In 1989 Stephen Covey wrote the best-selling book *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*. Covey begins this book by reviewing the “success literature” in the United States written since 1776. Covey concludes that success for the first 150 years was based on the “character ethic”—that the foundations for success were deeply rooted in our character. “The character ethic is based on the fundamental idea that there are principles that govern human effectiveness...” Principles would include fairness, integrity, honesty, service, dignity, excellence, the Golden Rule, etc. Shortly after World War I, the character ethic was slowly replaced with the “personality ethic”—public relations techniques or developing a positive mental attitude. In short-lived human interactions we can get by with the personality ethic but “eventually if there isn’t deep integrity and fundamental character strength, the challenges of life will cause true motives to surface.... In the end, what we are communicates far more eloquently than anything we say or do.”

Covey illustrates effectiveness with the story of the goose and the golden egg. True effectiveness is a function and balance of two things; what is produced (the golden eggs) and the capacity to produce (the goose). As long as we keep the goose healthy it will produce golden eggs. If we concern ourselves only with the golden eggs, we may, like the man in the fable, end up killing the goose. Viewed through the eyes of a team leader, many of the Seven Habits may be instrumental in helping you be a more effective leader. Let’s take a look at them.

**HABIT #1--BE PROACTIVE**

Being proactive means more than taking the initiative. It means that we, by and large, are responsible for our own lives and the choices that we make. Although genetic, parental and environmental factors certainly influence our behavior and our lives, they do not have to determine who we are or what we choose. Unless we believe that we are who we are today because of the choices we have made we can never choose to be any different. We can’t choose what happens to us but we can choose how we will respond. This is consistent with Biblical anthropology. Being proactive means that we are responsible—we have the ability to respond. We don’t have to react. In this regard Joseph, in Genesis 37-50 was a proactive person. Being proactive involves at least three areas:

- Taking the initiative—recognizing our responsibility to make things happen. There are many things to complain about in this ministry—lack of development, lack of staff, poor support, no good evangelistic contacts, etc. “Reactive” staff complain and their attitude usually brings everyone down a shade or two. Proactive staff take responsibility and initiative to make things happen. They read, study their Bibles, enroll in courses, they pray, they cultivate new support contacts. They don’t see themselves as victims. Proactive people are fun to be around because they think in terms of solutions rather than problems.
• Work in your “circle of influence.” This is simply another way of saying that we need to take responsibility for what we can control and pray for those things we can’t control.

• Making and keeping commitments. As we make promises and keep them, set goals and work toward them we build strength of character.

HABIT #2—BEGIN WITH THE END IN MIND
Beginning with the end in mind has to do with vision. We are more in need of a vision and destination and a compass than a road map. We often don’t know the terrain that lies ahead but if we have a strong compass and a good sense of judgment we can eventually get where we want to go. Developing a “Personal Mission Statement” is the first step to Habit #2. A personal mission statement focuses on “what you want to be (character) and do (contributions and achievements) and the values or principles upon which being and doing are based.” Covey suggests that to discern what is really important to you that you picture four people speaking at your funeral—someone from your family, a co-worker, a friend and someone from your church. What would you want each of them to say regarding your character, the contribution you have made to their lives and your achievements. These are your genuine life goals.

HABIT #3—PUT FIRST THINGS FIRST
The third habit has to do with time management, or better yet, the management of self. The nature of your job is such that your time is probably divided between four types of activities.

1. Urgent and Important--comprised of crises, deadlines, resolving staff conflicts and pressing problems.
2. Not Urgent but Important--relationship building, planning, evangelism, discipling, personal Bible study, personal growth, recreation, etc.
3. Urgent but Not Important--some mail, interruptions, some calls, some meetings, popular activities, etc.
4. Not Important and Not Urgent--trivia, busy work, time wasters, etc. To be effective over time we need to focus on Quadrant II activities--those things which have to do with development and results. A good question to ask yourself periodically is “What one thing could I do in my personal or professional life that, if I did on a regular basis, would make a tremendous difference in my life and the lives of others?”

In managing our time, two words are important to keep in mind, “effectiveness” and “efficiency.” We need to think in terms of efficiency in dealing with things and with time and effectiveness in dealing with people. Trying to deal with people efficiently will only de-value the relationships.

Covey also suggests a new way of looking at your schedule by defining your roles and your goals. Sample worksheets can be ordered for free by calling 1 (800) 255-0777.

EMOTIONAL BANK ACCOUNTS
“An Emotional Bank Account” is a metaphor that describes the amount of trust that’s been built up in a relationship. It’s the feeling of safeness you have with another human being. If I make deposits into an Emotional Bank Account with you through courtesy, kindness, honesty, and keeping my commitments to you, I build up a reserve. I can even make mistakes and the trust level--that emotional reserve, will compensate for it.” Covey suggests six major deposits that build the Emotional Bank Account:

1. Understanding the individual. You will not understand what constitutes a “deposit” with a person until you understand that person. What may be a “deposit” for you may be a “withdrawal” for the other person.
2. Attend to the little things. In relationships the little things (kindnesses and courtesies) are the big things.
4. Clarifying expectations. When expectations are not clear and shared, simple misunderstandings become compounded into major conflicts.
5. Showing personal integrity.
6. Apologizing sincerely when you make a withdrawal. “People will forgive mistakes, because mistakes are usually of the mind, mistakes of judgment. But people will not easily forgive the mistakes of the heart, the ill intention, the bad motives, the prideful justifying cover-up of the first mistake.”

