



EP 7 Habits Advisory Program

Handbook for Habit 4

**Adapted from The Leader in Me Activity Guide
and The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens*

Student Name:

Advisory Teacher:

This packet should be read by:

Habit Four: Think Win/Win

Competition is usually about getting ahead, winning, being the best. Competition works well sometimes, but is it always the best way? Think of school for instance, if you had to compete against your classmates for grades, would that be good? Imagine a system where no matter how well you do on an assignment, some people always have to “lose” or fail. For example, everyone in a math class completes an assignment. When the teacher grades the assignment, 10 students got all the problems correct, 3 students got one problem wrong, and 2 students only got 2 problems wrong. In a competitive system the students who got 1 or 2 problems wrong would be the losers, or in other words they would fail the assignment. Is that really fair?

Under this system you might find yourself not wanting to share your best ideas with others during study groups. If you did, they might steal your ideas and get credit for them instead of you! Eventually all these feelings would start eating you up inside and maybe even make you feel really small, as if you had a heart the size of a grape. The problem in this kind of system is that it encourages people to think Win-Lose. And Win-Lose thinking will always fill your heart with negative feelings. Luckily, there is a better way. It’s called Think Win-Win and it’s Habit #4.

Think Win-Win is an attitude toward life, a mental frame of mind that says I can win, and so can you. It’s not me or you, it’s both of us. Think Win-Win is the foundation for getting along well with other people. It begins with the belief that we are all equal, that no one is inferior or superior to anyone else, and no one really needs to be.

Now you might say, “Get real, Covey. That’s not how it is. It’s a cutthroat, competitive world out there. Everyone can’t always win.” I disagree. That’s not how life really is. Life really isn’t about competition, or getting ahead of others, or scoring in the 95th percentile. It may be that way in business, sports, and sometimes in school, but those are merely institutions that we’ve created. It’s certainly not that way in relationships. And relationships, are the stuff that life is made of. Think how silly it is to say, “Who’s winning in your relationship, you or your friend?”

So let’s explore this strange idea called Think Win-Win. From my experience, the best way to do it is to see what Win-Win is not. Win-Win is not Win-Lose, Lose-Win, or Lose-Lose. These are all common but poor attitudes toward life. Climb aboard, strap yourself in, and let’s take a look at each one.

Win-Lose: The Totem Pole

“Mom, there’s a big dance tonight and I need to take the car.”

“I’m sorry, Marie, but I need to get groceries tonight. Your friends will have to pick you up.”

“But, Mom! My friends always have to pick me up. It’s embarrassing.”

“Listen, you’ve been complaining about not having food in the house for a week. This is the only time I have to get groceries. I’m sorry”

“You’re not sorry. If you were sorry you’d let me take the car. You are so unfair. You could care less about me.”

“All right. All right. Go ahead. Take the car. But don’t come complaining to me when there’s nothing to eat tomorrow.”

Marie won and Mom lost. This is called Win-Lose. But has Marie really won? Maybe she has this time, but how does Mom feel? And what’s she going to do the next time she has a chance to get even with Marie? That’s why in the long run it never pays to think Win-Lose.

Win-Lose is an attitude toward life that says the pie of success is only so big, and if you get a big piece there is less for me. So I’m going to make sure I get my slice first and that I get a bigger piece than you. Win-Lose is competitive. I call it the totem pole syndrome. “I don’t care how good I am as long as I’m a notch higher than you on the totem pole.” Relationships, friendships, and loyalty are all secondary to winning the game, being the best, and having it your way.

Win-Lose is full of pride. In the words of C. S. Lewis, “Pride gets no pleasure out of having something, only out of having more of it than the next man... It is the comparison that makes you proud, the pleasure of being above the rest.”



Don’t feel too bad if you think Win-Lose at times, because we have been trained to do so from an early age, especially those of us who have been raised in the United States. In the end, though, Win-Lose will usually backfire. You may end up on the top of the totem pole, but you’ll be there alone and without friends. “The trouble with the rat race,” said actress Lily Tomlin, “is that even if you win, you’re still a rat.”

Lose-Win: The Doormat

One teen wrote:

“I, for one, am a big peacemaker. I would much rather take the blame for just about anything than get into an argument. I constantly find myself just saying that I’m dumb...”

Do you find yourself identifying with this statement? If so, you have fallen into the trap of Lose-Win. Lose-Win looks prettier on the surface, but it’s just as dangerous as Win-Lose. It’s the doormat syndrome. Lose-Win says, “Have your way with me. Wipe your feet on me. Everyone else does.”

Lose-Win is weak. It’s easy to be the nice guy. It’s easy to give in, all in the name of being a peacemaker. It’s easy to let your parents have their way with you rather than try to share your feelings with them.

With a Lose-Win attitude you’ll find yourself setting low expectations and compromising your standards again and again. Giving in to peer pressure is Lose-Win. Perhaps you don’t want to ditch school, but the group wants you to. So you give in. What happened? Well, you lost and they won. That’s called Lose-Win.

If you adopt Lose-Win as your basic attitude toward life, then people will wipe their dirty feet on you. And that's a real bummer. You'll also be hiding your true feelings deep inside. And that's not healthy.

There is a time to lose, of course. Lose-Win is just fine if the issue isn't that important to you. For example, if you and your sister can't agree on who gets which side of the closet you share, or if your mom doesn't like the way you hold your fork. Let others win the little issues, and it will be a deposit into their Relationship Bank Account (Just like your Personal Bank Account, but this is shared between you and another person). Just be sure to take a stand on the important things.



