

Embracing the Seven Habits

BY ARTHUR BARRETT

I recently had the opportunity to attend a FranklinCovey one-day seminar in Boston. This presentation was an enlightening dive into their "7 Habits" (*The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People* by Stephen R. Covey). While I had read the book, I did not have an accurate or effective grasp of each Habit until I attended this seminar.

I have already experienced the positive results of two habits in particular, two that really go hand-in-hand for me—*be proactive*, and *empathic listening*.

Habit 1: Be Proactive

I had a different grasp of *proactive* before I attended the seminar. As the antonym of *reactive*, to me proactive meant that I should anticipate some occurrence, get in front of it, and either prevent it from happening (if an adverse occurrence)—or heighten the effect (if a positive occurrence). Post-seminar, the term *proactive* has a completely different meaning for me. Simply stated, when you are being

proactive, you do not allow any stimulus (an adverse occurrence or another's poor behavior) to cause reactive behavior or reactive language on your part. Instead, you take control of your emotions and your own behavior—keep your emotions in check—and refuse to allow another person's behavior to have an adverse effect on you. In short, recognize that, when you cannot control the stimulating event, you still have the freedom to choose your response to that event.

The "take-away" from Habit 1 for me is that I have complete control over my own reaction to the behavior of others. The first venue where I have taken this principle to heart is at home, in my interaction with my children. As a father of young boys, I have a heightened sense of responsibility for their behavior. After gaining a more thorough understanding of Habit 1, I now recognize that I cannot turn the clock back on their behavior—I can only control my own response to their behavior. A calm, thoughtful response will be immensely more effective at changing poor behavior.

Habit 5: Empathic Listening

This concept of a thoughtful response ties right into Habit 5, the skill of *empathic listening*. Covey demonstrates that each habit, in its own way, actually enhances productivity.

Covey stresses that empathy is the fastest form of communication. When somebody comes to you with a problem, they most often are first looking for an echo, before they are ready to accept advice. Too often I am tempted to jump right into offering advice because in my mind "taking the time to listen and understand will take too much time". Covey's research proves over and over that the speaker is not ready to receive until they have finished conveying. The empathic listener draws that conveyance out of the speaker, demonstrating a powerful ability to assume the mindset of the speaker and make the speaker feel

completely understood. Even at an invitation such as, "I really need your advice here," the empathic listener will refrain from responding. The truly skillful listener will echo and paraphrase in a manner that helps the speaker arrive at their own thoughtful and effective conclusion. In this manner the speaker is more likely to embrace the conclusion and take action. It is the move to action that, in the end, makes empathic listening the "fastest form of communication".

I find this to be true in my own relationships, both at home and at work. Unfortunately for me, there are too many examples where I learn this truth the hard way, by failing

The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People

1. Be proactive.
2. Begin with the end in mind.
3. Put first things first.
4. Think win/win.
5. Empathic listening.
6. Synergize.
7. Sharpen the saw.

to practice the habit. After the fact, I will have that "aha" moment where I realize that, had I embraced the habit, I could have arrived at a more meaningful conclusion to a conversation, and actually arrived there in less time.

I am going to reread Covey's book now, in the hope that it will have a more profound effect on me after diving into each Habit in his seminar. 📖