

## Week #1 of the 3-Week Series, “7 HABITS OF HIGHLY EFFECTIVE PEOPLE”

### BEING HIGHLY EFFECTIVE

March 15, 2020

Rev. Richard Maraj

**Rev. Richard Maraj:** Good morning everyone, and a shout out to everyone who watches us online during the week. Welcome to you all!

How many people would like your life to have less stress, fewer problems and more inner peace? Anybody? How many people would like to experience more success and achieve even greater things than you've done so far? And how many people would like your relationships – and some specific ones – to be healthier, happier, more loving and more harmonious? How many people would like that?

Of course, the answer is “Yes!” to all of them, because every single one of us, by our nature, is always seeking to experience more light, more love, more beauty, more happiness, more goodness in every single form. It is something that we are constantly seeking, searching for and desiring in our lives. And we have to think of all kinds of strategies of how we can do that. We work harder. We work smarter. We are more motivated. We are more determined. There are a whole bunch. And thousands of books have been written to help us have better lives and transform ourselves.

There's one, in particular, that had an impact on my life called, *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People* – did anyone ever read that a long, long time ago? – by Stephen Covey. The thing I loved about it, besides having an impact on my life, is that it is based on hundreds of years of teaching of principles to make our lives more effective. About universal laws to help us be more efficient, more successful and more efficient in all areas of our lives. It's really based on spiritual laws, spiritual principles, and principles of effectiveness. It really comes down to – right in the title it says – being highly effective. Because it's truly more about being than doing. It's more than just working hard or working more or working longer. It's more than just motivation. It is about a principle: the principles of being that attract and create greater efficiency, happiness and success in our lives.

Here's what [Covey] says: *“If you want a happy marriage, be the kind of person that generates positive energy and side steps negativity and, instead, empowers. If you want to have more pleasant, cooperative teenagers, be a more understanding, empathetic, consistent, loving....and lucky...parent.”* Oh, actually, I'm just goofing around [added the lucky].

**[Congregation laughs]**

*“If you want more freedom and latitude at work, be a more responsible, be a more helpful, and be a more contributing employee. If you want to have more trust in your life, be more trustworthy.”*

See, his entire focus about being more effective is around the idea that – whatever is going on in our lives – it is up to us to be more of whatever it would take to transform that experience. To be more compassionate, to be more kind, to be more forgiving, to be more positive, to be more confident, to be more creative. Whatever it is, the principle of effectiveness is always to turn within ourselves and ask ourselves what we can do to help the situation, to be more positive. It's to look within. That's the principle of effectiveness – the bottom line, really, of it: living from the inside out.

Now, living from the inside out and looking within sounds really easy, doesn't it? It sounds really simple, but it isn't so simple! Because most of us have been trained to live outside in. Most of us have had experiences in our lives where we have been conditioned to let outer circumstances – always wanting those to change and wanting the people in our life to behave differently. Wishing our family was different, our boss was different, our spouse was different. We always want things to be different, whether it's the economy, or the government or the weather. We often allow the outer things in our lives to kind of shape our feelings, our level of happiness and peace. Often shaping the decisions and the actions that we take, because we focus a lot on the outer. We let the outer things of our lives kind of dominate and affect our peace of mind.

But what he is saying is to do that is actually to live less effectively. It actually generates more frustration and feelings of inadequacy... That we turn to things like blame and anger and upset and depression and feeling sorry for ourselves when we overly focus on the outer conditions and other people, rather than turning within to ourselves, and to focus on our being. And engaging in activities that are more effective habits, actions to help us have a more effective situation. I bet every single one of us has a situation or circumstance in our lives that isn't going as well as we'd like. That if we were more effective, we know that we would have a more positive experience.