HABIT #4—THINK WIN/WIN
There are six paradigms of human interaction—Win/Lose, Lose/Win, Win/Win, Lose/Lose, Win, Win/Win or No Deal. Although there is a place for each of the above alternatives, as a leader you want to strive to achieve Win/Win situations with your staff and in your ministry. Win/Win is based on the model that there is plenty for everybody—that one person’s success is not achieved at the expense or exclusion of the success of others. We may have grown up thinking “win” means to beat...that someone has to lose. Win/Win is based on the “abundance mentality” as opposed to the “scarcity mentality.” The scarcity mentality sees life “as having only so much, as though there were only one pie out there. If someone were to get a big piece of the pie, it would mean less for everybody else.” Those with the scarcity mentality have a tough time sharing recognition, power, and credit with others. The abundance mentality says that there is plenty out there for everybody. It results in sharing of prestige, power, recognition and decision making. Conflict is often the result of the perceived scarcity of power or self-esteem. Thinking in terms of “Win/Win” means that we think in terms of collaboration—both parties getting what they want. It takes more time to work toward these types of solutions but they are possible.

HABIT #5—SEEK FIRST TO UNDERSTAND, THEN TO BE UNDERSTOOD

“Communication is the most important skill in life.” We’ve spent years learning how to speak, read and write but what skills have we learned to listen and understand what people are saying? Covey notes that there are five levels of listening:

- Ignoring the other person
- Pretending to listen
- Selective listening
- Attentive listening
- Empathic listening

“The essence of empathic listening is not that you agree with someone; it’s that you fully, deeply, understand that person, emotionally as well as intellectually.” Unless we really try to get inside another person’s frame of reference, to see the world the way they see it we will probably project our own assumptions, thoughts, experiences, feelings, motives and interpretation on the situation. Because communication is 10% words, 30% sounds and 60% body language it is imperative that we listen with our eyes and hearts. Just as a doctor’s prescription is only as valid as a correct diagnosis, so too is it fruitless to give opinions and advise without thoroughly understanding what the other is trying to say. Many team leaders have devalued their staff by trying to prescribe and control before they really understand the situation or the emotions involved.

HABIT #6—SYNERGISM

By definition, synergy means that the whole is greater than the sum of the parts. That is another way of saying that we can accomplish much more working together as a team than we could working individually. Biblically we think of the “body” concept. Synergy is more concerned with what’s right and best than who’s right and best. The solutions are not found in your way or my way but for the third and higher alternative...the Win/Win solution. Synergy on a staff team is the product of high trust and high cooperation. In order to have synergy we need to learn to value the differences that each person brings to our staff team. Effective leaders have the humility to recognize their own limitations. Because they value others, they want to understand the differences in perception.

HABIT #7—SHARPENING YOUR SAW

It is never a waste of time for a woodcutter to sharpen his saw. The saw is the tool of his trade. A sharp saw makes the work easier and more efficient. A dull saw only makes a woodcutter tired. There are four areas we need to sharpen—physical, spiritual, mental and the social/ emotional dimensions of life.

PHYSICAL

The physical dimension involves caring for our physical body—what we eat, rest and relaxation and exercise on a regular basis. As we grow older we will naturally grow more sedentary or we become so busy with life and ministry that we progressively lapse into terrible shape. Frontier evangelist, David Brainard, who died at 27, said of his failing health, “God gave me a message and a horse to deliver it on and I’ve gone and killed the horse.” Jesus and the apostles walked almost everywhere they went. Exercise was a way of life. Exercise does not have to be difficult, time consuming nor expensive to be beneficial. Think in terms of doing something that will get your heart rate to 65%-80% of maximum (220 minus your age) for at least 20 minutes. Probably jogging is the most time efficient.
SPIRITUAL
The spiritual dimension involves developing and renewing your relationship with God. It involves the time we spend in God’s Word and in prayer—the spiritual disciplines. Most directors feel the need for a minimum of an hour a day in Bible study and personal prayer in order to grow, maintain motivation and vision as well as to be a resource to others. For most team leaders, their seminary education consists only of their Bible and the ministry they are having today. The spiritual dimension also involves a commitment to walk in the Spirit and being honest with God. We cannot give away what we don’t possess. We minister out of who we are and what God is doing in our lives.

MENTAL
Once we stop learning we stop growing. Once we stop growing, we are disqualified for leading. We are greatly influenced by the people we know and the books we read. Most Directors think in terms of a minimum of a book a month to read. Periodicals like “Christianity Today” and “Leadership” can keep you abreast of current evangelical thinking. News magazines and political magazines (not to mention sports magazines) are helpful in keeping us current with our culture. Sometimes education involves formally taking classes. At times we all need the structure and accountability that formal education brings. However, the proactive staff person can find many, many ways to be mentally challenged and stimulated.

SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL
The social/emotional dimensions of our lives are tied together because our emotional life is closely tied to our relationships with others. What does it profit a man to win the whole world and lose his family? We need to do what we can to maintain strong friendships and relationships with others. Be more concerned with being a blessing to other people. Let influence rather than recognition be your motive for Christian service. See others for their potential rather than their problems.

APPLICATION
• What can you do to become more proactive this week? What roadblock or problem are you facing that needs to be solved? What can you do?

• Develop your “Personal Mission Statement?”

• What “Quadrant 2” activities do you need to concentrate on to be more effective?

• Into what relationship do you need to make significant “deposits” into this week?

• What can you do to change your style of leadership to achieve more “Win/Win” situations?

• Spend a significant time listening this week to those you meet with. Seek to diagnose correctly before you give your “prescription.”

• What “sharpening” activities do you need to build into your schedule to help insure long-term effectiveness?