Lose-Lose: The Downward Spiral

Lose-Lose says, "If I'm going down, then you're going down with me, sucker." After all, misery enjoys company. War is a great example of Lose-Lose. Think about it. Whoever kills the most people wins the war. That doesn't sound like anyone ends up winning at all. Revenge is also Lose-Lose. By getting revenge, you may think you're winning, but you're really only hurting yourself.

Lose-Lose is usually what happens when two Win-Lose people get together. If you want to win at all costs, and the other person wants to win at all costs, you're both going to end up losing. Lose-Lose can also occur when someone becomes obsessed with another person in a negative way. This is especially likely to happen with those closest to us.

"I don't care what happens to me as long as my brother fails."
"If I can't have Jeff, I sure as heck am not going to let my friend Sarah have him."

Win-Win: The All-You-Can-Eat Buffett

Win-Win is a belief that everyone can win. It's both nice and tough all at once. I won't step on you, but I won't be your doormat either. You care about other people and you want them to succeed. But you also care about yourself, and you want to succeed as well. Win-Win is abundant. It is the belief that there's plenty of success to go around. It's not a matter of who gets these biggest piece of pie. There's more than enough food for everyone. It's an all-you-can-eat buffet.



Dawn Meeves shared how she discovered the power of thinking Win-Win:

As a high school sophomore, I played on the girls' basketball team. I was pretty good for my age and tall enough to be starter on the varsity team although I was just a sophomore. One of my classmates named Pam, a dear friend and a sophomore as well, was also moved up to be a starter on the varsity squad.

I had a sweet little shot I could hit quite regularly from ten feet out. I began making four or five of those shots a game and began getting recognized for it. It soon became apparent that Pam didn't like all the attention I was getting and decided, consciously or not, to keep the ball from me. It didn't matter how open I was for the shot, Pam stopped passing the ball to me.

One night, after playing a terrible game in which Pam kept the ball from me most of the game, I was as mad as I had ever been. I spent many hours talking with my dad, going over everything, and expressing my anger toward my friend-turned-enemy, Pam. After a long discussion, my dad told me that the best thing he could think of would be to give Pam the ball every time I got it. Every time. I thought it was the most stupid suggestion he had ever given me. He simply told me it would work and left me at the kitchen table to think about it. But I didn't. I knew it wouldn't work and put it aside as silly fatherly advice.

The next game came quickly, and I was determined to beat Pam at her own game. I planned and plotted and came out with a mission to ruin Pam's game. On my first possession of the ball, I heard my dad above the crowd. He had a booming voice, and though I shut out everything around me while playing basketball, I could always hear Dad's deep voice. At the moment I caught the ball, he yelled out, "Give her the ball!" I hesitated for one second and then did what I knew was right. Although I was open for a shot, I found Pam and passed her the ball. She was shocked for a moment, then turned and shot, sinking the ball for two points. As I ran down the court to play offense, I felt a feeling I had never felt before: true joy for the success of another human being. And, even more, I realized that it put us ahead in the game. It felt good to be winning. I continued to give her the ball every time I got it in the first half. Every time. In the second half, I did the same, only shooting if it was a designated play or if I was wide open for a shot.

We won the game, and in the games that followed, Pam began to pass me the ball as much as I passed it to her. Our teamwork was getting stronger and stronger, and so was our friendship. We won the majority of our games that year and became a legendary small town duo. The local newspaper even did an article about our ability to pass to one another and sense each other's presence. Overall, I scored more points than ever before.

You see, Win-Win always creates more. An endless buffet. And as Dawn discovered, wanting another person to win fills you full of good feelings. By passing the ball, Dawn didn't score fewer points, but eventually scored more. In fact, they both scored more points and won more games than if they had selfishly kept the ball from each other.



Avoid the Tumor Twins

There are two habits that, like tumors, can slowly eat you away from the inside. They are twins and their names are competing and comparing. It's virtually impossible to think Win-Win with them around.

Competing

Competition can be extremely healthy. It drives us to improve, to reach and stretch. Without it, we would never know how far we could push ourselves. In the business world, it makes our economy prosper. The glory of the Olympic Games is all about excellence and competition. But there is another side to competition that isn't so nice. In the movie *Star Wars*, Luke Skywalker learns about a positive energy shield called "the force," which gives life to all things. Later, Luke confronts the evil Darth Vader and learns about the "dark side" of the force. As Darth puts it, "You don't know the power of the dark side." So it is with competition. There is a sunny side and a dark side, and both are powerful. The difference is this: Competition is healthy when you compete against yourself, or when it challenges you to reach and stretch and become your best. Competition becomes dark when you tie your self-worth into winning or when you use it as a way to place yourself above another.

Comparing

Comparing is competition's twin, and it's just as cancerous. Comparing yourself to others is nothing but bad news. Why? Because we're all on different development timetables. Socially, emotionally, mentally, and physically. Since we all bake differently, we shouldn't keep opening the oven door to see how well our cake is rising compared to our neighbor's, or our own cake won't rise at all. Although some of us are like the poplar tree, which grows like a weed the moment it's planted, others are like the bamboo tree, which shows no growth for four years but then grows 90 feet in year five.

I once heard it described this way: Life is like a great obstacle course. Each person has their own course, separated from every other course by tall walls. Your course comes complete with customized obstacles designed specifically for your personal growth. So what good does it do to climb the wall to see how well your neighbor is doing or to check out his obstacles in comparison to your own?

Building your life based on how you stack up compared to others is never good footing. If I get my security from the fact that my grades are better than yours or my friends are more popular than yours, then what happens when someone comes along with better grades and more popular friends? Comparing ourselves makes us feel like a wave on the sea tossed to and fro by the wind. We go up and down, feeling inferior one moment and superior the next, confident one moment and intimidated the next. The only good comparison is comparing yourself against your own potential.