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Management

Emotional Intelligence for Project Managers

The People Skills You Need to Achieve Outstanding Results

THE SUMMARY IN BRIEF

Without good people-management skills, even the most carefully planned project can fall apart in a flash. And managing people effectively means more than just keeping them in line: It means using finely tuned interpersonal skills and astutely reading emotional cues to get the job done right and on time.

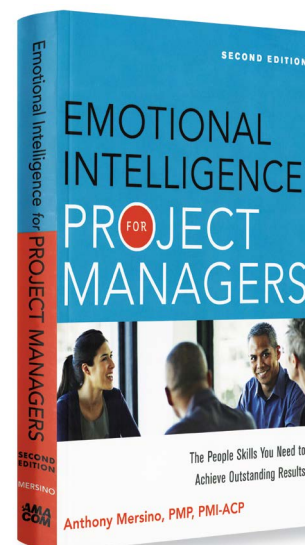
According to the latest research, an astounding 70 to 80 percent of management success rests on this kind of “emotional intelligence” (EQ). Even if you already recognize the important role of EQ in the workplace, *Emotional Intelligence for Project Managers* by author Anthony Mersino will help you take your understanding to the next level.

This indispensable guide provides tips on using EQ to lead and coach Agile Teams and explores the concept of Servant Leadership, which enhances productivity by promoting emotional connection with your staff. Also, there are sections on self-awareness, self-management and self-care because before you can build and lead a winning team, you need to understand and nurture yourself.

The keen insights and practical tools you’ll find here will help you transform your results from “good enough” to “beyond expectations” — all by improving your ability to read between the emotional lines. Improve your EQ, and you’ll soon be getting the best work out of everyone involved — including yourself.

IN THIS SUMMARY, YOU WILL LEARN

- How to establish the kind of high-energy approach that attracts top performers.
- How to encourage flexibility and collaboration among team members.
- How to deal productively with change, blame, stress and criticism.
- How to leverage emotional information to make better decisions.



by Anthony Mersino,
PMP, PMI-ACP

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THE COMPLETE SUMMARY: EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE FOR PROJECT MANAGERS

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PART 1: AN INTRODUCTION TO EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

My Growth in Emotional Intelligence

“Do you have any idea how dangerous it is not to be in touch with your feelings?” This question was posed to me by Rich, my career coach and mentor. Rich’s question resonated with me, but I wasn’t sure why. The truth was that I wasn’t aware of my feelings or emotions. I knew I needed to make some changes. Until then, my relationships with my project teams and other stakeholders were weak or nonexistent. That was largely the result of my project management style as a taskmaster. I was all business. Unfortunately, I placed a higher value on tasks, productivity and outcomes than on relationships. I lacked empathy. I had a way of driving the people on my project teams that was hostile and irresponsible.

My big shift came when I began to recognize the value of emotions and relationships in the workplace. I became aware of feelings and learned to trust them as a source of information. I learned how critical relationships and support were to achieving success on large projects. My relationships began to grow along with my ability to lead others.

What Is Emotional Intelligence?

The term *emotional intelligence* was actually coined by two psychologists, Peter Salovey and John D. Mayer, in 1990. They gave it the following definition: “the ability to monitor one’s own and others’ feelings and emotions, to

discriminate among them, and to use this information to guide one’s thinking and action.”

As a project manager (PM), I hold a pragmatic view of emotional intelligence, thinking of it as “knowing and managing our own emotions and those of others for improved performance.” I am interested in the application of emotional intelligence to life in general as well as specifically to the field of project management. In a project setting, the understanding and use of emotions helps us to have more enjoyable, predictable and successful projects. ●

A Brief Primer on Emotional Intelligence

Emotional intelligence is a popular though often misunderstood term. It would be hard to have missed the buzz about it since Daniel Goleman’s 1995 book *Emotional Intelligence* became a national bestseller. What made Goleman’s book so popular were two claims: (1) that emotional intelligence may be more important than intelligence quotient (IQ) and (2) that you can improve your emotional intelligence. Those claims are what made headlines and got emotional intelligence noticed. And while I believe those claims are true, it is not as simple as that to be successful with emotional intelligence.

