

Shifting Focus: The Practices of the Successful College Student

Introduction:

Our choices develop our character – and our character determines our choices.

A popular definition of character: “What we do when no one is looking.” We often think that a person’s character is tested in response to various temptations and challenges (“No! I won’t cheat, even if nobody is looking.”) Other definitions emphasize character as the capacity to draw a line where none exists. Indeed, people of good character are usually described as having strong principles such as truthfulness and fairness (Templeton, John: *Developing Character in the College Years*).

According to Ernest Boyer, author of *College: The Undergraduate Experience in America*, education in its fullest sense is inescapably a moral enterprise – a continuous and conscious effort to guide students to know and pursue what is good and worthwhile.

- I. **7 Habits of Highly Effective People** by Stephen Covey could be interpreted as the 7 habits of highly effective students.

A. Habit 1: Be Proactive

1. Being Proactive means taking responsibility for your actions. Base your actions on self-chosen values, not on moods, feelings, and circumstances. Some of these values or principles include truth, integrity, kindness, fairness, education, trustworthiness, human dignity, service, quality, excellence, potential, growth, patience, nurturance, encouragement and respect. Live by these values while you are on campus - make decisions based on these principles - don't be guided by spur-of-the-moment what others want to do. How can basing daily actions on your values & goals translate to college setting?

a. For instance, respect - respect for yourself and others, tell the truth. Match your values!

2. Being Proactive means being an active learner, taking responsibility for your learning.

a. An example in class

S	Sit up straight
L	Lean forward
A	Act interested
N	Nod slightly
T	Track with the eyes

b. Vocabulary improvement – Known-Frontier-Unknown list.

c. Reading improvement

d. Preparing yourself ahead of time for anticipated assignments.

B. Habit 2: Begin with the End in Mind.

1. Set goals and have a mission for your life and go after them. What is your goal in college? An education, having fun? Why are you here? Do you want knowledge or just graduate? A degree may help you get a job, the knowledge will help you keep it and advance.
Remember: Hate your job, hate half your life...work 8, sleep 8, 8 left
2. Keeping your goals in mind goes along with Habit 1 in what we often call **Motivation** - things that direct you. There are 2 kinds of motivation - internal and external.
 - a. Internal - comes from within each person. Values, goals, religion, dreams, basic needs like love, food, and water.
 - b. External - comes from outside the body. What are some examples? Money, parents, friends.
3. Until now, many students have been externally motivated or passive learners. They waited for the teacher or parents to tell them what to do. Now in college students need to be internally motivated, active learners, Proactive—Habit 1.



Internal/Student

External/Teacher

As a person goes through life, internal often becomes the main motivator – if you really want to learn something, little can stop you – not “bad” teachers, working on a job, family, etc.

C. Habit 3: Put First Things First.

1. This means set goals, keep a planner, and plan your day, week, and university career.
2. Most important, do first the things that are most important to reaching your goals - which may mean study, complete assignments, attend class, work.
3. Covey stresses that you really cannot control time, but you can control you. He calls this *life leadership* or taking control of your life, rather than time management. You control you rather than letting your surroundings control you.
4. One way to start setting short time goals and becoming the leader of your life is to start a study planner.

D. Habit 4: Think Win/Win.

This habit should work hand-in-hand with Habit 5. In conflict, think how can we both win? Get the right attitude first.

1. This means seeking mutual benefit in interdependent relationships.
2. Often people react to a situation by just walking away or giving up. Such as, not going to class when an assignment isn't finished. Sometimes there are better solutions using Habit 5, which we will discuss shortly.

E. Habit 5: Seek First to Understand, then be understood.

With a Win/Win attitude, then do the behavior to get you there.

1. This really has two parts—first try to see an issue from the other person’s point of view.
 - a. Non-traditional—you need to study, your kids are fighting and cranky.
 - b. Teens—your parents want straight A’s, you want to party.
 - c. Roommates—your roommate likes to play loud music; you need quiet to study.
 - d. Student—your professor wants you to keep a notebook and do vocabulary cards, you are getting by with C’s and don’t want to change your methods.
 - e. Students—your teacher covers some topics in class or uses language you are not comfortable with.
 - f. Students—you believe you need to work part-time, your boss wants you to work a lot of overtime with little notice, often the nights before you have tests.

2. The second part of this is “then be understood.”
 - a. It means communicating with the other person your point of view - not just walking away from a situation. Let the teacher know what is going on with you. Often things can be corrected. Look for the Win/Win situation. How can you complete the course in an acceptable way to both. Sometimes, though, it may mean repeating the course as the best Win/Win.

F. Habit 6: Synergize.

1. Synergy is when the joint effort or project of a group is more than what one person can do alone in a reasonable time.
2. Value different opinions, viewpoints, and perspectives when seeking solutions. When you are having trouble with courses, seek out other people's help such as tutors, classmates, teachers, Writing Center, etc.

G. Habit 7: Sharpen the Saw.

1. This means to engage in continuous improvement in the physical, mental, spiritual, and social/emotional dimensions of your life.
2. College shouldn't be just only mental improvement. Likewise, it shouldn't be all parties. A balance is needed. Have some fun, get some exercise.
3. The spiritual side may include religious involvement, but also includes good thoughts; being in nature; and reading encouraging poems, sayings, or religious passages.

II. **Conclusion.**

A. To conclude, study skills are the efficient use of your mind, talents, and resources for college study and for life-long learning and careers.

If you do only what is required of you – you are a slave; the moment you do more – you become free.