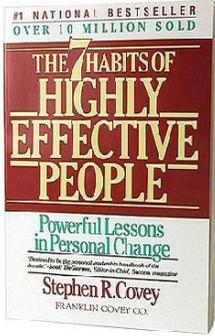


The Shifting Paradigms of Stephen Covey

By Bob Waldrep



If the abundance of infomercials is any indication, Americans are in search of the one program that will do it all. Reduce their weight-while eating all they want, and trim and tone their bodies-with no more than ten minutes of effort a day. They want a radiant personality that others cannot resist and to learn the secrets of being a success in every area of life; business, home, friends, etc.-by simply listening to a tape or reading a book. The sale of tapes, books and products that promise all this and more has grown into a multi-million dollar business with some of their authors and instructors gaining "talk show" celebrity status ensuring that their subsequent spin-offs also become best sellers. The numbers attending their seminars and the repeat best sellers by such human potential and New Age gurus as Deepak Chopra, Anthony Robbins and John Gray clearly indicate their message is being embraced by a large segment of our culture.

One of the more popular training programs and books in this genre is Stephen Covey's *The 7 Habits for Highly Effective People* (SH) and its various spin off books and programs, such as *The 7 Habits For Highly Effective Families*, (SF). Covey's organization, the Franklin Covey Company, claims to have over 19,000 licensed client facilitators teaching its curriculum to over 750,000 participants annually. These include eighty-two of the Fortune 100 companies, thousands of small and midsize companies, government entities, educational institutions, communities, families, and millions of individual consumers. Yearly book sales are over 1.5 million with over 15 million individuals using their planner products. Included among these participants and book purchasers are Christians, including business leaders, pastors and denominational leaders.

While some of the principles in SH are beneficial and has applications that will work, should it have a place in the Christian home and Church? Are there any concerns that Christians should have regarding this material?

A Brief Overview of the Seven Habits

The Seven Habits are:

1. Be proactive
2. Begin with the end in mind
3. Put first things first
4. Think win/win
5. Seek first to understand...then to be understood
6. Synergize
7. Sharpen the saw

According to Covey they represent the "internalization of correct principles upon which enduring happiness and success are based" and "are natural laws that cannot be broken." He believes many of these are "already deep within us, in our conscience and common sense." (p. 44)

Primary to these are understanding the powerful influence of paradigms and how to make a paradigm shift. Paradigms are generally defined as the way we see the world, not through visual sight but through our perceptions, understanding, and interpreting. (p. 23) They are like maps and "each of us has many, many maps in our head, which can be divided into two main categories: maps of the way things are, or realities and maps of the way things should be, or values. We interpret everything we experience through these mental maps." (p. 24)

These maps must be aligned with correct principles, thus becoming principle centered. This is much more important than expending effort on changing attitudes and behaviors. (p. 35) Paradigm shifts create change moving us from one way of seeing the world to another. "We can only achieve quantum improvements in our lives as we quit hacking at the leaves of attitude and behavior and get to work on the root, the paradigms from which our attitudes and behavior flows." (p. 30)

Its Mormon Roots:

To truly understand the *Seven Habits* model one needs to be aware of the author's theological underpinnings. Stephen Covey is a devout, practicing member of the Church of Jesus Christ Latter-day Saints and has not only authored personal development books marketed through secular bookstores but books intended for a Mormon (LDS) audience, as well. He has served the LDS church in a number of positions including fulltime

missionary, bishop, member of the MIA general board and of several Church leadership and teacher development committees and Mission and Regional Representative of the Twelve.

His book, *The Divine Center* (DC) is about centering one's life in the god of Mormonism and reads like a LDS primer. In fact, it seems to be the basis for SH as many of the ideas Covey wrote in it in 1982 are included and built upon in the SH, published in 1989.

7 Habits is the author's way of conveying ideas previously presented in DC to a non-LDS audience. He advises fellow Mormons, "...we shouldn't hesitate to work within the vocabularies of others to communicate our meanings ...we can teach and testify of many gospel principles if we are careful in selecting words which carry our meaning but come from their experience and frame of mind." (DC p. 240) This blurring of distinctions is a common tactic used by LDS in dialoguing with non-Mormons, particularly Christians.