Can we objectively measure emotional intelligence? If objective and accurate emotional intelligence tests were available, they would be at least as valuable as IQ testing — perhaps even more valuable. Unfortunately, this has led to a proliferation of various emotional intelligence instruments. It has also fostered a great deal of criticism among the various authors of emotional intelligence instruments.



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The good news is that some level of agreement has been reached about the framework to be used for applying emotional intelligence.

Let's take a brief look at this framework and the five domains.

- **Self-Awareness.** The first domain of the framework is self-awareness, which means understanding ourselves and our emotions. It involves the competencies of emotional awareness, accurate self-assessment and self-confidence. Self-awareness is the first building block of emotional intelligence.
- **Self-Management.** Building on the emotional understanding we gain with self-awareness, we use self-management to manage and guide our emotional state. Self-management is the ability to control our emotions so they don't control us. In fact, the domain of self-management includes just one competency — self-control.
- **Social Awareness.** Social awareness occurs when we expand our awareness to include the emotions of those around us. The domain of social awareness includes empathy, organizational awareness, seeing others clearly and emotional boundaries.
- **Relationship Management.** Relationship management means using the awareness of our own emotions and those of others to build strong relationships. Those strong relationships will serve us on our projects. After all, projects are nearly always team efforts. The domain of relationship management includes the competencies of stakeholder relationships, developing others and truth telling.
- **Team Leadership.** Team leadership is focused on the emotional skills needed to effectively lead project teams. This includes communications, conflict management and inspirational leadership.

Project managers (PMs) need to be great communicators. The larger the team, the more important communications become. The communications competency includes the ability to understand and manage the emotional tone of the project team through communications as well as the ability to be congruent between actions, one-on-one communications and communications in groups. ●

PART 2: PROJECT MANAGEMENT BEGINS WITH SELF-MANAGEMENT

Self-Awareness

Self-awareness, which is the first building block of emotional intelligence, is our ability to recognize our own

emotions and their effects on us and others.

Self-awareness is about the here and now. With self-awareness, we strive to get in touch with exactly what we are feeling right now. It is about knowing ourselves in this moment.

Self-awareness is not about what happened yesterday or what will happen tomorrow. Yesterday's events are only relevant if they affect how we are feeling right now. Otherwise, leave the past in the past. The key to self-awareness is to focus on what we are feeling now.

Emotional Self-Awareness

Self-awareness is the ability to understand our own emotions. It is about being conscious or mindful of our own emotional state. Self-awareness may be challenging for us for a number of reasons. First, our emotions can be as volatile as the weather. Feelings mix, morph and evolve, often in a short span of time.

Second, we may actually experience a mix of emotions at any time. We can be excited, happy, scared and angry all at once.

A third reason that self-awareness may be difficult is due to childhood wounds that inhibit our ability to access our feelings or simply to poor modeling of emotions by our parents.

Learning about emotional intelligence often includes unlearning what we were taught and breaking unhealthy bad habits.

It's rare that you can work on a project without experiencing at least one emotion, and this emotional awareness directly affects how successful we are in our work. We actually become stronger when we recognize the underlying feelings we're experiencing. Self-awareness is about developing this capacity. It is similar to building a physical muscle in our bodies.

Self-Confidence

Like accurate self-assessment, all PMs need self-confidence. No one wants to follow a leader who lacks self-confidence.

Individuals who lack self-confidence don't give themselves the freedom to laugh at themselves. It is as if they are on the defensive all the time, trying to make sure no one sees through their façade.

Ask yourself the following questions:

1. Are you aware of your weaknesses or the areas where others might get a chuckle about you?
2. Are you willing to let others have a laugh at you about those areas? Would you even make a joke out of it and let others laugh at you?

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3. Do you ever feel as if you wouldn't dare let others know about mistakes you've made?

If you are too serious about yourself or feel threatened by the idea that others might see your weaknesses or flaws, consider loosening up a bit. ●

Self-Management

Self-management happens when we use our awareness of our feelings to manage ourselves. Building on the base of self-awareness, we use that information to control and manage our emotions. Self-management is the ability to control our emotions so that they don't control us.

