

## The 7 Habits of a Highly Effective Advertising Sales Rep

The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People by Stephen R. Covey is one of the most important and influential books in publishing history. Originally published in 1989, Seven Habits spent 5 years on the New York Times bestseller list and it is the country's best selling business book. With over 15 million copies in 38 languages it is a book that has made an impact in the lives of people around the globe. I purchase this book for my employees who want to improve their skills and gain more satisfaction out of their career and their personal lives. I highly recommend this book to anyone who seeks to be truly "effective" in his or her life. Starting with this edition of Link and Learn and continuing over the next six months I will review the basic concepts of Dr. Covey's program as they apply to our business. My purpose is just to stimulate interest in the Seven Habits, to gain a better understanding of this powerful material read the book or attend one of the seminars presented by the Covey organization.

### **Habit 1 – Be Proactive**

The first three habits focus on what Stephen Covey defines as "Private Victory". Anyone who can practice these behaviors until they become habits will take themselves from a position of dependence to true independence. Habits one through three are intended to prepare the individual to move on to "Public Victory". Covey believes that before we can interact effectively with others, we must take responsibility for our attitudes and actions.

Being proactive simply means taking charge of your own life. Many, if not most, people live reactively. A reactive person blames others or circumstances for the problems that prevent them from living a satisfying life. A proactive person acknowledges these barriers but is in full control of their reaction to them. This is a very realistic way to look at the world, we cannot change our environment but we can change how we respond to our environment. This "response" is the root world of responsibility. The ability to use our intellect to direct our response is what makes us uniquely human. Animals instinctively run from fire, but a human fire fighter runs toward it...his intellect tells him that proper response is to rescue anyone trapped by the flames and to stop the fire before it spreads. Being proactive doesn't mean that fires won't break out; it means that when they do, the proactive fire fighter will make the best of the situation.

Taking our analogy to the next level, the truly proactive fire fighters will not only take steps to extinguish the fire but will take steps to prevent future fires. They will

inspect the wiring, use fireproof building materials, educate children about matches etc. What they are doing is enlarging their personal circle of influence over the situation. Fire is a physical fact, it cannot be changed, but by taking responsibility for our environment, using our intellect and learning from our experiences we can make significant improvements in our life and in the lives of those around us.

For an example a little closer to home, think of two sales reps that return to the office after a day of making cold calls. They each made 15 calls and neither made a sale. Sales rep #1 Bob Reactive, plops down on a co-worker's desk and spends 15 minutes telling him how "everybody in my territory is so cheap, and they're stupid and rude, they wouldn't buy an ad if their life depended on it!" Sales rep #2, Sue Proactive, comes in to the office grabs her call reports and walks into her manager's office. She asks if he has a minute and says: "I made 15 calls today without getting a sale. I am not sure what I'm doing wrong, can you help me with my approach and presentation?" In 6 months Bob is working at another company, he has had 3 different jobs and is still looking for that perfect territory, Sue is still working her territory and is fast becoming one of the top reps in the company. The difference... Bob saw the problem outside himself; it was the "lousy customers". Sue saw the problem as lying inside her circle of influence "I'm doing something wrong". Since Bob's problem was outside of his control it was hopeless, it would never change. Sue could solve her problem simply by thinking about it and changing her behavior. Sue was focused on the things that she could control, her own actions, and did not waste time or energy on the things she could not control, the customers, the market etc. By focusing on these things Sue's circle of influence will expand, her growing confidence will make her more successful, she will gain the respect of her customers and her influence within the company will grow.

One of the keys to being proactive is to use proactive speech. Proactive people use "I" statements. Instead of "My customers don't advertise in special sections" they will say "Up until now, I have had trouble selling the value of special sections to my customers." The 1st statement is a "victim" statement, it is happening to you; it is beyond your control. End of story nothing can be done.

The 2nd statement begins with "up until now", this expresses a belief that humans can change and grow. Proactive people believe that what has happened in the past is not necessarily what will happen in the future, that through their own actions things can be made better. Dr. Covey says that proactive people "live out of their imagination, rather than out of their memory." The next word is "I". Using this word demonstrates a "if it's to be – it's up to me" attitude. To take responsibility for making the situation better, rather than waiting for things to magically improve. This sentence identifies the problem, the first step to correcting it. Perhaps there are no prospects in the territory that would benefit from that particular special product, in this case the proactive rep would say "I need to come up with a better idea that will help my advertisers" or "What else can I present to my advertisers to reach my

sales target.” In every situation the proactive person seeks to find a solution within their control rather than to find a way to blame something outside of their control. Fixing blame on the cruel universe may let you off the hook but it is not a very satisfying way to live.

Here’s another example. A reactive person might say: “My boss is a real pain in the backside, there’s just no pleasing him.” If this situation is to improve, this statement (and the attitude behind it) places all the responsibility on the “boss”. A proactive person would say: “Up until now I have not been able to build a good relationship with my boss.” Their next step would be to approach the boss and discuss the conflict showing a willingness to accept the responsibility for the relationship. “Boss, in the past, I haven’t lived up to your expectations, can you help me understand what I can do to change that?” Will this approach work every time, of course not, but it has a much better chance of turning things around than whining about your lot in life. Often opening a channel of communication and showing a willingness to meet the other person halfway can work wonders.

In the Seven Habits of Highly Effective People, Stephen Covey writes a great deal about paradigms. A paradigm is the way we see the world, a sort of lens colored by our experiences and especially our thoughts. Shifting from a reactive to a proactive paradigm, adopting a worldview where you take personal responsibility for your own success and for your own happiness is a very uplifting experience. I recommend taking the proactive step to read Dr. Covey’s Seven Habits and start making them a part of your life today.

**Next Month Habit #2** “Begin with the end in mind”.