



# It Starts With Trust

## Building Organizational Effectiveness

By Charles S. Farnsworth and Dr. Dennis I. Blender

**T**hese are exciting times in public education. Revolutionary steps are being taken to restructure schools and rethink the way children are instructed. The concepts of empowerment, total quality management, and strategic planning are becoming the norm. However, while these activities have the potential of influencing education in significantly positive ways, they must be based upon a strong foundation to achieve their full potential. *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, an approach based upon the best-selling book by Stephen Covey, provides that foundation.

Achieving educational effectiveness is an incremental, sequential improvement process. This improvement process begins by building a sense of security within each individual so that they can be flexible in adapting to changes within education. Addressing only skills or techniques, such as communication, motivation, negotiation, statistical process control or empowerment, are ineffective when individuals in a district do not trust its systems, themselves, or each other. A district's resources are wasted when invested only in training programs that assist administrators in mastering "quick fix," superficial techniques that at best attempt to manipulate, and at worst reinforce mistrust.

In environments emphasizing techniques and skills, individuals use more energy for image building than in serving their constituents (students, business people, patrons, etc.). This technique-centered approach neglects more long-range objectives such as commitment to quality, development of intra- and inter-departmental relationships and other activities that contribute to achieving the

district's stated mission and/or vision.

The challenge is to transform relationships based on insecurity, adversarialism, and politics, to those based on mutual trust. Trust is the beginning of effectiveness and forms the foundation of a principled-centered learning environment that places emphasis upon strengths and devises innovative methods to minimize weaknesses. The transformation process requires an "inside-out" approach that emphasizes individual responsibility for change and promoting effectiveness. Examples of the kinds of fundamental changes in thinking, which are key to realizing the full potential of individuals and districts, are exhibited in the following:

- Individuals understand the importance of personal trustworthiness before they can expect to trust or be trusted.
- Individuals are secure enough to value diversity or differences where they may have once felt threatened.
- Individuals view change as providing opportunities and challenges instead of problems.
- Individuals can adapt an abundance mentality where the success of others does not indicate that there is less for themselves, but is evidence that they can achieve the same.
- Individuals understand that in an interdependent environment, such as a school district, any decision-making process other than win-win is a lose. They understand that loss may not be felt immediately, but in the long term all lose because overall effectiveness is thwarted and the spirit of success important to a district's longevity is surrendered for the sake of ego.

Albert Einstein stated that the significant problems individuals and organizations face today cannot be

solved at the same level of thinking at which they were created. Enhancing environments and existing talents, and developing a more participative leadership style requires a process that incorporates patience, work and trust. It is not a "quick fix" but rather a natural, orderly, step-by-step process that encourages constant constructive feedback. This change also requires long-term commitment to the principles of transformation applied in proper sequence for sufficient duration to achieve long-term change.

The Seven Habits approach, developed by Stephen Covey, Chairman of the Covey Leadership Center, focuses on the inside-out developmental process that operates at four levels (Figure 1):

- *Personal leadership* — This is the foundation, the building block on which everything else rests. It is centered on individual trustworthiness. Personal leadership is accomplished by building strong character and focusing on those things that individuals can control. Personal trustworthiness is the foundation upon which successful districts are built. If trustworthiness is the root, trust is the fruit.
- *Interpersonal leadership* — Trust is the key to effective human relations. In fact, trust is the highest form of human motivation. If the trust level is high, motivation and communication is easy and instantaneous. If trust is low, communication is difficult, exhausting and tedious, and there will be a continual battle to motivate others. When trust is the root, empowerment is the fruit.
- *Managerial leadership* — Management styles should reflect a degree of trust in the person and in the relationship. The less trust between people, the more external control is needed. With increased trust, inter-



nal control can be exercised by individuals. Trust allows individuals to work out win-win performance agreements, thereby empowering the talents and energies of people.

■ **Organizational leadership** — The key to this level is alignment. When a district is properly aligned, its strategy, structure and systems embody and express the shared vision and values of its people and community. With true alignment, all individual actions contribute to the attainment of a quality education.

