**Habit 2: Start With the End in Mind:**

Although Habit 2 applies to many different circumstances and levels of life, the most fundamental application of “begin with the end in mind” is to begin today with the image, picture, or paradigm of the end of your life as your frame of reference or the criterion by which everything else is examined. Each part of your life—today’s behavior, tomorrow’s behavior, next week’s behavior, next month’s behavior—can be examined in the context of the whole, of what really matters most to you. By keeping that end clearly in mind, you can make certain that whatever you do on any particular day does not violate the criteria you have defined as supremely important, and that each day of your life contributes in a meaningful way to the vision you have of your life as a whole.

To begin with the end in mind means to start with a clear understanding of your destination. It means to know where you’re going so that you better understand where you are now and so that the steps you take are always in the right direction. It’s incredibly easy to get caught up in an activity trap, in the busyness of life, to work harder and harder at climbing the ladder of success only to discover it’s leaning against the wrong wall. It is possible to be busy—very busy—without being very effective.

How different our lives are when we really know what is deeply important to us, and, keeping that picture in mind, we manage ourselves each day to be and to do what really matters most. If the ladder is not leaning against the right wall, every step we take just gets us to the wrong place faster. We may be very busy, we may be very efficient, but we will also be truly effective only when we begin with the end in mind.

The carpenter’s rule is “measure twice, cut once.” You have to make sure that the blueprint, the first creation, is really what you want, that you’ve thought everything through. Then you put it into bricks and mortar. Each day you go to the construction shed and pull out the blueprint to get marching orders for the day. You begin with the end in mind. For another example, look at a business. If you want to have a successful enterprise, you clearly define what you’re trying to accomplish. You carefully think through the product or service you want to provide in terms of your market target, then you organize all the elements—financial, research and development, operations, marketing, personnel, physical facilities, and so on—to meet that objective. The extent to which you begin with the end in mind often determines whether or not you are able to create a successful enterprise. Most business failures begin in the first creation, with problems such as undercapitalization, misunderstanding of the market, or lack of a business plan.

It’s a principle that all things are created twice, but not all first creations are by conscious design. In our personal lives, if we do not develop our own self-awareness and do not become responsible for first creations, we empower other people and circumstances outside our Circle of Influence to shape much of our lives by default. We reactively live the scripts handed to us by family, associates, other people’s agendas, the pressures of circumstance—scripts from our earlier years, from our training, our conditioning. These scripts come from people, not principles. And they rise out of our deep vulnerabilities, our deep dependency on others and our needs for acceptance and love, for belonging, for a sense of importance and worth, for a feeling that we matter.

Habit 2 is based on principles of personal leadership, which means that leadership is the first creation. Leadership is not management. Management is the second creation, which we’ll discuss in the chapter on Habit 3. But leadership has to come first. Management is a bottom line focus: How can I best accomplish certain things? Leadership deals with the top line: What are the things I want to accomplish? In the words of both Peter Drucker and Warren Bennis, “Management is doing things right; leadership is doing the right things.” Management is efficiency in climbing the ladder of success; leadership determines whether the ladder is leaning against the right wall. You can quickly grasp the important difference between the two if you envision a group of producers cutting their way through the jungle with machetes. They’re the producers, the problem solvers. They’re cutting through the undergrowth, clearing it out. The managers are behind them, sharpening their machetes, writing policy and procedure manuals, holding muscle development programs, bringing in improved technologies and setting up working schedules and compensation programs for machete wielders. The leader is the one who climbs the tallest tree, surveys the entire situation, and yells, “Wrong jungle!”

But how do the busy, efficient producers and managers often respond? “Shut up! We’re making progress.”

As individuals, groups, and businesses, we’re often so busy cutting through the undergrowth we don’t even realize we’re in the wrong jungle. And the rapidly changing environment in which we live makes effective leadership more critical than it has ever been—in every aspect of independent and interdependent life. We are more in need of a vision or destination and a compass (a set of principles or directions) and less in need of a road map. We often don’t know what the terrain ahead will be like or what we will need to go through it; much will depend on our judgment at the time. But an inner compass will always give us direction. Effectiveness—often even survival—does not depend solely on how much effort we expend, but on whether or not the effort we expend is in the right jungle. And the metamorphosis taking place in most every industry and profession demands leadership first and management second.

