

LeadershipReview

Robert Heller's
Masterclasses

Stephen Covey 1

Exercising Self-Leadership



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Leading and influencing other people require first that you take control of yourself in the positive sense of making the most of your abilities and opportunities. To achieve this, you must learn to think proactively and to take the initiative whenever possible. You must also set your own short and long-term goals and develop your capability to achieve them.

USE SELF-AWARENESS

Stephen Covey regards self-awareness, the ability to think about your own thought processes, as a unique human ability and the secret of human success. It is the first of four keys to freedom of choice between reactive behaviour (being controlled by others) and proactive behaviour (taking control of yourself).

Start to take control of your life by practising active self-awareness. Do the following self-awareness assessment. Can you answer "Yes" to the first five questions and "No" to the last?

- Can you view yourself as though you were someone else?
- Can you identify your present mood?
- Can you name what you are feeling?
- Can you describe your present mental state?
- Is your mind working quickly and alertly?
- Are you torn between doing this exercise and evaluating the point to be made from it?
The point is, if you answer "No" to the questions, practise until you can answer "Yes".

THE PROACTIVE COURSE

According to Covey, the other three keys to proactive behaviour are: conscience (a sense of right and wrong); independent will (the readiness to act on your own, as your self-awareness dictates); and imagination (the use of the creative, right-hand side of the brain).

By exercising and developing all four abilities, you can become a more effective human being, gaining the power to be and do what you want, not just what others want from you. By winning this freedom of choice you empower yourself to take control of your own destiny and fulfil your potential. This masterclass shows you ways of improving all four of Covey's key abilities.

1. Watching your words

The language you use is a strong indicator of whether you are merely reacting to events or proactively influencing them. Adopt proactive language to bring a positive transformation in how you view yourself and in how others respond to you.

SELF-LIMITING LANGUAGE

The principle is simple. If you do not enter a race, you cannot win. Covey's argument, a very true one, is that people under-perform because they consciously or unconsciously limit their ambitions. They show this self-limitation by their language. Analyze your own language to see how much you hold yourself back in the way you express yourself. For every self-limiting, or reactive, phrase there is a proactive equivalent that puts you in the driving seat.

REACTIVE LANGUAGE

- There's no point in asking my boss, he'll only say "No".
- I couldn't do that, it's not my sort of thing.
- I've got no head for figures and making mental calculations.

PROACTIVE LANGUAGE

- I'll make him an offer he won't be able to refuse.
- I've never done that before, but I'd love to try.
- I'm going to work hard to improve my numeracy.

USE POSITIVE LANGUAGE

Concentrate for a full day, advises Covey, on listening to your own language and that of others. Ask yourself, how often do I use and hear reactive phrases such as "If only", "I must", or "I have to"? You will almost certainly be surprised at the frequency.

From then on, whenever you find a reactive phrase coming to your lips, turn it around to the proactive opposite. For example, replace "If only" with "I will", "I must" with "I prefer", and "I have to" with "I will choose". The shift will work to reverse any unconscious passivity in your attitude and can dramatically change your behaviour and raise your effectiveness.

2. Taking the Initiative

You can take control of your destiny. That most people do not, says Covey, is contrary to proactive human nature.

Do not empower conditions and conditioning to run your life.

Empower yourself by your behaviour and by widening your influence over events.

DEVELOP PROACTIVE BEHAVIOUR

Covey suggests that you check how proactive you are by using a programme that demonstrates your responsibility for your own effectiveness. For a period of 50 days, try to adhere to the following instructions in all your activities, at work and in the home:

- Make small commitments and keep them.
- Be part of the solution, not part of the problem.
- Be a model, not a critic.
- When you make a mistake, admit it, correct it, and learn from it — immediately.
- Do not blame and accuse.
- If you start to think the problem is “out there”, and not your responsibility, stop yourself.

At the end of each day, write down how you have performed on each of the instructions. Keep the instructions in the forefront of your mind and aim to improve every day.