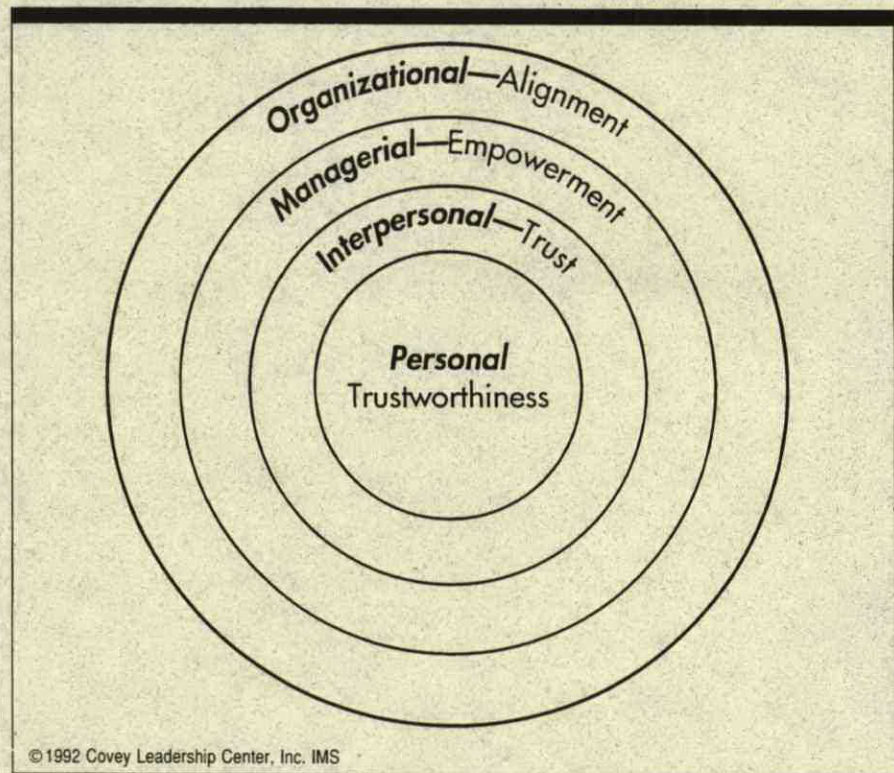
In 1976, Stephen Covey conducted a research study which was a review of the success literature of the first 200 years of the United States. He read the biographies, autobiographies and articles that were written on what it takes to become a successful person. During the first 150 years of the United States, virtually all of the success literature dealt with fundamental values and character traits: integrity, patience, trustworthiness, fidelity, temperance, and humility.

The success literature during the next 50 years shifted from the qualities of success to the trappings of success: superficial skills training marked by such slogans as "Swimming in the mainstream"; learning how to influence other people, teaching people how to get what they want fairly quickly. We have strayed from character development to a personality ethic focused on skills and techniques that captivate and manipulate.

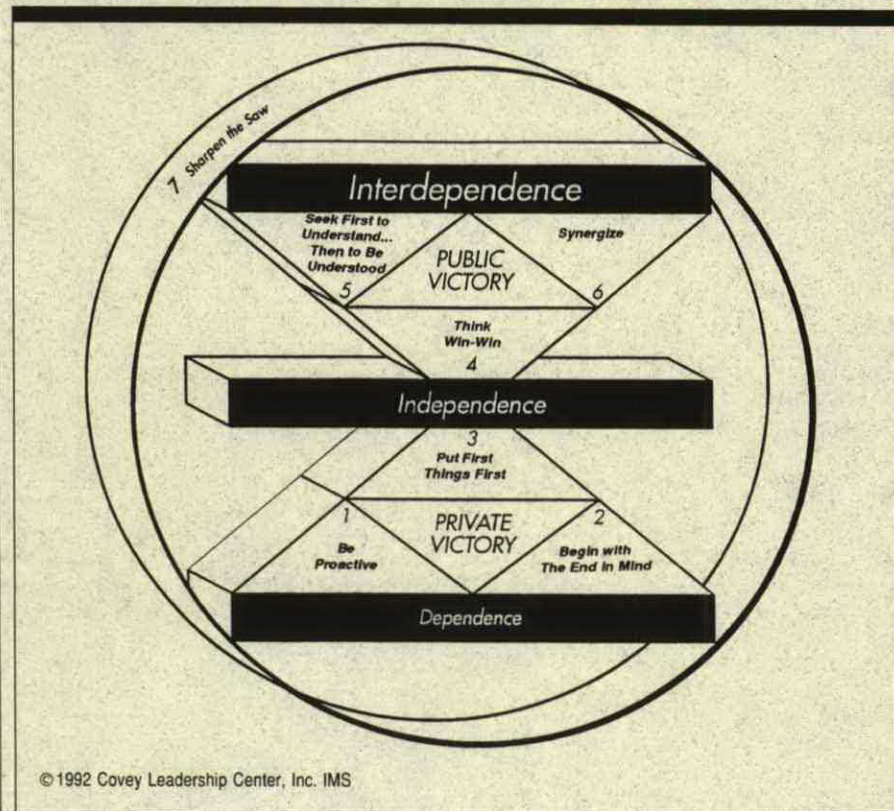
The Seven Habits approach teaches us that we must first establish the qualities of character, and progress from a state of personal and professional dependence to independence (Figure 2). Habits 1, 2, and 3 emphasize the importance of self-mastery and self-esteem. Habits 4, 5, and 6 focus upon establishing a public victory, or reaching a level of interdependence. It is at this level that we can develop cooperative, collaborative relationships with others. However, success at this level depends on the degree to which we have mastered Habits 1, 2, and 3. These habits represent the true test of our commitment to effectiveness in our personal and professional lives.