Individuals who don't manage their emotions in the business world are called rage-aholics and drama queens. They cause others to sigh, roll their eyes, even leave the room in fright, and respond themselves with anger. If you cannot manage yourself, you cannot manage others.

Awareness can be a big help when it comes to managing negative emotions. When we are feeling a negative emotion, we can often disarm or control the impact of that feeling just by being aware of what it is and why we are feeling it.

Self-Control

Self-control is the ability to remain composed in spite of our emotional state. For most PMs, managing the negative feelings is going to be the biggest priority.

Here are some of the ways to improve self-control and emotional resiliency and reduce the likelihood and severity of emotional breakdowns.

1. Know Thyself. The key to self-control is self-awareness. Make it a point to understand your specific emotional triggers, your patterns of distorted thinking, and things that reduce or build up your emotional resiliency. Try to avoid putting yourself in situations where you aren't able to choose a graceful response.

2. Use HALT. HALT stands for Hungry, Angry, Lonely and Tired. These four conditions are warning signs that we might be vulnerable to emotional breakdowns. The key thing that the HALT acronym tells me is whether or not I am putting myself at risk.

3. Evaluate Your Physical Environment. If you are a work-at-home professional, try staying connected with Instant Messaging, or go to work in a public space like a Starbucks rather than staying at home in isolation.

4. Take Care of Yourself and Stay Healthy. If you don't take care of yourself, it will be hard for you to care for others.

5. Sharpen the Saw. Stephen Covey talks about the importance of sharpening the saw in *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*. In essence, he is talking about self-renewal. This means taking your vacations as well as investing in training and development.

6. Avoid Long Work Weeks. If you are working more than 45, 50 or 60 hours every week, you are likely setting yourself up for fatigue and illness.

7. Get Support. Reach out to others and engage them on an emotional level. Get the help you need to stay on top of your game.

8. Reduce Your Stress Level. There are a multitude of stress-reduction methods, from easy things such as exercise and self-care all the way through more radical approaches such as getting a new job or leaving an abusive relationship.

9. Talk It Out With Someone. If you don't have someone in your professional life whom you can bounce ideas off, find someone.

10. Give Yourself a Time Out. If you find yourself heading toward a breakdown, give yourself a time out. Leave the building, go to lunch early, quit for the day, or just head out to the nearest coffee shop for a snack. ●

PART 3: BUILDING PROJECT STAKEHOLDER RELATIONSHIPS

Social Awareness

Social awareness is the ability to understand the emotions of others. It includes the competencies of empathy, organizational awareness, seeing others clearly and emotional boundaries.

Simply put, social awareness is the ability to accurately read situations and people and to understand and empathize with the emotions of others.

Empathy

Empathy is one of the most important parts of social awareness and, perhaps, one of the most critical people skills for PMs and other leaders. Empathy is the ability to understand and relate to the emotions of others. It helps us walk in the shoes of another person or to see things from another's point of view.

The importance of empathy was explained perceptively in Stephen Covey's book *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*. Covey's fifth habit was empathy: Seek first to understand, then to be understood.

Embedded in that phrase is the simple wisdom of orienting first to the other person. A great deal of con-

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flict that we experience on projects could be reduced or eliminated if we simply tried to understand the other person's point of view before we tried to convince them of our own message. We need to listen with the intention of understanding what others are trying to say.

One of the key applications of empathy is empathetic listening, listening without judgment. When we listen empathetically we 1) focus on the words and behaviors of another without judgment and 2) periodically summarize what they think, feel and need in the moment. PMs who master empathetic listening benefit by

- Making the speaker feel valued and important.
- Improving the depth of the communication.
- Understanding the underlying emotions, which adds richness to the conversation.
- Building trust and the relationship with the other.

Seeing Others Clearly

For those of us who want to improve our abilities to see others clearly, here are some steps we can take:

1. Recognize Our Own Biases. We can start by recognizing that we all have biases and prejudices.

2. Practice Studying Others. We can expand our understanding of others by viewing life as a game of exploration.

3. Practice Looking for the Best in Others. Make it a regular practice to evaluate your team and identify the strengths and weaknesses of each team member.

