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Those who get the most out of life and those who give the most are those who make the choice to act.

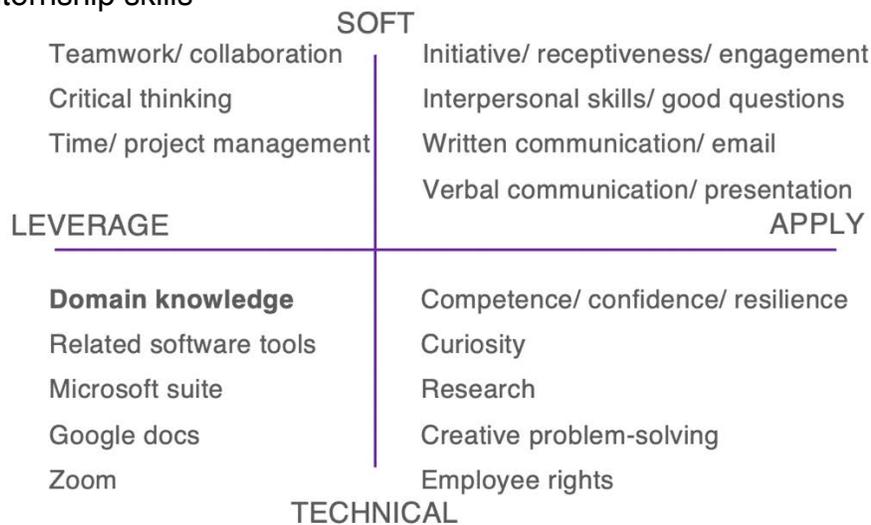
Stephen R. Covey (1932-2012), educator, author, businessman, and keynote speaker

Internships and The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People

(Reading time: 5 minutes)

I was recently asked to present on what skills students should have or hone prior to starting an internship. As a strong believer in internships which can provide students with not only job experience (technical and soft skills) but also bolster their resume and perhaps lead to a job placement, I found this question intriguing. I brainstormed a list, did some online searching to round it out, and then organized it (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: Internship skills



SKILLS DEVELOPMENT SERIES

'One must develop skills that stretch capacities, that make one more than what one is.'

Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, psychologist who developed the concept of flow, a highly focused mental state conducive to productivity



I then focused on five of these selecting from all four quadrants, after some grouping. For each skill, I summarized what it entailed and how you could get or hone these skills. (See Table 1).

Table 1: Pre-internship skills to acquire or hone (with a “7 Habit” in red).

Skill	Entails	How to get/hone
Project management	Time/ cost management Priorities/ critical path Communication/ change management/ no surprises	Plan/ seek guidance Prepare checklists Report/ provide updates/ early issue identification Consider contingency plans
Initiative/receptiveness/ engagement/curiosity	Positive/ can-do attitude Value the unique learning opportunity Work hard and smart	Focus on mid-term goals Volunteer for projects/ teams Have a chess/ game mindset – thinking ahead
Interpersonal skills/good questions & suggestions	Act professionally to suppliers, customers, colleagues, and senior management, Get involved	Seek first to understand Consultant-client mindset Research questions so you can be more specific Provide options
Communication	Written including email Verbal 1-on-1/ presentation Active listening	Practice, practice, practice!! Read/ observe/ reflect Notetaking
Computer skills	Microsoft Word/PowerPoint/Excel Google docs/Google drive/ Dropbox Email/Slack/Microsoft OneNote Zoom/Skype	Practice YouTube lessons Online courses



In the middle of this process, I suddenly realized that many of these soft skills were covered in the book entitled, “The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People.”¹ In 1989, Stephen Covey wrote this best-selling book with now over 40 million copies sold. It is considered to be one of the most influential business books of the 20th century. A summary of the 7 Habits is shown in Figure 2.