Today, we are going to look at these “Seven Habits of Highly Effective People.” To me, all these habits are based on three powerful truths: we are powerful; we are resourceful; and we are responsible. Every single one of us – in every single moment and situation – is always powerful, always resourceful and we are always responsible. I am powerful, resourceful and responsible. Together:

***[With congregants]: “I am powerful, resourceful and responsible.”***

It says in the Book of Timothy, “*God has not given you a spirit of weakness and timidity, but a spirit of power, love and self-discipline.*” Scripture says that we are created in the image and likeness of God, the Creator. So we are creators! It says we are the temple of the living God. In Genesis, it says we have been given dominion and authority over all things. And nothing more important have we been given dominion and authority over than our own thinking! Than our own mindset. Than our own perspective. Than our own ability to be more aware. Having the power and the resources and responsibility springs off into three important aspects that make all of these habits possible...and that's self-awareness, our conscience and our imagination.

Today, we are going to look at the first two of the seven habits, which are to “Be Proactive,” and the second is to “Begin with the End in Mind.”

So right now, what I want you to do, is I want you to notice what mood you are in right now. Just be aware. What would you name that mood or mindset that you are in currently? Is there something weighing on your mind? Or is your mind kind of relaxed and peaceful? Are you kind of distracted? Are you kind of not enjoying this exercise and thinking, “*Rev. Maraj, could you move on to the talk now, please?*”

***[Congregation laughs]***

What are you feeling? Because I will tell you, self-awareness is that incredible ability that we all have to observe ourselves. To literally notice and be aware of what we are thinking, what we are feeling. It is a powerful, powerful ability in us that helps us to reflect; helps us to evaluate; helps us to adjust and

change. Have you ever had a situation, then afterwards, you thought to yourself, *“Gosh, I probably got a little aggressive and maybe a little defensive. I wish I hadn't shown up. Next time, I'll be a little more calm about it.”* Were you ever in a situation where you say, *“Aw, I didn't say a word, and I wish I'd spoken up.”* We have this ability to be self-aware of situations – in the moment of how we are feeling and after the fact – to help us to adapt and experience things in greater ways and be a more effective person. Self-awareness is a powerful thing.

And the two aspects of self-awareness are what he calls the “Circle of Concern” and the “Circle of Influence.” It's about our awareness in both of those. The Circle of Concern is all the things you are concerned about. What are you most concerned about right now? Whether it is your finances or your relationship or your health or the national debt or the government, it's all the things we get concerned about. And what we do is: we get so concerned with them, we start getting into worry and fear and anxiety and upset and frustration. What happens is that, the Circle of Concern begins to consume us so much, that it actually makes us feel even worse. It makes us feel down and helpless, because a lot of the things in the Circle of Concern we actually don't have control over.

And then the second one is the Circle of Influence. Those are the things we can control, like our attitude, our mindset, our perspective. Asking ourselves, *“What is it that I need to see a little differently in this situation? What is it that I need to let go? In what way am I supposed to step up and stand up in this particular situation?”* And the more that we connect with the Circle of Influence – guess what? The Circle of Concern gets smaller in our mind, and we tend to actually be more effective. Less effective when we spend too much time in the area of concern and much more effective when we spend time in the areas of influences.

In the book. [Covey] gives a really powerful example of someone who was controlling their influence more than their concerns. And it was Gandhi. So, here's Gandhi: got no money, got no power, didn't have a political position... Yet he had an intention and a desire to liberate India from British rule. Regardless of all the laws – regardless of this – he didn't concern himself with all that. Of all the things. He could have said, *“Man, I got no chance; this thing will never work. They're way too powerful.”* But what he did: he created a sphere of influence and did what he could do. He engaged more and more people in this to the point that the influence was so big, it literally brought the British Empire to its knees... literally transformed and freed all the Indians from British rule.

So who is our “British Empire” that we think is suppressing us? And, instead of being concerned about whatever it is that's going on – that we're feeling isn't fair, isn't working, will never get better—we have to focus on the areas of influence that we can impact. Because, over time, it will make a difference.

The truth is: whether it is a problem you are facing, or a goal and a dream you've got, or mistake that you've made, or your relationship, or overcoming or self-improving, the number one thing to do is to look at ourselves and to ask, *“How can I be proactive in this situation? What's the best thing I can do to help myself to handle this, to manage this situation? And have some impact in my experience through it and its outcome?”* So, really, being proactive is about accepting our power, our resourcefulness and our responsibility, and the Circle of Concern will go down and our Circle of Influence will increase.