Because we already live with many scripts that have been handed to us, the process of writing our own script is actually more a process of “rescripting,” or paradigm shifting—of changing some of the basic paradigms that we already have. As we recognize the ineffective scripts, the incorrect or incomplete paradigms within us, we can proactively begin to rescript ourselves.

In developing our own self-awareness many of us discover ineffective scripts, deeply embedded habits that are totally unworthy of us, totally incongruent with the things we really value in life. Habit 2 says we don’t have to live with those scripts. We are response-able to use our imagination and creativity to write new ones that are more effective, more congruent with our deepest values and with the correct principles that give our values meaning.

The most effective way I know to begin with the end in mind is to develop a personal mission statement or philosophy or creed. It focuses on what you want to be (character) and to do (contributions and achievements) and on the values or principles upon which being and doing are based. Because each individual is unique, a personal mission statement will reflect that uniqueness, both in content and form.

Once you have that sense of mission, you have the essence of your own proactivity. You have the vision and the values which direct your life. You have the basic direction from which you set your long- and short-term goals. You have the power of a written constitution based on correct principles, against which every decision concerning the most effective use of your time, your talents, and your energies can be effectively measured.

One friend of mine who taught at a university became very distraught because of the weaknesses of a particular administrator with whom he had a negative relationship. He allowed himself to think about the man constantly until eventually it became an obsession. It so preoccupied him that it affected the quality of his relationships with his family, his church, and his working associates. He finally came to the conclusion that he had to leave the university and accept a teaching appointment somewhere else. “Wouldn’t you really prefer to teach at this university, if the man were not here?” I asked him. “Yes, I would,” he responded. “But as long as he is here, then my staying is too disruptive to everything in life. I have to go.” “Why have you made this administrator the center of your life?” I asked him. He was shocked by the question. He denied it. But I pointed out to him that he was allowing one individual and his weaknesses to distort his entire map of life, to undermine his faith and the quality of his relationships with his loved ones. He finally admitted that this individual had had such an impact on him, but he denied that he himself had made all these choices. He attributed the responsibility for the unhappy situation to the administrator. He, himself, he declared, was not responsible. As we talked, little by little, he came to realize that he was indeed responsible, but that because he did not handle this responsibility well, he was being irresponsible.

By centering our lives on correct principles, we create a solid foundation for development of the four life-support factors. Our security comes from knowing that, unlike other centers based on people or things which are subject to frequent and immediate change, correct principles do not change. We can depend on them. Principles don’t react to anything. They don’t get mad and treat us differently. They won’t divorce us or run away with our best friend. They aren’t out to get us. They can’t pave our way with shortcuts and quick fixes. They don’t depend on the behavior of others, the environment, or the current fad for their validity. Principles don’t die. They aren’t here one day and gone the next. They can’t be destroyed by fire, earthquake or theft. Principles are deep, fundamental truths, classic truths, generic common denominators. They are tightly interwoven threads running with exactness, consistency, beauty, and strength through the fabric of life. Even in the midst of people or circumstances that seem to ignore the principles, we can be secure in the knowledge that principles are bigger than people or circumstances, and that thousands of years of history have seen them triumph, time and time again. Even more important, we can be secure in the knowledge that we can validate them in our own lives, by our own experience.

The wisdom and guidance that accompany principle-centered living come from correct maps, from the way things really are, have been, and will be. Correct maps enable us to clearly see where we want to go and how to get there. We can make our decisions using the correct data that will make their implementation possible and meaningful. The personal power that comes from principle-centered living is the power of a self-aware, knowledgeable, proactive individual, unrestricted by the attitudes, behaviors, and actions of others or by many of the circumstances and environmental influences that limit other people.

By centering our lives on timeless, unchanging principles, we create a fundamental paradigm of effective living. It is the center that puts all other centers in perspective.

As proactive people, we can begin to give expression to what we want to be and to do in our lives. We can write a personal mission statement, a personal constitution. A mission statement is not something you write overnight. It takes deep introspection, careful analysis, thoughtful expression, and often many rewrites to produce it in final form. It may take you several weeks or even months before you feel really comfortable with it, before you feel it is a complete and concise expression of your innermost values and directions. Even then, you will want to review it regularly and make minor changes as the years bring additional insights or changing circumstances. But fundamentally, your mission statement becomes your constitution, the solid expression of your vision and values. It becomes the criterion by which you measure everything else in your life.