In SH Covey claims these are universal principles, not "unique to any specific faith or religion, including my own. These principles are a part of most every major enduring religion as well as social philosophies and ethical systems." (p. 34) "The more closely our maps or paradigms are aligned with these principles or natural laws, the more accurate and functional they will be." (p.35)

Yet, in DC Covey reveals that *the only true and correct map* is found in the LDS Church and that God appeared to Joseph Smith and rejected all existing maps. (p. 16) During that alleged encounter with God, Smith specifically names the Baptists, Methodists and Presbyterians as having what Covey refers to as "incorrect maps." (*History of Joseph Smith* 1:9-10, 18-19, DC p.16) Covey says it is actually the adversary that distorts the maps in non-Mormon minds getting a stranglehold on them "because most people never question their maps". (DC. P. 17) He continues, "No wonder Joseph Smith under inspiration identified the "creed of the fathers" as "the very mainspring of all corruption." (ibid.)

According to DC, those who use Covey's material without embracing LDS teaching, have an incorrect map "that distorts the knowledge of who we really are, who our Heavenly Father is, who Jesus Christ really is, and who the Holy Ghost really is, that it imposes enormous limitations on...those who 'buy into it.'" (P. 80) He says "The true map, on the other hand, tells us what Elder Lorenzo Snow summarized in this couplet:

As man is, God once was; As God now is, man may become." (p.81)

Covey calls the Trinity an apostate doctrine leading people "to believe that we are a *creation* of God rather than His *literal offspring*." (p.82) This Mormon belief that man is the "literal" offspring of God is the basis for Snow's couplet that man may become a God or as Covey puts it, "Man, therefore, possesses in seed form all of the ultimate capabilities and powers God himself possesses." (p. 206)

Covey finds renewal in meditating on the Scriptures (p. 292) and in SF declares the benefit of daily reading of scriptures and other "'wisdom literature" which he states, "could be anything that connects you with timeless principles." (p. 301) Examples of "wisdom literature" are the *Bible*, the *Koran*, the *Talmud*, Native American Wisdom, the *Bhagavad-Gita*, *As A Man Thinketh*, *Walden*, *The Book of Virtues* or *Chicken Soup for the Soul*." (ibid.) Missing are references to any Mormon works. Yet, in DC he identifies the most powerful scriptures in his life as the Gospel of John, the Epistles of Paul and Peter, and two LDS standard works, the *Book of Mormon* and *Doctrine and Covenants*. (p.298)

For Covey the Bible is placed as just another of those connecting us to "timeless principles;" no better, no worse. This conforms to LDS teaching that the Bible is flawed and contains error. Quoting LDS Apostle Bruce McConkie he adds, "pay particular attention to the inspired changes made by the Prophet Joseph Smith in the Bible. Be sure any quotations you make include the new textual corrections." (DC p. 202) The reader is warned to be careful of private interpretation, "The inspired words of living prophets may be of greater worth to us than the words of dead prophets." (DC p. 199) He quotes two of these Mormon prophets, David O. McKay in SH (p. 294) and SF (p. 66) and Gordon B. Hinckley in SF (p. 208) identifying them only as a religious leader/educator and a wise leader respectively.

The focus of SH is being *principle centered*, "If you look at things through the paradigm of correct principles, what you see in life is dramatically different from what you see through any other centered paradigm." (SH p. 125) Here the author appears to have made a paradigm shift from DC in which he states we are to be God/Divine centered. (pp. 73-84) It seems odd the author would make this shift; particularly since, even one who is principle centered is still not Divine-centered unless they are following the Lord's prophet. "Any individual who is in opposition to the Lord's anointed prophet is also in opposition to the Lord, no matter how

strongly he may feel he is directed and guided by the Lord. What is actually happening to the apostate is that he is being guided by another spirit." (DC p. 22)