I just want you to say that to me: I am powerful. Together:

**[With congregation]: “I am powerful.”**

Take a deep breath. See how good that feels? I am resourceful. Together:

**[With congregation]:** *"I am resourceful."*

Take a deep breath. See how that feels. And this one: I am responsible. Say that:

**[With congregation]:** *"I am responsible."*

Take a deep breath. Is it just me, or did you notice that "responsible" didn't create as much warm fuzzies as the other two?

**[Congregation laughs]**

And you know why? Because in our culture, responsibility is connected to being a burden, or thinking that it's about blame. And it really isn't. Responsibility is actually a liberating, empowering truth of who we are. Because, when we don't feel responsible, guess what? We give other people in situations power. To have responsibility means – no matter what the situation – we have the power to improve it. We have the ability to respond, the ability to be proactive and to help that situation. So, it actually isn't a burden; it's actually liberating! And you know what happens? We feel like responsibility means, *"Oh, man! I gotta work all the time I gotta do all this effort."* Over time, the more responsible we are, the more effective we'll be. Guess what? Life actually gets easier over time when we turn to ourselves and act proactively and say, *"What can I do to make this situation and my life better?"*

So, something that is important for us to understand is that proactivity is our nature. Being proactive is our nature! Let me give you some examples. When Scripture says, *"Ask and you shall receive; seek and you shall find; knock and the door will open unto you,"* asking, seeking and knocking is proactive. When you pray, guess what? That's proactive. When you choose to forgive? That's proactive. When you choose to give compassion? That's proactive. Compassion? When you hold a vision and set an intention? That's proactive. We have so many resources! And being proactive is right within our own grasp to improve all the situations in our lives. It is powerful and amazing. We should get excited about being responsible! Excited we have resources and excited that we have the power to improve any and every situation in our lives!

Victor Frankl said there are three categories of values. The first one is experiential: the things that happen in our lives around us. The second one is creative: the things we create and bring forth. And the third one is attitudinal: how we adjust our mindset, particularly during the difficult times. Because, he said, how we manage and handle and are proactive in our difficult times actually shifts our paradigm and helps us grow and expand in awareness and spiritual power, more than anything else. It's a bit of a bummer, but it's also exciting that –whatever difficulty you are going through – that has the seed in it to help us be more powerful, more resourceful and more proactive. It is an important thing.

So here's the assignment for the week. For the next 30 days, no matter what happens, we look within ourselves and say, *"How can I be proactive in this? What's the best way for me to show up in this situation?"* That is always the most effective thing. First and foremost – based on the truth that we are powerful, resourceful and responsible – is to ask, *"What can I do to be more effective? How can I be more proactive?"*

And then, the second one is to begin with the end in mind... [Covey] has an exercise. Imagine you're attending your own funeral. All the people in your life gathered there to love and appreciate you, and

there are four speakers: somebody from your very close family; a friend; somebody from work; and somebody from your church or a community organization you might be a part of. And the question is: what would you like to hear them say? What would a family member say about you? What would a friend say about you? About the difference you made, the impact, the kind of person you were? What would someone at work say about your work ethic and how you got along with others? What would someone from your church or your community say about you?

We have this incredible ability to see beyond the moment – to create the kind of person you want to be and the life. The Book of Proverbs says, *“Where there is no vision, the people perish, but happy is he who keepeth the law.”* So where there is no vision the people perish. What perishes? When we don't have a vision or a goal to work toward – a sense of direction or meaning – our motivation, our energy perishes. We kind of just drift in our lives. Whatever happens, happens. We live by default, rather than design. We live casually, rather than intentionally. And it robs us of some of the spiritual power and abilities that we have.

And it said, *“but he that keepeth the law, happy is he.”* What it means is: the person who has a vision to work towards, guess what? They have more energy. They have more focus. They express their power more. And by using it more, it actually increases. It's an important thing for us to hold a vision: to visualize, to kind of see what it is we want to create.