Organizational Awareness

The third competency of social awareness is organizational awareness. This awareness includes not just the project but also the company, customers and vendors related to the project.

The two main aspects of organizational awareness that Daniel Goleman and co-author Richard Boyatzis discuss are identifying key power relationships and understanding the values and culture of the organization.

Emotional Boundaries

The next facet of social awareness for PMs is the competency of emotional boundaries. An emotional boundary is where one person's emotions leave off and another's begin.

Empathy does not mean we should take on the emotions of others. As PMs, we need to recognize that we are separate and distinct from others. We need to be responsible for our own emotions and let others be responsible or theirs.

Here are some ways that we can respect our own emotional boundaries as well as those of others.

• **Set Limits.** It is often helpful to set limits in advance so that you can establish a clear boundary with others when you start. The point is to limit their ability to impact you. This can be as simple as establishing a length of time that you will be together, whether on the phone or in person; establishing limits on the type of behavior you will tolerate, as for example, you won't tolerate others yelling at you, or you won't sit by while someone criticizes your team.

• **Respond Appropriately.** How we respond to the emotions of others is a key to our own emotional sanity. While we want to understand the feelings of others, we need to be careful not to become "hooked in" to the emotions they are experiencing.

• **Take Responsibility.** Our response should include taking responsibility for our feelings. This means acknowledging that they are my feelings alone and that I have a choice about them.

• **Let Them Be.** The flip-side of our responsibility is letting others be responsible for their feelings. We cannot control others. Often we need to simply let them react to our words or actions. If they are going to be angry or sad, so be it. ●

Relationship Management

Relationship management is about using our emotional understanding of others to create relationships with them. The relationship management domain builds on the first three emotional intelligence domains. In other words, our success in relationship management is a function of our success in self-awareness, self-management and social awareness.

The PM Framework for emotional intelligence includes the following three competencies for the domain of relationship management: stakeholder relationships, developing others and truth telling.

Stakeholder Relationships

The goal of the stakeholder relationships competency is to strategically establish meaningful one-on-one relationships that are going to do the following:

- Increase our likelihood of success on the project.
- Provide cushioning to weather the inevitable storms that occur on every project.
- Provide an environment that is personally satisfying.

Stakeholder relationship management is the process of systematically developing stakeholder relationships that

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help us with the project. We can break it down into the following four steps:

1. Identify our project stakeholders.
2. Collect and analyze information about the stakeholders.
3. Develop relationship strategies.
4. Manage the ongoing relationships with the stakeholders.

Developing Others

The second competency in the relationship management domain is developing others. For PMs, developing others means to invest in and grow the project team. Most PMs would agree that developing their staff is an important component of the job.

As PMs, we need to recognize that developing others means making an investment in them. As a result of this investment, we create goodwill and deepen our relationship with our team members.

Telling the Truth

The third relationship management competency is telling the truth. Being honest and forthcoming with the people we interact with on our projects sounds quite simple, but it is rarely a simple thing to do.

Fortunately, there is help for those of us who have a hard time telling the truth with diplomacy. Here are some tools and techniques to provide a framework for telling the truth in the project environment.

- **Providing Your Reaction.** What others do and say affects all of us. It is entirely appropriate to provide your reaction, especially if you are asked.

- **Saying No.** Many of us struggle with saying no. When we are asked to do something, most of us like to oblige by saying yes. For some of us, saying no is a muscle we simply have not practiced using. As a PM, saying yes too much can damage our careers. We need to know when to say no. If we don't protect ourselves and our team by saying no, we will alienate our team and perhaps even cause them to leave the project.

- **Using "I Like/I Dislike" Statements.** A very helpful technique for relationship building is to state what you like or dislike. You might say, "I like when you get your deliverables done on time" as a way to encourage your team members. A higher-risk version is to say, "I didn't like when you made that disparaging comment about Bob." That type of communication is clear and to the point. ●

PART 4: USING EQ TO PROJECT TEAMS

Project Team Leadership

Project team leadership is the overarching aspect of the emotional intelligence framework for PMs. It is about getting the right people on your team, successfully communicating with and motivating them, and then clearing conflicts and other roadblocks so that they perform and achieve the project objectives. This domain includes the project management competencies of communications, conflict management and inspirational leadership.

