# Excerpt from The 8th Habit by Stephen R. Covey

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"I'm stuck, in a rut."

"I have no life. I'm burned out — exhausted."

"No one really values or appreciates me."

"I can't change things."

These are the voices of people at work and at home — voices of literally millions of parents, laborers, service providers, managers, professionals, and executives all over the world who are fighting to make it in the new reality. The pain is personal, and it's deep.

In no way is this pain more clearly or practically manifest in organizations than in their inability to focus on and execute their highest priorities. Harris Interactive recently polled 23,000 U.S. residents employed full-time within key industries and in key functional areas. Consider a few of their most stunning findings:
• Only 37% said they have a clear understanding of what their organization is trying to achieve and why.
• Only one in five was enthusiastic about their team's and organization's goals.
• Only one in five said they have a clear "line of sight" between their tasks and their team's and organization's goals.
• Only 15% felt that their organization fully enables them to execute key goals.
• Only 20% fully trusted the organization they work for.
If, say, a soccer team had these same scores, only four of the 11 players on the field would know which goal is theirs. Only two of the 11 would care. Only two of the 11 would know what position they play and know exactly what they are supposed to do. And all but two players would, in some way, be competing against their own team members rather than the opponent.

The data is sobering. It matches my own experience with people in organizations of every kind all around the world. Despite all our gains in technology, product innovation, and world markets, most people are not thriving in the organizations they work for. They are neither fulfilled nor excited. They are frustrated. They are not clear about where the organization is headed or what its highest priorities are. They are bogged down and distracted. Most of all, they don't feel they can change much.

We live in a Knowledge Worker Age but operate our organizations in a controlling Industrial Age model that absolutely suppresses the release of human potential. Voice is essentially irrelevant. This is an astounding finding. The mindset of the Industrial Age that still dominates today's workplace will simply not work in the Knowledge Worker Age and new economy.

The main assets and primary drivers of economic prosperity in the Industrial Age were machines and capital — things. People were necessary but replaceable. You could control and churn through manual workers with little consequence — supply

exceeded demand. You just got more able bodies that would comply with strict procedures. People were like things — you could be efficient with them. When all you want is a person's body and you don't really want their mind, heart, or spirit (all inhibitors to the free-flowing processes of the machine age), you have reduced a person to a thing.

So many of our modern management practices come from the Industrial Age. It gave us the belief that you have to control and manage people. It gave us our view of accounting, which makes people an expense and machines assets. Think about it. People are put on the P&L statement as an expense; equipment is put on the balance sheet as an investment. It gave us our motivational philosophy — the Great Jackass technique that motivates with a carrot in front (reward) and drives with a stick from behind (fear and punishment).

The problem is, managers today are still applying the Industrial Age control model to knowledge workers. Because many in positions of authority do not see the true worth and potential of their people and do not possess a complete, accurate understanding of human nature, they manage people as they do things. This lack of understanding prevents them from tapping into the highest motivations, talents, and genius of people.

What happens when you treat people like things today? It insults and alienates them, depersonalizes work, and creates low-trust, unionized, litigious cultures. People stop believing that leadership can become a choice. Most people think of leadership as a position and therefore don't see themselves as leaders. They think that only those in positions of authority should decide what must be done. They have consented, perhaps unconsciously, to being controlled like a thing. Even if they perceive a need, they don't take the initiative to act. They wait to be told what to do by the person with the formal title, and then they respond as directed. Consequently, they blame the formal leader when things go wrong and give him or her the credit when things go well. And they are thanked for their "cooperation and support."

This widespread reluctance to take initiative, to act independently, only fuels formal leaders' imperative to direct or manage their subordinates. This, they believe, is what they must do in order to get followers to act. And this cycle quickly escalates into co-dependency. Each party's weakness reinforces and ultimately justifies the other's behavior. The more a manager controls, the more he or she evokes behaviors that necessitate greater control or managing. The co-dependent culture that develops is eventually institutionalized to the point that no one takes responsibility. Over time, both leaders and followers confirm their roles in an unconscious pact. They disempower themselves by believing that others must change before their own circumstances can improve. The same cycle reappears in families between parents and children.

