

The Seven Habits of Highly Effective Teens by Sean Covey

● WHAT EXACTLY ARE HABITS?

Habits are things we do repeatedly. But most of the time we are hardly aware that we have them. They're on autopilot.

Some habits are good, such as:

- Exercising regularly
- Planning ahead
- Showing respect for others

Some are bad, like:

- Thinking negatively
- Feeling inferior
- Blaming others

And some don't really matter, including:

- Taking showers at night
- Eating yogurt with a fork
- Reading magazines from back to front

Depending on what they are, our habits will either make us or break us. We become what we repeatedly do. As writer Samuel Smiles put it:

*Sow a thought, and you reap an act;
Sow an act, and you reap a habit;
Sow a habit, and you reap a character;
Sow a character, and you reap a destiny.*

Luckily, you are stronger than your habits. Therefore, you can change them. For example, try folding your arms. Now try folding them in the opposite way. How does this feel? Pretty strange, doesn't it? But if you folded them in the opposite way for thirty days in a row, it wouldn't feel so strange. You wouldn't even have to think about it. You'd get in the habit.

At any time you can look yourself in the mirror and say, "Hey, I don't like that about myself," and you can exchange a bad habit for a better one. It's not always easy, but it's always possible.

Not every idea in this book will work for you. But you don't have to be perfect to see results, either. Just living some of the habits some of the time can help you experience changes in your life you never thought possible.

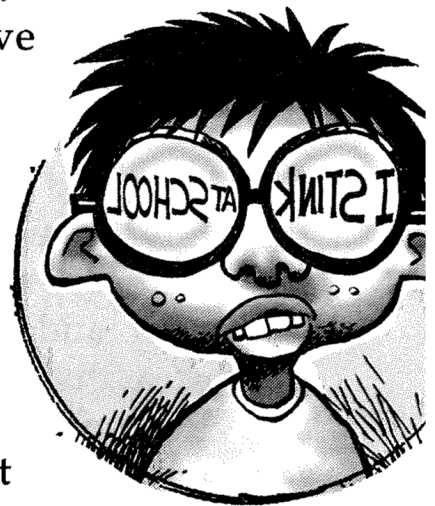
So What's a Paradigm?

What do these two lists of statements have in common? First, they are all *perceptions* about the way things are. Second, they are all inaccurate or incomplete, even though the people who said them are convinced they're true.

Another word for perceptions is *paradigms* [pair-a-dimes]. A paradigm is the way you see something, your point of view, frame of reference, or belief. As you may have noticed, our paradigms are often way off the mark, and, as a result, they create limitations. For instance, you may be convinced that you don't have what it takes to get into college. But, remember, Ptolemy was just as convinced that the earth was the center of the universe.

And think about the teen who believes she can't get along with her stepdad. If that is her paradigm, is she likely to ever get along? Probably not, because that belief will hold her back.

Paradigms are like glasses. When you have incomplete paradigms about yourself or life in general, it's like wearing glasses with the wrong prescription. That lens affects how you see everything else. As a result, what you see is what you get. If you believe you're dumb, that very belief will make you dumb. If you believe your sister is dumb, you'll look for evidence to support your belief, find it, and she'll remain dumb in your eyes. On the other hand, if you believe you're smart, that belief will cast a rosy hue on everything you do.



A teen named Kristi once shared with me how much she loved the beauty of the mountains. One day she went to visit her eye doctor and, to her surprise, discovered that her sight was much worse than she had thought. After putting in her new contacts, she was astonished at how well she could see. As she put it, "I realized that the mountains and trees and even the signs on the side of the road have more detail than I had ever imagined. It was the strangest thing. I didn't know how bad my eyes were until I experienced how good they could be." That's often the way it is. We don't know how much we're missing because we have messed-up paradigms.

We have paradigms about ourselves, about other people, and about life in general.

● PARADIGMS OF SELF

Stop right now and consider this question: Are your paradigms of yourself helping or hindering you?

Principle-Centered—*The Real Thing*

In case you were starting to wonder, there is a center that actually works. What is it? (Drumroll, please.) It's being *principle-centered*. We are all familiar with the effects of gravity. Throw a ball up and it comes down. It's a natural law or principle. Just as there are principles that rule the physical world, there are principles that rule the human world. Principles aren't religious. They aren't American or Chinese. They aren't mine or yours. They aren't up for discussion. They apply equally to everyone, rich or poor, king or peasant, male or female. They can't be bought or sold. If you live by them, you will excel. If you break them, you will fail (hey, that sorta' rhymes). It's that simple.

Here are a few examples: Honesty is a principle. Service is a principle. Love is a principle. Hard work is a principle. Respect, gratitude, moderation, fairness, integrity, loyalty, and responsibility are principles. There are dozens and dozens more. They are not hard to identify. Just as a compass always points to true north, your heart will recognize true principles.

