactive

We need to take initiative in life by realizing that our decisions (and how they align with life's principles) are the primary determining factor for effectiveness in our life. We need to take responsibility for our choices and the consequences that follow. For example, identify an experience you might encounter in the near future where, based on past experience, you would probably behave reactively. How could you respond proactively? Take few moments and create the experience in your mind, picturing yourself responding in a proactive manner.

Habit 2: Begin with the End in Mind

We need to self-discover and clarify our deeply important character, values and life goals. We need to envision the ideal characteristics for each of our various roles and relationships in life. It is important for each one of us to create a personal mission statement.

Habit 3: Put First Things First

To be successful, we need to prioritize, plan, and execute our week's tasks based on importance rather than urgency. Further, we must evaluate whether our efforts exemplify our desired character values, propel us toward goals, and enrich the roles and relationships.

B. INTERDEPENDENCE

The next three habits focus on Interdependence (i.e., working with others):

Habit 4: Think Win-Win

We need to genuinely strive for mutually beneficial solutions or agreements in our relationships. Focus should be on to value and respect people by understanding a "win" for all is ultimately a better long-term resolution, than if only one person in the situation had gotten his/her way.

Habit 5: Seek First to Understand, Then to be Understood

We need to be empathic listeners to be genuinely influenced by a person, which compels them to reciprocate the listening and take an open mind to being influenced by us. This creates an atmosphere of caring, and positive problem solving.

Habit 6: Synergize

We must combine the strengths of people through positive teamwork, so as to achieve goals no one person could have done alone.

C. CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

The final habit is that of continuous improvement in both the personal and interpersonal spheres of influence.

Habit 7: Sharpen the Saw

We must balance and renew our resources, energy, and health to create a sustainable, long-term, effective lifestyle. This primarily emphasizes exercise for physical renewal, prayer (meditation, yoga, etc.) and good reading for mental renewal. It also means service to society for spiritual renewal. For example, you can make a list of activities that would help you keep in good physical shape, that would fit your lifestyle and you could enjoy over time. Select one of the activities, make a plan and evaluate performance and results.

CONCLUSION

As Stephen R. Covey says, "To change ourselves effectively, we first have to change our perceptions". Further, to improve personal effectiveness, it is very important to develop the ability to influence all stakeholders. Focus should be on improving good human relations by demonstrating good listening skills, effective communication, smiling and empathy towards the stakeholders. Genuine appreciation commensurate to the achievement will motivate people to perform better. Being proactive will give an edge over others and we need to always begin with end in mind. While taking up tasks, we need to prioritize and execute first things first. In this process, we should never forget that the result should bring in a win-win situation. All this can be achieved by synergizing the efforts of all the team members and maximizing their potential. By improving personal effectiveness, we can be competitive and excel in personal, social and professional lives.

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