

Begin with the End in Mind

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You've heard the jargon, "think win-win" or "put first things first", "prioritize" and "synergize". These buzz words are in common use but what do they really mean and how can they change the culture of your school?

Stephen Covey wrote the popular book *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People* about twenty years ago. In the book, Covey teaches the habits and encourages people to live their lives with integrity, courage, patience, discipline, simplicity, and the Golden Rule. Covey has taught countless people in the corporate sector as well as individually to use these habits to increase productivity and success. But no one had brought them to the educational field.



Enter a principal of a school in Raleigh, North Carolina. She took her school from a struggling magnet school in danger of losing its magnet status to a school of high academic achievement as well as a place where parents are on waiting lists to get their children into the amazing program they have developed. The book, *The Leader in Me*, is the account of their journey into incorporating the seven habits into an educational setting and their progress into excellence.

Our leadership team read *The Leader in Me*. We could immediately see the possibilities that the seven habits held for Deer Lake School in Burnaby, BC. We began our journey into becoming a seven-habits school with an intensive two-day seminar for all staff put on by a facilitator from the Franklin Covey Institute. As we assimilated the knowledge, we began to see huge potential for our students, especially middle school and high school. If they could develop these habits and the discipline involved, they would be well on their way to successful academic experiences and eventually, successful careers. We continued to review these habits and incorporate them into our everyday lives. And we began to teach them to our students.

Soon "think win-win" became the language used as conflicts arose and were resolved. "Begin with the end in mind" was the opportunity to teach better planning skills when large projects were assigned. "Put first things first" helped our students to see that the really important things must not be sacrificed to the less important but urgent stuff of everyday life.

"Seek first to understand, then to be understood" is one of the most important lessons we can learn and it is one of those skills that will last a lifetime. Resisting the urge to interrupt and give advice is difficult for all of us. The desire to tell our own story is strong. But listening with the intent to understand is equivalent to making a huge deposit into the emotional bank account of another. Relationships thrive when the parties value the skill of listening before talking.

Synergy: Teaching students the value of creative cooperation is another important life-skill. The more ideas and strategies that are brought to the problem-solving process, the better. Instead of your idea or my idea, the third alternative is arrived at and it's better than either one.

Our leadership team visited a school that had been practicing the 7 habits for seven years. From the moment we walked in and were greeted by students who confidently looked us in the eye, we knew that we were in a place where good things were happening. From kindergarten to the Special Education classroom, we were immersed in an atmosphere of successful learning. Students shared openly their journeys from negative behaviours to successful solutions and their pride in the results was evident. Everywhere we looked we saw evidence that students were acting in harmony with the principles taught.

We have one more intensive seminar with our Franklin Covey presenter to prepare us for implementation. It has been a long exciting year just doing the groundwork for putting this program into action. We are filled with anticipation as we enter the final phase. We believe that these simple but powerful habits will enable our students to achieve lifelong personal excellence.

In closing, let me add how perfectly we believe the seven habits dovetail with the NAD Journey to Excellence goals. Covey develops the seven habits more fully, but the content is very similar. They are completely in line with our spiritual values defined over years of teaching tomorrow's thinkers and leaders. The character-building elements of each habit will prepare our students for citizenship in this life as well as for eternity.

Resources:

- Covey, Stephen R. (1989) *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, New York: Simon & Schuster
- Covey, Stephen R. (2009) *The Leader in Me*, New York: Free Press