



Book Recommendation

The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People by Stephen Covey

I've always had a deep love of learning — and while that shows up in many ways, reading is one of my favourite forms. I do wish I could say I've read all the books on my shelves... but the truth is, my appetite for learning often outpaces the time and energy I have to keep up with it. Still, among the sea of books waiting patiently to be opened, this month's recommendation is one I'm actually re-reading.

I first encountered *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People* in the year 2000. I remember it vividly — we were living in England on a teaching exchange at Uppingham School. That season of our lives was filled with new friends, new ideas, and new experiences. Reading Covey's book at that time helped shape a way of thinking that I've carried with me ever since.

The reason I'm returning to it now is something quite special: my son Jack and I have started our own little book club. One book each month, followed by a meal together and a chat about what we've learned. After researching a list of books that explore leadership, self-development, and relationships, we agreed to begin with this timeless classic from 1989. I ordered a fresh copy for Jack and instinctively reached for my own — now over 30 years old, dog-eared and heavily underlined. In fact, several references to Covey's ideas appear in *My Manifesto: A Compassionate Guide to Reveal Your Best Life* — a testament to the enduring influence of his work.

Just yesterday, Jack and I had breakfast together at Uncle Drew's Café. We talked about university life, work, and shared some of our biggest takeaways from the seven habits. Re-reading this book has been a joy. Some insights felt like old friends, others struck me differently this time, resonating in new and deeper ways. There were even sections I didn't re-highlight — not because they no longer matter, but because they feel so deeply embedded in how I now live.

And yet, what has moved me most isn't just the content of the book — it's the shared experience. Knowing that Jack and I now have this common language, this shared lens, and these stories that shape our thinking... that's the real highlight.

Who knows how long our little book club will last. But with our first six books already chosen and stacked beside us, I'm hopeful for many more insights (and many more meals) to come. I'm grateful to Stephen Covey not only for the wisdom in these pages but for the connection and conversation they've sparked.

For those who haven't read it — or those considering a re-read — here's my personal one (or two) sentence take on each of Covey's 7 Habits: (Of course, these humble summaries only scratch the surface — Covey's true genius lies in the way the habits interconnect and build upon one another.)

**Habit 1: Be Proactive**

Choose to take responsibility for your own life. Recognise that you have the power and freedom to choose your response in any situation.

Habit 2: Begin with the End in Mind

Get clear on what truly matters to you — your values, your goals, your vision. Know why you're doing what you're doing, and let that guide your choices. (It's in this chapter that Covey advocates writing a personal mission statement — something I did back in 2000, and a practice that helped lay the foundation for the work we now do through My Manifesto.)

Habit 3: Put First Things First

Align your daily actions with your deepest priorities. Focus your time and energy on what matters most — especially in the relationships and roles that give life meaning.

Habit 4: Think Win/Win

Seek outcomes that honour both your needs and the needs of others. It's a mindset of mutual benefit — one that builds trust, respect, and long-term success.

Habit 5: Seek First to Understand, Then to Be Understood

Listen with empathy and curiosity. Before jumping in with your own views, seek to truly understand where someone else is coming from.

Habit 6: Synergise

Celebrate diversity. When people bring their different strengths, talents, and perspectives together — openly and respectfully — the result can be far greater than the sum of its parts.

Habit 7: Sharpen the Saw

Prioritise your own growth, health, and renewal — mentally, physically, emotionally, and spiritually. After all, a sharp saw is far more effective than a blunt one.

So that's my take — not just on the book, but on the experience of returning to it through the lens of connection, reflection, and family.

With best wishes,
Justin