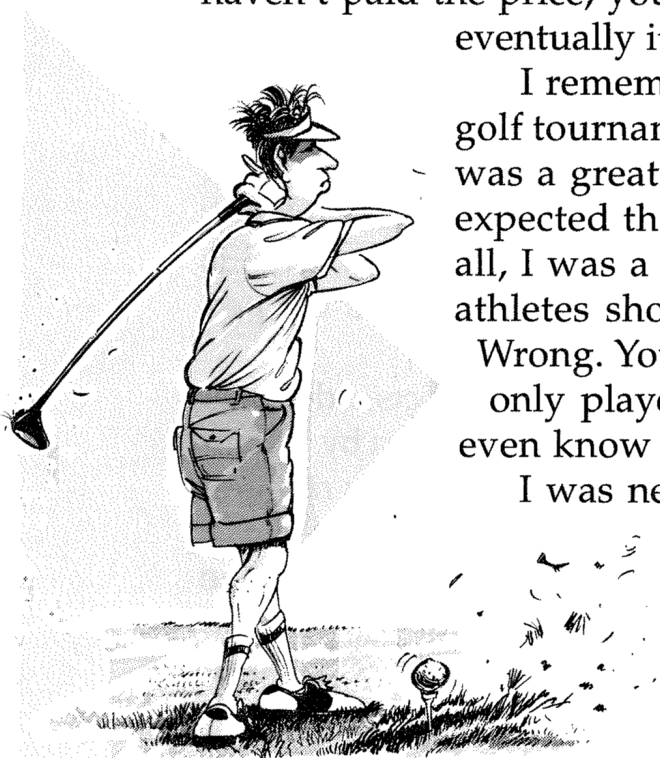
For example, think about the principle of hard work. If you haven't paid the price, you may be able to get by for a while, but eventually it'll catch up to you.

I remember one time being invited to play in a golf tournament with my college football coach. He was a great golfer. Everyone, including my coach, expected that I'd be a fine golfer as well. After all, I was a college athlete and all college athletes should be great golfers. Right?

Wrong. You see, I stunk at golf. I'd only played a few times in my life, and I didn't even know how to hold a club properly.

I was nervous about everyone finding out how bad I was at golf. Especially my coach. So I was hoping that I could fool him and everyone else into thinking I was good. On the very first hole there was a small crowd gathered around. I was first up to tee off. Why me? As I stepped

up to hit the ball, I prayed for a miracle.

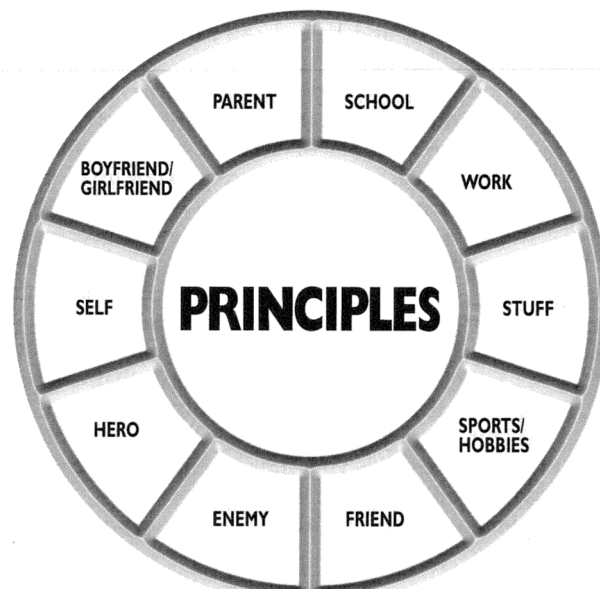


Swoooooosssssshhhhh. It worked! A miracle! I couldn't believe it! I had hit a long shot, straight down the middle of the fairway.

I turned around and smiled to the crowd and acted as if I always hit like that. "Thank you. Thank you very much."

I had them all fooled. But I was only fooling myself because there were 17^{1/2} more holes to go. In fact, it took only about five more shots for everyone around me, including my coach, to realize that I was a complete golf nerd. It wasn't long until the coach was trying to show me how to swing the club. I'd been exposed. Ouch!

You can't fake playing golf, tuning a guitar, or speaking Arabic if you haven't paid the price to get good. There's no shortcut. Hard work is a principle. As the NBA great Larry Bird put it, "If you don't do your homework, you won't make your free throws."



Principles Never Fail

It takes faith to live by principles; especially when you see people close to you get ahead in life by lying, cheating, indulging, manipulating, and serving only themselves. What you don't see, however, is that breaking principles *always* catches up to them in the end.

Take the principle of honesty. If you're a big liar, you may be able to get by for a while, even for a few years. But you'd be hard-pressed to find a liar who achieved success over the *long haul*. As Cecil B. DeMille observed about his classic movie *The Ten*

Commandments, "It is impossible for us to break the law. We can only break ourselves against the law."

Unlike all the other centers we've looked at, principles will never fail you. They will never talk behind your back. They don't get up and move. They don't suffer career-ending injuries. They don't play favorites based on skin color, gender, wealth, or body features. A principle-centered life is simply the most stable, immovable, unshakable foundation you can build upon, and we all need one of those.

To grasp why principles always work, just imagine living a life based on their opposites—a life of dishonesty, loafing, indulgence, ingratitude, selfishness, and hate. I can't imagine any good thing coming out of that. Can you?



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CECIL B. DEMILLE
MOVIE DIRECTOR

Ironically, putting principles first is the key to doing better in all the other centers. If you live the principles of service, respect, and love, for instance, you're likely to pick up more friends and be a more stable boyfriend or girlfriend. Putting principles first is also the key to becoming a person of character.

Decide today to make principles your life-center, or paradigm. In whatever situation you find yourself, ask, "What is the principle in play here?" For every problem, search for the principle that will solve it.

If you're feeling worn out and beaten up by life, perhaps you should try the principle of *balance*.

If you find no one trusts you, the principle of *honesty* might just be the cure you need.