This idea of being guided by another spirit is found in those who believe that the work of Christ alone is sufficient for salvation. In DC Covey states Satan would say perfection can be achieved by what "has been done for you by Christ; just receive him by believing in him, and that's all there is to it. Of course, Satan is the father of lies." (p. 271) The LDS Church puts it thusly; "Christians speak often of the blood of Christ and its cleansing power. Much that is believed and taught on this subject, however, is such utter nonsense and so palpably false that to believe it is to lose one's own salvation. Many go so far, for instance, as to pretend, at least, to believe that if we confess Christ with our lips and avow that we accept him as our personal Savior, we are thereby saved. His blood without other act than mere belief, they say, makes us clean." (*What Mormons Think of Christ* p. 19, 1982 ed.)

Fortunately DC provides a test for determining if another spirit guides you or if you are on the right track to being God-centered. "Does he keep the general commandments, and is he consecrated to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and submissive to its appointed apostles and prophets?" (p. 225) Surprisingly, those who read SH are not made aware of this important test for determining the correct map.

For those Christians, particularly leaders in the Church, using Covey's material, please note that in order to properly follow these beliefs one must be rooted in submission to the authority of the LDS Church and its god. If you do otherwise he considers you as opposing the Lord, led by another spirit-the adversary, and following an incorrect map.

Its New Age Underpinnings:

Apart from its Mormon roots, Covey's products and programs are problematic for the Christian due to Covey's promotion of New Age teachers and practices. Covey is well versed in the New Age teachings and practices of its adherents because he often runs in the same circles as they, appearing on panels and at seminars. This is especially evident in his inclusion in the overtly New Age compendium, *Handbook for the Soul*.

Both SH and SF have a number of quotes or references to New Age proponents and books. These include Marilyn Ferguson (*The Aquarian Conspiracy*), M. Scott Peck (*The Road Less Traveled*), Marianne Williamson (*A Return to Love*), John Gray (*Men Are From Mars Women Are From Venus*), Jack Canfield and Mark Victor Hansen (*Chicken Soup for the Soul*) and Oprah Winfrey. Among the New Age practices referred to are visualization and affirmation, subliminal programming, neurolinguistic programming and "new forms of relaxation and self-talk processes." Concerning these new age techniques he states, "These all involve explanation, elaboration and different packaging of the fundamental principles of the first creation ... I think most of the material is fundamentally sound." (SH p. 134) Incredulously, he adds, "The majority of it appears to have originally come out of the study of the Bible by many individuals." This appears to legitimize these occult practices.

The new age practice of visualization is prominent in Covey's books and training materials. These meditation/self hypnosis techniques, according to Covey, involve getting the mind in a relaxed state through deep breathing and progressive muscle relaxation for the purpose of reprogramming or rescripting oneself, (SH p. 133) are forms of programming (p. 135) and are powerful in that "if you visualize the wrong thing you will produce the wrong thing." (p. 134)

In addition, he not only quotes new age leader Marilyn Ferguson (p. 60) but also refers to her New Age primer, *The Aquarian Conspiracy*, as a "landmark book" (SF p. 125) and in quoting Marianne Williamson he invokes the basic tenet of the New Age that all are God and God is all, or in all. "Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure... We were born to make manifest the glory of God that is within us. It is not just in some of us it's in everyone." (SF p. 348)

Covey has also referred to the laws of nature as "what Carl Jung called the unconscious, the collective unconscious, that pervades all humanity regardless of their upbringing, their religion, their cultural heritage, their scripting, whatever it is." (*Anthony Robbins' Personal Power II, Vol. 12, track 7*) Based upon this, Covey puts forth the idea that a group that attains "synergy"-the proper exchange of information and ideas-and comes to proper understanding, will, individually and separately, come to a collective agreement on their mission statement or principles. New Agers refer to a similar concept in their belief in the "100th Monkey Syndrome." (See end of article)