Communications

Undoubtedly, PMs need to be great communicators. The reality is that for most PMs, a big part of the job is communications. That may take the form of walking around and talking with team members or stakeholders. It may also mean sitting in lots of meetings. That is communications. Communications can also include talking on the telephone, writing emails and instant messages, preparing for meetings, creating and delivering briefings, and generating status reports.

No matter what form they take, communications contain and evoke emotions. Well-planned communications, therefore, help the PM set the emotional tone for the team. Poorly executed communications can trigger negative emotions in the team.

Communicating with emotional intelligence involves applying the domains of self-awareness, self-management, social awareness and relationship management. PMs who are competent in each of those domains will do a better job of communicating with emotional intelligence. If you want to be intentional about your project communications, consider the following steps:

- Determine your objective.
- Understand your own emotions.
- Choose an appropriate time, place and mode.
- Approach others with empathy.
- Listen and respond to the emotions of others and not only to the content of what they say.
- Share your own emotions when appropriate, being as open and honest as possible.
- Check for understanding and reactions.

Conflict Management

Project conflict can be disruptive. If not properly channeled, conflict can stifle communication, kill creativity and squash productivity. Project teams that are not able to manage conflict may ultimately fail to reach their objec-

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tives. The PM is the one who will make the difference between leveraging conflict and having conflict wreak havoc on the team.

Conflicts involve both facts and feelings. It is important to probe to find out what the parties in a conflict are feeling. When we understand the underlying wants and needs of the affected parties, we better understand their motivation. Then we can work together to address the issue or conflict that is caused by the underlying want and need.

Inspirational Leadership

The third and final competency of team leadership is inspirational leadership. This is the ability to inspire others by casting a vision for the individual and the team. PMs who are inspirational leaders make work attractive and interesting to the team, create high team morale, and attract and retain good resources.

Vision casting is the process of stating a future, positive picture of the goals or objectives for the team, assisting the team to understand why they are important, and helping the team to connect with those goals and objectives. Vision casting for projects is the responsibility of the PM.

One way to cast a vision is through the use of the mission, vision and values statement for the project or team. The mission is a short statement about the overall objective for the team or what is going to be accomplished. The vision is a statement on how that mission will be accomplished. And the team values are the framework for pursuing the mission. ●

Creating a Positive Team Environment

As PMs, we want to create the best possible team environment to attract and retain great team members and help them to be productive. If we want to get the best from our teams, we need to create an environment that will support our team members and encourage them to perform at their best. The PM is responsible for creating that team environment and setting the stage so that team members can do their best work.

Creating a Positive Team Environment

Here are seven techniques for creating a positive team environment:

1. Assess How Team Members View the Team Environment. I have found it helpful to poll my team to see how they feel about the environment. Most members will be flattered if you ask how they think you are doing in this area. Consider a mini-assessment that will evaluate

how you are doing in terms of creating safety, establishing and communicating values, and resolving conflict.

2. Put It in Writing. PMs may choose to document their expectations for their team members to make sure those expectations are clear. Consider working with the team members to create a set of values, rules or expectations for team behaviors.

3. Establish Clear Accountability and Hold People to It. Once you have established responsibility and accountability for deliverables, you need to hold others to it. Rate yourself on how you are doing in this area. If you are not doing as well as you would like, think about what you need to do to make it better.

4. Hold Others to Your Highest Vision for Them. Dedicate a chunk of quality quiet time to think about each person on the team and his or her true potential. Try to see people at their very best. Envision what their future could look like and how you see them succeeding.

5. Catch People Doing Something Right. Develop the habit of catching people doing something right, and make it part of your leadership style. Make it a point to track your efforts for each individual. Give more to those people who are junior or new to the team to help them integrate.

6. 1001 Ways to Recognize People. Some time ago I stumbled across a book entitled *The 1001 Rewards & Recognition Fieldbook*. The title helped me to appreciate that the ways to recognize and reward the individuals on our teams are nearly unlimited.