USE YOUR IMAGINATION

Encourage yourself to take the initiative by using visual “affirmations”, which might be called purposeful day-dreaming. A successful

affirmation contains five distinctive elements.

THE FIVE ELEMENTS OF VISUAL AFFIRMATION

- It is personal.
- It is positive.
- It is present tense.
- It is emotional.
- It is visual.

For example, faced with a senseless decision from your superior that you do not wish to carry out, use a visual affirmation to help you take the proactive course — persuading your boss to change his or her mind. Your affirmation might be: “I get a real high (emotional) because I (personal) respond (present tense) with honesty, courage, and selfcontrol (positive) to stop mistakes being made.” Then visualize yourself entering your boss’s office and convincing him or her. Next, do it — and do not be surprised when it works.

WIDEN YOUR CIRCLE OF INFLUENCE

There are some matters over which you have control, and others that concern you, but where you can do nothing. They all belong in what Covey calls it the Circle of Concern. Those you can affect are directly in the core, the Circle of Influence.

SEEKING TO INFLUENCE

Within our Circle of Concern is the smaller Circle of Influence, which we should work to enlarge as much as possible.

Use your initiative to widen your Circle of Influence, and use your self-control to concentrate your time and energy on issues you can affect. When you face a problem, always ask:

- Is this something over which I have no control?
- Is this something over which I have direct control?
- Is this something over which I have indirect control?

If the answer is (1), learn to live with the difficulty. If the answer is (2), use your powers to resolve the issue. If the answer is (3), use your powers to influence people in the direction you want.

3. Setting your goals

Identify where you want to go and how you are going to get there. Doing so is fundamental to taking control of yourself. Without a clear objective, you will miss the signposts that show you the way. As Louis Pasteur observed, "Fortune favours the prepared mind."

DECIDE YOUR MISSION

Write down your chief ambition in a mission statement. Make it short and to the point. For example, "To be chief executive of a major publicly quoted company by the age of 40." Just deciding on that prime objective is a major step towards achieving it.

You can now focus all your other activities and lesser objectives towards that end. You will then start to notice events, opportunities, material, and contacts (the signposts) that will help you attain your prime objective. Putting a time to the target is very important in disciplining and directing your efforts — and you may well find that the objective is reached earlier than you thought possible.

PLAN STRATEGICALLY

Naming your prime objective is only the start. You are engaged in personal strategic planning, and need to follow the same procedure as a corporate planner. That invokes answering these questions:

- Where am I now (position A)?
- Where do I want to be, and when (position B)?
- What resources are required to get from A to B?
- Which do I possess now?
- What development do those resources need?
- What other required resources must I find?
- How can I find them?
- What stages must I pass before reaching the final objective — and when?
- What help will I need, and from whom?

Covey describes this process as mental creation. Begin by applying it to a project that you will be undertaking in the near future. Write down the results you desire and the steps that will lead to those results. Success in smaller projects will build your confidence in the planning of your long-term personal mission.

4. Optimizing your capability

Effectiveness does not operate in the single dimension of the work you get through and how excellently it is done. You must also nurture and enhance your capacity to perform, your Production Capability (PC), if you are to make the most of your abilities.

DEVELOP CAPABILITY

The more knowledge you have, the greater your ambition, and the more and better the components of your skills set, the more effective you will be. The Seven Habits all provide critical elements of PC, which needs to be developed in just the same way as athletes build body power (their form of PC) - by training and exercise.

EFFECTIVE HABITS

Where your knowledge skills, and desire intersect lies the potential to develop positive working habits.

Conduct regular audits of your personal PC development and that of your organization to identify weak spots where more could be done to improve capability and thus performance. Are you acting to:

- Exert control over your destiny?
- Form valuable objectives?
- Prioritize the use of your time?
- Work with others for your mutual benefit?
- Learn by listening?
- Coordinate your work with that of others?
- Improve your physical, human, and financial resources?