Conclusion

It appears SH is paradigm in flux. Though the author believes there is only one true map, he leads SH readers to believe, in typical New Age thinking, there are many roads to correct principles. Christians using his material are left to believe that their "biblical map" is correct though in truth, Mr. Covey actually believes them to be following the adversary (Satan). In fact, the author fails to warn of this or that he views the Bible as flawed and that one should actually turn to the higher "wisdom" literature of the LDS Church and its prophets. Strangely, when quoting these prophets (with a supposed grasp on the true map) he doesn't identify them as such. Perhaps this seeming detachment from Mormonism is to gain a non-LDS audience by blurring the distinctions between his LDS beliefs and those of non-LDS. Or, perhaps all of this is just a shifting paradigm.

Some will say this book should simply be read for the good it contains and let's not throw the baby out with the bath water. Unfortunately this approach does not respond to the problematic conflicts the author and his books have with biblical doctrine. As a faithful adherent to Mormonism the author's beliefs and teachings are diametrically opposed to those of the Christian. He is a member of an organization that not only presents itself as Christian but, intentionally blurs or covers up the distinctions between it and true, Biblical Christianity. As his programs and writings grow in popularity, they make Mormonism and New Age beliefs more acceptable and appealing.

These issues must be given serious consideration. After examining Covey's material, Bill Gordon, Interfaith Witness Evangelism Associate, of the Southern Baptist's North American Mission Board came to this conclusion, "Churches and religious organizations should seriously reconsider whether it is appropriate to use a personal growth program that is written by someone who believes these false doctrines." (*A Closer Look at Stephen Covey and His 7 Habits*, p. 4)

One cannot and should not be told what product to buy which seminar to attend which book to read, etc. Each person must take personal responsibility to make informed decisions, particularly as to where we place our finances and to where or, to what, we give our time and endorsement; particularly when considering that which on the surface seems good. (1 *Corinthians* 8:9-13) Proper consideration must be given to that which is being recommended and to the discernment level of the one to whom the recommendation is being made.

In the case of SH, a recommendation of it might be taken as an endorsement of any number of books, beliefs, and practices opposed to Biblical teaching and values. For example, SH contains a list of other books by the author including *The Divine Center*. Some will end up reading this book of Mormon Doctrine because they found SH helpful and wanted to read other books by the author. Still others, trusting the teachings and values of Covey, will want to acquire what he calls a "landmark book," *The Aquarian Conspiracy* or books by some of the other new age authors he quotes. A Christian businessman or pastor's endorsement of SH may actually end up being interpreted as an endorsement or affirmation of Covey's LDS beliefs and any number of new age beliefs and practices.

Like others, Christians seek that which will help them overcome problem areas. As we seek such or help others in their quest, we must be very careful, exercising discernment (1 *Thessalonians* 5:21) as to whom and what we endorse; remembering not all that offers a solution to life problems is of God. (2 *Corinthians* 11:13-14; *Matthew* 7:15; *Proverbs* 14:12) If it does not pass the test of Scripture it is of no profit and should be avoided.

Hundred Monkey Syndrome

The "Hundredth Monkey Theory" was developed in 1979 by researcher, Lyall Watson when he and other researchers discovered a particular feeding behavior within a group of rhesus monkeys in Japan. After supplying the group of monkeys with yams, one monkey discovered that washing the yam in a stream removed the dirt prior to eating. More of the monkeys were given yams and over a period of time all the monkeys who received the yams for the first time took it to the stream and washed it.

The researchers repeated the experiment on another island with the same results. Watson attributed this phenomenon to a supernatural force at work on the islands posturing that as more and more monkeys learned this behavior the entire group would develop a general consciousness of it. He set the threshold at the 100th monkey believing that once this monkey began washing potatoes the behavior would become part of the group consciousness and that this consciousness would even leap to islands where the behavior had not been introduced.

In short this theory asserts that knowledge gained by a single member of a group can be passed on to others through some sort of mental telepathy. New Agers appeal to this theory in their belief that if enough people believe a certain way a mass consciousness, a unity of thought, belief and action will be attained.