7. Fix Your Broken Windows. Take a moment to conduct an honest assessment to see if there are any rules or standards that people don't adhere to in your environment. Develop an inventory of the rules and standards, and if there are lapses, develop action plans to address any regulations that are not being followed. ●

Leveraging Emotional Intelligence on Large and Complex Projects

In the large project environment more than any other place, the PM has to be flexible in approach and have the ability to vary leadership style. In *Primal Leadership*, Goleman and his co-authors described six inspirational leadership styles.

Applying Different Leadership Styles

Four of those styles are considered to be resonant; that is, they cause a positive effect on the team environment.

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- **Visionary Leadership.** Visionary leaders tell people where they are going; they provide the vision and the big picture. On a project, visionaries describe the end goals but leave individuals plenty of latitude on how to achieve them.

- **Coaching Style.** Coaching style focuses on personal development rather than on the accomplishments of tasks. The project becomes the vehicle that we can use to help people stretch and develop. The key outcome for the coaching style of leaders is the growth of the team members.

- **Affiliative Style.** Affiliative leaders are great relationship builders. They tend to focus less on tasks and goals and more on building relationships with their team members. Affiliative leaders create an environment of harmony and friendly interactions. They work to nurture personal relationships, using empathy and conflict management.

- **Democratic Style.** The democratic style is similar in some ways to the affiliative style. Democratic leaders tend to take input from many sources. This input leverages the experience of the team, provides for better decisions and gets buy-in from the entire team.

- **Pacesetter Style.** The pacesetter leader expects excellence and models that to the team. They have high expectations for performance and for continuous improvement. Pacesetter leaders tend to put pressure on everyone on the team to perform at their very best.

- **Commanding Style.** The commanding style is one in which leaders require everyone to do it their way. PMs who use the commanding style don't want questions; they want compliance. They are reluctant to share power and authority, and they rarely take the time to explain themselves fully.

The commanding style should be used sparingly. It works best during emergencies or crisis situations, such as during a project turnaround when there is no time to explain the rationale behind every decision. Otherwise, the commanding style takes a toll on the team and should be avoided. ●

Success with Agile Projects

The last five to 10 years have seen a tremendous growth in Agile projects. Whether Scrum, Lean, XP or some other methodology, Agile methods are quickly becoming mainstream for software development projects, and inroads are being made into other types of projects.

PMs usually have different titles and roles when working in the Agile environment. Scrum is the most common

Agile method used today; it is a project management framework for Agile teams. The Scrum Master is the facilitator for the Scrum Team and is the rough equivalent to the PM.

Anyone who has used Agile methods, though, will attest to the fact that leading Agile teams is not the same as leading traditional teams. Agile teams are expected to be self-organizing. This doesn't mean there are no leaders, but it requires a style of leadership that is less prescriptive and more supportive. It is often called Servant Leadership, and it requires a lot of emotional intelligence.

Servant Leadership

Servant leadership is about making the needs of others a priority and then serving them. In the case of Agile, it means putting the needs of the Agile team first. The key ways that Agile leaders do this is through removing impediments and supporting the team to work better together. When leaders make the resolution of impediments a top priority, they help the team be productive, and more importantly, they send the signal to the team that the leader is there to serve and contribute.

Be a servant leader. Agile team leaders, Program Managers and Functional Managers all need to support the Agile team. They frequently need to serve as a buffer between the Agile team and the rest of the organization. Tune in to the organizational norms that run counter to Agile and run interference for the team. Help streamline mandatory documentation or other PMO requirements so that the Agile team can be empowered and self-organizing.

We can always improve in the area of people skills. And the great news is no matter what our current level of EQ is, we all have the ability to improve our level of emotional intelligence. ●

RECOMMENDED READING LIST

If you liked *Emotional Intelligence for Project Managers* you'll also like:

1. ***Emotional Intelligence: Why It Can Matter More Than IQ* by Daniel Goleman.** Goleman explains five crucial skills of emotional intelligence, and shows how they determine our success in relationships, work and even our physical well-being.
2. ***The EQ Difference* by Adele B. Lynn.** This useful book helps professionals at all levels understand how emotions can have a profound effect on performance, values and relationships in the workplace.
3. ***The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People* by Stephen R. Covey.** Covey presents a holistic, integrated, principle-centered approach for solving personal and professional problems.