Do you know they've done studies on all peak performers and athletes at high levels. You know that every single one – in their own way, every one of them – visualizes their outcome first. Every single one of them sees themselves performing at the highest level. So, if these guys do it and it brings them high peak performance, why wouldn't we do it for our lives? To visualize the kind of life, the kind of relationship, the kind of person, the kind of feelings, the kind of financial abundance that we would have. Why would we not use it?

So how do we do it? The first thing to use the power of our vision – our imagination – and begin with the end in mind. First, look at our lives now and ask ourselves that Dr. Phil question, *“So how's that working for you?”*

**[Congregation laughs]**

And to see if there are any areas in our lives where we would like to feel more joy and fulfillment in that area. Is there any area in our lives that's not only not feeling joyful, but that's not really me: that's not my authentic life? Where I'm living what other people's expectations are? Sometimes people have difficult times. They come through abuse. They come through poverty. They come through a lot of different things. And the great thing about having a vision is that we can re-write the script. We can retell the story. It doesn't matter how many years it's been going on; we have the power today to not only be proactive, but to hold a new vision. To tell a new story. A story of defeat can become a story of triumph... and we get to write that story! A story of being stuck can be a story of overcoming and transformation. A story of lack can become a story of abundance and triumph. We have so much more power than we actually realize!

The second thing is to ask ourselves, *“What's important to me? What kind of life do I want to have? What kind of things do I want to experience? What kind of person do I really want to become?”* To literally ask ourselves...

Do you know, the Socratic method of learning is based on the idea that all the wisdom and knowledge is already in us and, when you ask questions, it helps bring it out? So asking yourself the question, “*What do I want? What do I want to create? What do I want to feel? Who do I want to become?*” is actually hugely powerful. Even add other things in there, like asking yourself the question: if you had to write your eulogy, what would you want to be said about you? Yourself, to write it. If you only had six months to live, what would you do? To really connect with what it is that we want.

And this isn't like a one-time, happen-all-at-once. It takes a little bit of time. Because we so often get caught in the “activity trap” of life, and are so busy, we actually don't take time to think of what we want our lives to look and feel like. We are just trying to survive! We're busy! Sometimes we're doing a lot, but not getting anywhere. One of the best things to move our lives for is to take time to figure out what I want my life to look like. “*What do I want my life to be like?*”

Victor Frankl said an interesting thing. He said when it comes to finding your vision, it's more about detecting it than inventing it. I love that! More about detecting it than inventing it. Because you already know; we have allowed other things to cover it up, and all kinds of problems, false things that we have told ourselves, and allowed ourselves to believe by other people... But it's in there. That's why asking the questions regularly over time will get you clearer and clearer about who you came here to be, and the difference you came to make, and the kind of relationship that you can have and are deserving of having. But we have to do that inner work of being proactive, and beginning with the end in mind and, literally, looking in ourselves to get clear on what it is we want. What is that picture that we are trying to create?

Here's what [Covey] says about the inside out focus: about being proactive. He says, “*The inside out process is a continual process of renewal based on natural laws that govern human growth, progress and transformation.*” And the fact is that, at every age and stage of your life, life is always calling you to bring out more. Life is always calling us to be proactive... Always calling us to get clear about what it is we want, and what it is we want to have, and what it is that we want to create. There is no person – from 10 to 20 to 50 to 100 – who is not being called to express more and be more. And the way to be most effective is to be proactive and to begin with the end in mind.

And so, let's make a commitment to ourselves: remember the 30-day thing. Be proactive every day. Turn within – no matter what's annoying you – turn within in and say, “*How can I be most proactive? How can I be most effective?*” And the second one is to work over time about our vision, and get clearer by asking ourselves what's important. “*What do I want? What am I here to do?*” You know, Mark Twain once said, “*The two most important days of your life are the day you were born, and the day you find out why.*”

**[Congregation murmurs]**

The day you re-discover why. So, be proactive and begin with the end in mind. Those are the first two steps to help us be more **Highly Effective People**.

God bless you all!

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***Thank you to volunteer Kara Marshall for transcribing this message!***