

Strengthening Families: An Evening with Stephen Covey

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Dr. Stephen R. Covey addressed about 1300 of us in Calgary one evening in April 2006 with highlights of his book, *7 Habits of Highly Effective Families*. For a man with 9 children and over 40 grandchildren he speaks from both personal and academic knowledge. Here is a brief review of his 7 habits and some additional comments from Covey.

7 Habits

1. **Be Proactive:** Act based on your values. Accept responsibility for your actions and initiate the best for yourself, family and community.
2. **Begin with the End of Mind:** Take action based on your Family Mission Statement. Develop your statement after a thorough discussion of mutually shared family values.
3. **Put First Things First:** Act with integrity based on your values.
4. **Think Win-Win:** Make decisions for the mutual benefit and respect of all family members. Spend quality time as a family. Express appreciation. Cooperate more. Compare and compete less.
5. **Seek First to Understand, Then to be Understood.** Listen attentively and with care.
6. **Synergize:** Acknowledge differences and seek solutions that benefit all family members.
7. **Sharpen the Saw:** Invest in the health, play and fond memories of your family.

Covey encourages families to create a Family Mission Statement. In your statement include concepts that enhance your family members' bodies, minds and spirit. For example: in our family we value and act upon health, learning, mutual respect, cooperation and community service. When we state and post our Family Mission Statement, we are more apt to stay steady and act upon our values. As Covey asks, "What kind of family do you want to bring your friends home to?"

Listening is also encouraged. "Listen with eyes primarily and ears secondarily." Covey uses an Indian talking stick to promote both effective talking and listening with his family and work. The rule is: you get the talking stick for your turn once the present talker feels understood. Ask, "Do you feel understood? Is there anything else you want me to understand?" Another way to effectively listen is to establish an agreement. "Would you be willing to accept a simple ground rule? No one makes his or her point until they have restated the other person's point of view."

Covey has no patience for punishment. “Punishment stirs up resentment.” Discipline means to lead or teach. He suggests replacing criticizing, complaining, comparing, competing and cynicism with gratitude, forgiveness and abundance.

We were offered a method of increasing children’s school performance while getting off their backs for higher marks. Have children teach you what they are learning. Start with their favourite subjects and slowly move towards their least favourite. You could even have a Teaching Time. Children will learn the value of learning for learning’s sake. At the same time, Covey advised minimizing television viewing.

Lastly Covey offered some conversation openers for, particularly, grandparents. However, these lines would be helpful for anyone who is involved and cares for a child:

1. *What have you learned since we last met?*
2. *What are your goals?*
3. *I want you to know how much I treasure and love you.*

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