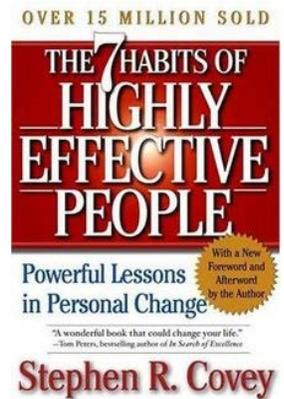
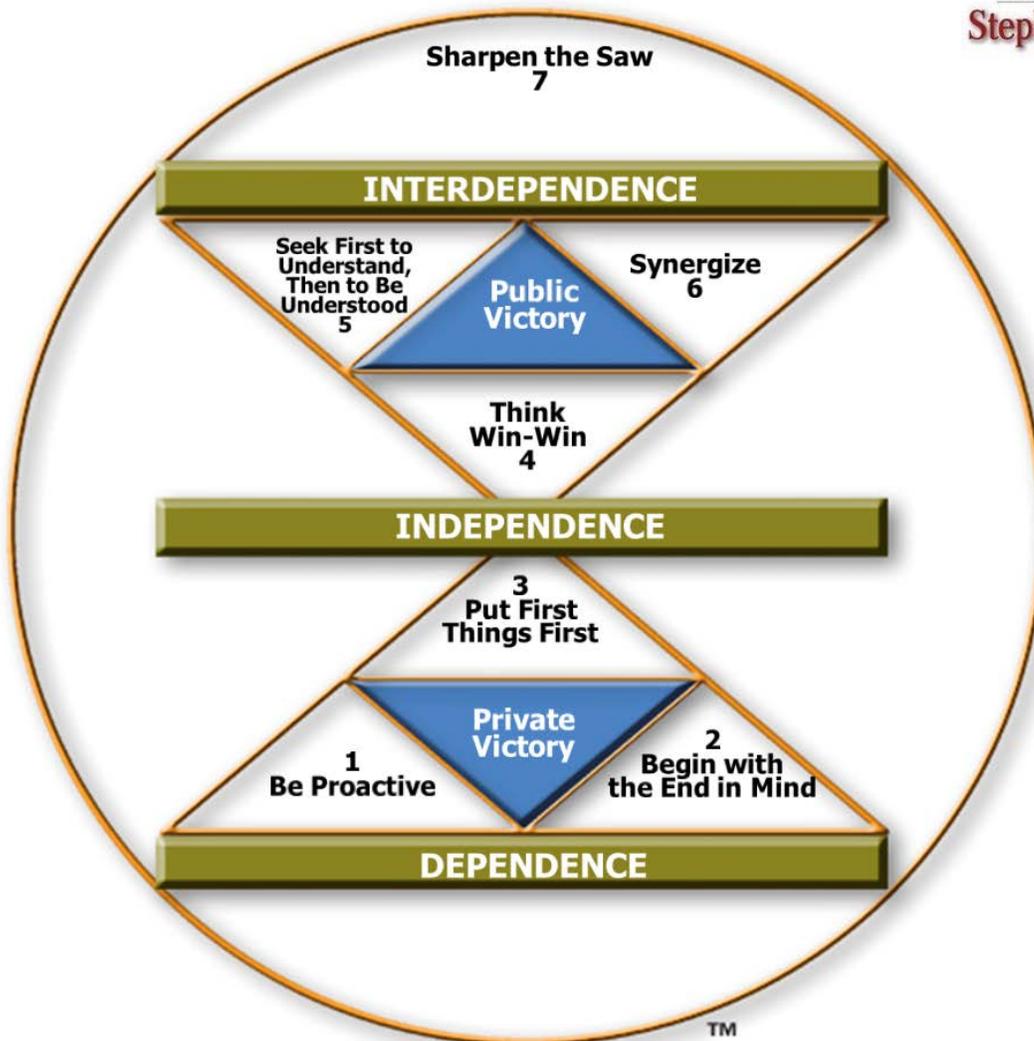


Figure 2: The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People.



¹ Covey, S. R. (2004). The 7 habits of highly effective people: Restoring the character ethic ([Rev. ed.]). New York: Free Press.



I recently reread my copy and, although it seemed a bit long-winded in parts, the model and core teachings remain very relevant and valuable. There are an overwhelming number of summaries of various lengths available on-line, which are a much faster means to learn or brush up Covey's core concepts.^{2,3,4,5} Table 2 provides a summary of the 7 Habits as they apply to internships.

Habit	Application
Be proactive	Take the initiative at work. Look for opportunities where you can be of assistance. Don't just be reactive, waiting to be told what to do next.
Begin with the end in mind	Uncover the higher-level objective of each task, as it can inform your activities and priorities.
Put first things first	Manage your time and priorities. Urgent first and then longer-term strategic projects.
Think win-win	Seek mutually beneficial solutions when working with others, especially customers and external collaborators.
Seek first to understand, then be understood	Listen actively and empathetically to ensure you clearly understand situations, before developing and proposing solutions.
Synergize	Leverage the combined knowledge and creative power of diverse teams to solve difficult problems.
Sharpen the saw (work-life balance and renewal)	Ensure you maintain a good work-life balance.

Internships are invaluable opportunities for students to gain work experience and apply the skills they have developed at school. In order to fully capitalize on these opportunities, it is advisable to start with a strong skill set by honing those skills you already have and reviewing the concepts outlined in The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People is a good place to start.

² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_7_Habits_of_Highly_Effective_People#References

³ <https://visual.ly/community/infographic/education/summary-stephen-covey-bestseller-7-habits>

⁴ <https://blog.hubspot.com/sales/habits-of-highly-effective-people-summary>

⁵ <https://www.franklincovey.com/the-7-habits.html>