The private victory embodied in the first three habits must precede the public victory of the last three habits. It is in Habits 1, 2 and 3 that an individual's principles and values are defined. These values then become the touchstone by which a character is shaped, responses to circumstances are chosen, and decisions are made. The seventh habit,

**FIGURE 1**  
Principle-Centered Leadership, an Inside-Outside Development Process

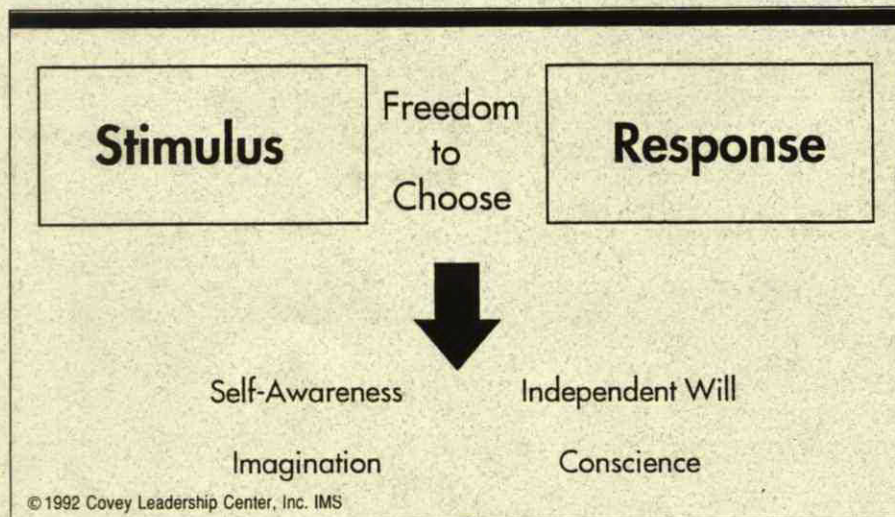


**FIGURE 2**  
The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People

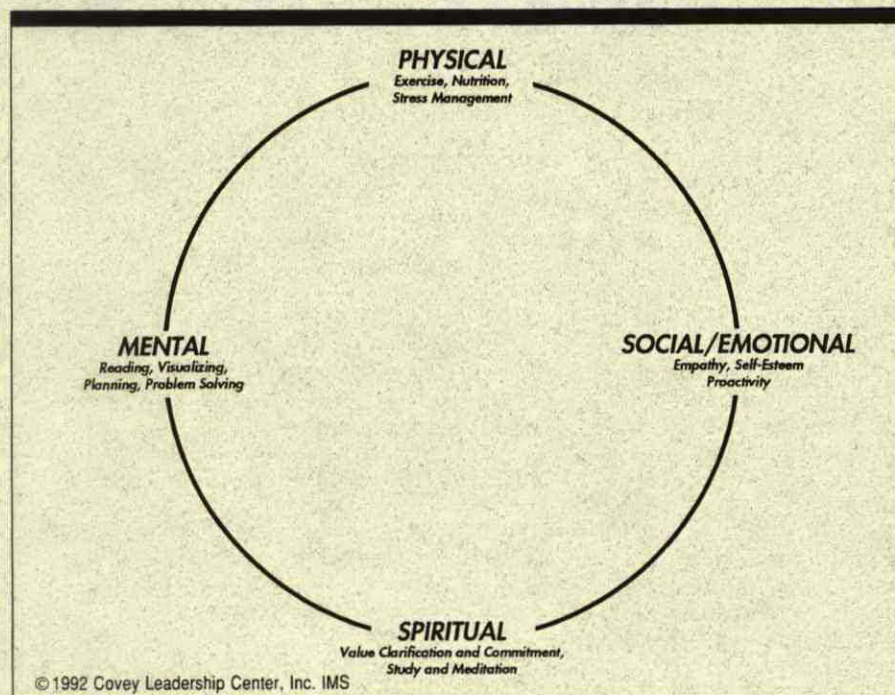




**FIGURE 3**  
Pro-active Model



**FIGURE 4**  
Habit 7: Sharpen the Saw  
Four Dimensions of Renewal



Sharpen the Saw, is a personal continuous improvement process where we are constantly working to maintain and improve ourselves physically, mentally, socially, and spiritually. It presses us to view ourselves as life-long learners always seeking opportunities for personal and professional growth.

**HABIT 1**  
**Be Pro-active**

We are responsible for our actions.

It is not the forces outside of ourselves that cause us to respond in a certain way. We choose our responses based upon our principles and values. As human beings we have four very special human endowments that separate us from all other creatures on the face of the earth. We have an *imagination* which allows us to think about creative possibilities. We are *self-aware* creatures and can think about alternate possibilities. We have a *conscience* which teaches us the differences between right and

wrong. Lastly, we have *independent will*. We and only we can decide what is going to happen to us. This freedom to choose our responses can be referred to as human potential (Figure 3).

Proactive people choose to focus on those areas within their control. They do not deny the existence of things that they have no control over, but they look very sharply and clearly at things they can do something about and focus on those activities. Reactive people, on the other hand, focus on things that they cannot control. Their language is hallmarked by "if only" types of statements ("If only we had more money," "If only we had smarter students," "If only our parents understood the problems in education."). Reactive thinking leads to denial, excuses, and blame. It saps administrators, teachers, parents, and students of initiative, creativity, and a responsible attitude.

