

HABIT 7: SHARPEN THE SAW

Habit 7 is taking time to sharpen the saw. It's preserving and enhancing the greatest asset you have—you. It's renewing the four dimensions of your nature—physical, spiritual, mental, and social/emotional. This is the single most powerful investment we can ever make in life—investment in ourselves, in the only instrument we have with which to deal with life and to contribute.

—STEPHEN R. COVEY

HABIT 7: Sharpen the Saw is about balanced renewal in all four dimensions of human need: physical, spiritual, mental, and social/emotional. As you renew yourself in each of the four areas, you create growth and change in your life. You increase your capacity to produce and handle the challenges around you. When you don't renew yourself, you limit or even reverse your growth, and limit or decrease your capacity to produce and your ability to handle challenges.

So, you're thinking you don't have time to Sharpen the Saw? How can sharpening the saw increase capacity? Think about it.

- Time to cut a log with a dull saw—30 minutes.
- Time to sharpen the saw—5 minutes.
- Time to cut the log with a sharp saw—10 minutes.

Ka-ching! You just saved yourself fifteen minutes. You've never cut a log? How does this apply to you?

- Time left until your deadline and you're exhausted—5 hours.
- Time to Sharpen the Saw, refocus, and feel ready to go—30 minutes.
- Time it takes to finish the project when you're refreshed—4 hours.

Ka-ching! You just saved yourself thirty minutes. That's how it applies to you.

Feeling good doesn't just happen. You can't just snap your fingers and decide to feel good without making a conscious effort. Living a life in balance means taking the necessary time to renew yourself. It's all up to you. You can renew yourself through relaxation. Or you can totally burn yourself out by overdoing everything. You can pamper yourself mentally and spiritually. Or you can go through life oblivious of your well-being. You can experience vibrant energy. Or you can procrastinate and miss out on the benefits of good health. You can revitalize yourself in order to face a new day in peace and harmony. Or you can wake up in the morning full of apathy because your get-up-and-go has got-up-and-gone. Just remember that every day provides a new opportunity for renewal—a new opportunity to recharge yourself instead of hitting the wall. All it takes is the desire, knowledge, and skill.

GETTING READY

In order to reach a place of prosperity, you must engage in a process of renewal and revival. In order to maintain meaningful and consistent progress, you must be able to sense congruity or disparity.

The human endowment of conscience is called being self-aware. When you become self-aware, you can hear the intimations of conscience. Listen to your conscience. It can help you connect your conduct with your personal purpose.

Let your conscience guide you as you work through the next four pages of checklists. Being self-aware will help provide an assurance that the renewal plan you come up with in this section will be right for you.

Physical Checklist

Check only the items to which you can truthfully answer yes.

- ____ I stay informed and current on both health and fitness information.
- ____ I exercise twenty to thirty minutes at least three times a week.
- ____ I am fully aware of my need for vitamins and minerals.
- ____ I increase or maintain a strength program.
- ____ I include cardiovascular and flexibility activities in my exercises.

- ___ I get the proper amount of sleep.
- ___ I rest or relax when my body needs it.
- ___ I eat junk food less than twice a week.
- ___ I have an effective, positive way of dealing with stress.
- ___ I center my diet on a researched plan that fits my needs and goals.

Spiritual Checklist

Check only the items to which you can truthfully answer yes.

- ___ I have defined what my values are, and I plan and live my life accordingly.
- ___ I have created my mission statement. I rely on it to give vision to my purpose in life.
- ___ I find daily renewal through meditation, prayer, study, or reflection.
- ___ I frequently spend time in a place where I find spiritual renewal, e.g., in nature, a synagogue, a chapel, a temple.
- ___ I live with integrity and honor.
- ___ I keep my heart open to the truth.
- ___ I am able to take a stand or tell the truth, even when opposed by others.
- ___ I frequently serve others with no expectations of any type of returned favor.
- ___ I can identify which things in life I can change and which things I cannot. I let go of the things I cannot change.
- ___ I can connect to my inspirational guide as needed.