At the core, there is one simple, overarching reason why so many people remain unsatisfied in their work and why most organizations fail to draw out the greatest talent, ingenuity, and creativity of their people and never become truly great, enduring organizations. It stems from an incomplete paradigm of who we are — our fundamental view of human nature.

The fundamental reality is, human beings are not things needing to be motivated and controlled; they are four-dimensional — body, mind, heart, and spirit. The call and need of a new era is for greatness. It's for fulfillment, passionate execution, and

significant contribution. Tapping into the higher reaches of human genius and motivation — what we could call voice — requires a new mindset, a new skill-set, a new tool-set … a new habit.

The 8th Habit is not about adding one more habit to the 7 — one that somehow got forgotten. It's about seeing and harnessing the power of a third dimension to the 7 Habits that meets the central challenge of the new Knowledge Worker Age. This 8th Habit is to Find Your Voice and Inspire Others to Find Theirs.

I've worked with organizations around the world for over 40 years and have been a student of the findings of the great minds who have studied organizations. Most of the great cultural shifts — ones that have built great organizations that sustain long-term growth, prosperity, and contribution to the world — started with the choice of one person. Sometimes that one person was the formal leader — the CEO or president. Very often it started with someone else — a professional, a line manager, someone's assistant. Regardless of their position, these people first changed themselves from the inside out. Their character, competence, initiative, and positive energy — in short, their moral authority — inspired and lifted others. They possessed an anchored sense of identity, discovered their strengths and talents, and used them to meet needs and produce results. People noticed. They were given more responsibility. They magnified the new responsibility and again produced results. More and more people sat up and noticed. Top people wanted to learn of their ideas — how they accomplished so much. The culture was drawn to their vision and to them.

People like this just don't get sucked into or pulled down for long by all the negative, demoralizing, insulting forces in the organization. And, interestingly, their organizations are no better than most organizations. To some degree, they're all a mess. These people just realize that they can't wait for their boss or the organization to change. They become an island of excellence in a sea of mediocrity. And it's contagious.

Where does a person get such internal strength to swim against the current and to withstand negative cultural provocations, subordinate selfish interests, and develop and sustain such vision and determination?

They learn of their true nature and gifts. They use them to develop a vision of great things they want to accomplish. With wisdom they take initiative and cultivate great understanding of the needs and opportunities around them. They meet those needs that match their unique talents, that tap their higher motivations, and that make a difference. In short, they find and use their voice. They serve and inspire others. They apply principles that govern growth and prosperity in human beings and in organizations; principles that draw the highest and best from a "whole person" — body, mind, heart, and spirit. Equally significant, they choose to influence and inspire others to find their voice through these principles as well.

Once you've found your own voice, the choice to expand your influence, to increase your contribution, is the choice to inspire others to find their voice. It will be those organizations that reach a critical mass of people and teams expressing their full voice that will achieve next-level breakthrough in productivity, innovation, and leadership in the marketplace and society.

Simply put — at its most elemental and practical level — leadership is

communicating to people their worth and potential so clearly that they come to see it in themselves. Think about this definition. Isn't this the essence of the kind of leadership that influences and truly endures?

A few years ago I remember interviewing the chief executive of a company who had just received the prestigious Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award. I asked him, "What was your toughest challenge in achieving this level of quality in your organization?" With but a moment of thought, he smiled and said, "Giving up control."

When you truly establish the conditions for empowerment, control is not lost: It is simply transformed into self-control.

Self-control does not come when you simply abandon people in the name of "empowerment"; it comes when there is a commonly understood end in mind, with agreed-upon guidelines and supportive structures and systems, and when each person is set up as a whole person in a whole job. Training and coaching is provided to those who lack the competence required to be fully entrusted with greater freedom. A track record of consistent performance earns greater and greater trust and latitude in methods. People become accountable for results and have the freedom, within guidelines, to achieve those results in a way that taps into their unique talents.

I call this directed autonomy. The manager's role then shifts from controller to enabler — co-missioning with people, removing barriers, and becoming a source of help and support. That's quite a shift.