A proactive approach leads to results. It revitalizes, encourages, and nourishes because this response often leads to incremental improvements and medium to long-term successes. Pro-active people are energized because they spend their time in arenas in which they can influence, thus increasing the probability of real outcomes and a belief in the ability to make a difference in the education institution.

**HABIT 2**  
**Begin with the End in Mind**

Habit 2 asks very fundamental questions. "What is it you want to accomplish in your life, professionally and personally?" "Do you reflect on where you would like to be in 5 years or 10 years?" "Do you ask yourself how you would like to be described by other people?" "Do you recognize the different life roles in which you participate and how you are going to balance these roles?" Habit 2 focuses on our fundamental values, the principles by which we want to live our lives. It is truly the habit of personal leadership, setting direction, establishing our own vision and our own mission. If we do not have a clear end in mind for our lives, we will end up wandering aimlessly with no particular direction.

Habit 2 helps us achieve balance in our lives. We acknowledge the consequences of running out of clean water or clean air. We understand that we must view our environment



as a system, and try to achieve an ecological balance.

Begin with the end in mind helps us to achieve a sense of personal ecology or balance. By examining our key roles and goals, we can begin to place value on our activities. This will eventually help us make the difficult decisions of proportioning our time; whether to stay at our office, attend an evening conference, or go home to spend time with family. Begin with the end in mind helps us formulate a response to what we want to be in life.

### **HABIT 3** **Put First Things First**

Habit 2 is the habit of personal leadership — establishing the vision and direction for our lives. Habit 3 is the habit of personal management, where we learn to organize and execute around our priorities. After having identified our key roles and goals in life, we can now plan our activities based upon what is truly important. Habit 3 helps us to eliminate the typical crisis management style where we respond aimlessly to situations around us without any particular direction. In Habit 3, we learn the importance of planning all of our activities, personal and professional, on a weekly basis.