Mental Checklist

Check only the items to which you can truthfully answer yes.

- ___ I read books and other publications regularly.
- ___ I keep a journal or some sort of log, or engage in a regular writing process.
- ___ I allow music, silence, or some sort of relaxation exercise to clear my mind on a daily basis.
- ___ I challenge my mind through puzzles, problem solving, or games.
- ___ I have a hobby.
- ___ I continue my education either formally or informally.
- ___ I engage in meaningful dialogue at least once a week.
- ___ I visualize projects and plans so I have the end result in mind to guide the process.
- ___ I have a system to retrieve information when I need it.
- ___ I use a system to plan and organize my time and efforts.

Social/Emotional Checklist

Check only the items to which you can truthfully answer yes.

- ___ I am reliable and dependable.
- ___ I have a hopeful outlook on life.
- ___ I am trusting and supportive of people in my Circle of Influence.
- ___ I listen to others and hear what they have to say rather than thinking of what I want to say.

- _____ I reach out to others and am empathic.
- _____ I maintain my most important relationships.
- _____ I sincerely apologize when I need to.
- _____ I can persevere through the "hard times."
- _____ I am aware of what it means to take good care of myself.
- _____ I can control my impulses—cool down and act rather than react to people and situations.

Hopefully, the previous checklists have helped jumpstart your thinking for your personal renewal plan. Do you see areas where you are already doing well? How about areas where you could use some help? There is no right or wrong plan when it comes to renewal activities. You have to make it work for you.

Now that you've completed the checklists, take some time to think about the following questions. They will also get you thinking about where you might be out of balance, how to get your life in balance, and ultimately how to feel more rejuvenated. jot down your thoughts and responses in the space provided.

1. If you could choose five things to do that would nourish your soul, what would they be?

2. What makes those five things nourishing to you?

3. What is cluttering your life?

4. What keeps you awake at night?

5. What did you enjoy doing as a child?

6. Remember a time when you were truly happy. What did it feel like? How can you feel that way again?

7. How can you strengthen your relationship with a significant other?

8. What inspires you?

9. What memories can you pass on to your children about your ancestors?

10. What are you doing so that your family remembers you?

11. When was the last time you really checked in with yourself?

12. What would ignite the childlike sense of wonder you once had?

13. If you could build your very own retreat, what would it look like? How would you use it?

14. What can you do less of?

15. What do you want to do more of?

16. What is complicating your life right now?

17. How can you simplify it?

18. Are you saying yes when you really want to say no? To what? To whom?

Now that you've spent some time getting a better picture of where you are and where you want to be when it comes to Sharpening the Saw, let's break things down into more manageable pieces.

PLANNING

If you want a quality life, you have to plan and work for the results. Careful, consistent planning and action can provide renewal.

Planning is merely drawing a blueprint for the nurturing you wish to experience. There are two keys to successful planning: careful reflection, and giving the plan priority time. Careful reflection will assist you in determining which activities will sincerely regenerate your energies. Safeguarding time for your plan will securely keep it a priority in your daily and weekly schedule.

Exercising a plan that enriches all areas of your life will require about an hour a day. It is completely within your control. Keep in mind that it is very

possible to combine activities from two or more of the dimensions. You may renew a relationship while walking together. Or why not attend a class on an interest you share with a friend? There are many ways to make your plan fit you and your lifestyle perfectly.

Renewal is a gift you give yourself, not an imposition. Give yourself time to get one area of renewal up, running, and fully launched. After executing it over a period of time, evaluate your progress. Assess your plan and see if it is fulfilling your needs. If your plan requires adjustment, then do it! It's not carved in stone. Move to the next aspect of your program once you are comfortable with the one you've been working on.

Plan, execute, and evaluate one step at a time. If you begin to feel overwhelmed, take a break and figure out what needs to be adjusted. This is about decreasing stress and increasing your feelings of renewal and balance, not the opposite!