



Alexandra Meets Stephen Covey

It's a glorious October day and I am about to meet one of the best-known and highly regarded authors of today, Stephen R Covey. His huge best seller, *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People* has sold over 10 million copies in 28 languages and seventy countries making him the international authority on leadership. His other books including *Principle-Centered Leadership* and *First Things First* are two of the best-selling business books of the past decade. Among the many accolades he has received over the years, *Times* magazine recognized him as being one of the twenty-five most influential Americans.

Now his next literary offering is *The 8th Habit* released early in November. The theme of the new habit is to find your voice and help other find theirs. I couldn't agree more to such a powerful and happiness-educing practice!

Covey's new book comes at a profoundly different time in history than when *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People* was originally published. The challenges and complexity we face in our personal lives and relationships, in our families, in our professions, and in our organizations are of a different order of magnitude. We are struggling to feel engaged, fulfilled, and passionate across all areas of our lives. Tapping into the higher reaches of human genius and motivation to find what Stephen calls our voice - requires a new mindset, a new skill-set, a new tool-set...a new habit. Covey's *The 8th Habit* is the path to finding that voice and one's passion.

"I've not felt such passion, such conviction or excitement since my work on *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*," says Stephen. "I believe the reason the response to the new ideas in *The 8th Habit* has been so strong is that people feel a void in their lives. This same emptiness is felt in organizations across the world, most of which struggle to achieve their top priorities. People don't feel their unique talents are tapped or appreciated. Bottom line - there is a profound yearning in both people and organizations



to find their true "voice," to matter, to make a difference, to find greatness." What does Covey mean by "our voice"? Our voice is finding out who we are and what we are good at. If we know these two things we can excel in life and feel happy and fulfilled. Finding your voice is not just about your work life. It is as essential in your private life too. Imagine the difference to your relationships with your family and friends if you felt more at peace with yourself and your life. Again I agree with Stephen, and as a coach I too urge everyone to find out who they are and what they want to (not should) do with their lives and this is just as true at home as it is at work.

"People who have found their voice require no management," says Covey. I agree. Think about a time when you were 100% engaged in something you were doing. You did not need watching over because you were thoroughly enjoying what you were doing. It felt natural, it felt right and it felt good. Covey explained that finding our voice is the key to the 21st century and I am inclined to believe him. This type of paradigm is just what we need to work from to create the fulfillment in each of the many roles we play in life as women. So how do you find your voice? Stephen advises; "Ask yourself what do I love doing, what do I do well? What needs do I serve, what does my conscience tell me? If you can answer those four, you can find your voice." He then makes the following point; "Beware that you don't confuse your conscience with your ego. Most of us are driven by our egos. If you use this voice, whatever you do will show no results." His message is to 'know thyself'. Know yourself enough to decipher between your conscience, or true inner voice, versus your ego.

Family is Stephen's priority in life and so when you hear about his achievements and consider that he has nine children and forty-two grandchildren (with the 43rd on the way), you tend to wonder how on earth he manages. "It's all about choice." Stephen answers. "If you get up early and exercise and make a promise to yourself and fulfill it, then the next day you make a bigger promise and fulfill it and so on. Pretty soon you have achieved quite a bit!"



When asked how he balances such a full life Stephen quips; "Most people spend half their time doing things that are urgent but not important. The average father in the US spends no more than an hour a week with his kids who then spend on average four hours a day in front of the TV. I think this is one massive copout and one in which the fathers, and no doubt the children, will live to regret. No one on their deathbed ever wishes that they spent more time at office. I spend most of my time doing things that are important."

Stephen ends by saying; "The habits I talk about are all principle based, I didn't invent them and I can put them into any circumstance and situation. In a world with changes and unknowns we need these constants. Greatness comes from your moral authority and humility. Seek first to understand and then to be understood. Learn to listen more, be open and humble enough to learn what you know you need to and want to. Institutionalize these principles and take responsibility in your own circle of influence. Make a family mission statement and think through what makes life worth living for you. What is missing? Help others reach their potential greatness, not in secondary things like wealth, but with what they contribute in life. Life is short so live, love, learn and leave a legacy."

Meeting him was an absolute pleasure and I shall remember and embrace his message in its entirety. Thank you Stephen for such a memorable experience!