### **HABIT 4** **Think Win-Win**

Habit 4 teaches us an approach or philosophy of decision-making methods that can lead to mutual satisfaction among all involved. Thinking win-win is essential because long-term unexpressed feelings never die. They get buried alive and come out later in uglier ways. Unfortunately, we have been scripted into a win-lose paradigm, hoping to achieve our own objectives first, often at the cost of others. Habit 4 simply suggests a new way of approaching the negotiation process that asks us to rewrite our scripts so that we can sincerely seek mutual benefit for all involved.

There are three prerequisites to developing a win-win philosophy. First, it is being a person of *integrity*. If someone is not trustworthy, does not honor and keep the commitments they make to themselves or to other people, it will be difficult to approach negotiations with a win-win

philosophy.

Second, it is balancing communication in relationships based upon *courage and consideration*. Specifically, this means taking into account other people's thoughts and feelings, being considerate of them, but also having the courage of one's convictions to express particular points of view.

Third, it requires an *abundance mentality*, believing that there are enough alternatives there for everyone to end as a "winner" and that win-win solutions can be found to almost any conflict.

By adopting a win-win approach, we are able to enter into negotiations with a renewed spirit that everyone can win. This spirit frees communication and allows for open and honest dialogue.

### **HABIT 5** **Seek First to Understand, Then to be Understood**

Habit 5 is the most difficult of the habits because it is not a skill that is typically taught or practiced. Habit 5 is the habit of communication. Physicians diagnose before they prescribe. Top sales people pre-assess needs and then sell solutions. Educators assess skills prior to making specific educational interventions.

Unfortunately, most of us do not do this. Most of us reverse the order and try to be understood before we understand. If somebody comes to us with a problem, we are very quick to instruct them on what they should do. Stephen Covey recommends that we practice empathic listening. We learn that our eyes are the main tools for listening, not our ears. We listen with our eyes for feeling. The key to influencing others is to be *influenceable*. If we enter into a conflict with a belief that both sides will win, we are free to listen to their point of view and truly try to understand their thoughts and concerns.

### **HABIT 6** **Synergy**

Often people try to go directly to synergy as a final product. Synergy, the habit of creative cooperation, is a by-product of Habit 4 — Think Win-Win, and Habit 5 — Seek First to Understand, Then to be Understood. It is not something we can achieve directly but involves exercising both the win-win mentality and empathy.

Synergy, defined as "the whole is

greater than the sum of the parts," is only possible when there is a high degree of trust among members and high levels of cooperation. This trust and cooperative spirit becomes the foundation on which we can feel comfortable in permitting ourselves to be open to other viewpoints. It is in valuing differences that creative solutions are developed. Synergy allows us to bring alternative perspectives together in the spirit of mutual trust and respect resulting in a solution that may be better than any individual could have developed alone.

### **HABIT 7** **Sharpen the Saw**

Educators are very aware of the concept of life-long learning. Habit 7 is the habit of personal continuous improvement. It is preserving and maintaining our greatest asset, ourselves. When people get busy producing or "sawing" they often neglect to sharpen the saw, because maintenance seldom pays dramatic immediate dividends. Regularly sharpening the saw means having a balanced systematic program for self renewal in four areas; physical, mental, spiritual, and social/emotional (Figure 4).

School districts are beginning to incorporate *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People* into their professional development activities, curricula, and parent education programs. The implementation of this program, however, depends upon the personal commitment of people who understand the inside-out, principle-centered approach to empowerment and excellence. In other words, they accept the challenge to model what they teach in order to create a principle-centered learning environment for our children and for future generations. □

*Charles (Chuck) S. Farnsworth is the co-founder and vice president of the Educational Division of the Covey Leadership Center. During the past 24 years, Farnsworth has served as a classroom teacher, administrator, educational consultant, grantwriter and president of his own consulting firm.*

*Dr. Dennis I. Blender is a manager with Plante & Moran, a Michigan-based CPA and management consultant firm. Plante & Moran, an affiliate of the Covey Leadership Center, is the only independent licensed provider of the Seven Habits in Michigan.*