

STEPHEN Covey of *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People* fame was emphatic that to be highly effective in the public sphere, one must first be successful in private life.

He made this very clear when he said: "You can't invert that process any more than you can harvest a crop before you plant it."

This is in relation to the first three habits — being proactive, beginning with the end in mind and doing first things first.

In other words, it means sorting out what is personal to you as an individual so that you can be truly independent and dependable before attempting to claim public victory.

Since success in the public eye encompasses wider social complexities founded on effective interdependence, "private" reliability is vital.



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Doing first things first

Without it, the chances of failure are higher, let alone being effective.

Private victories generally come about from "winning" intense private battles, be it involving filial relationship, finances, health or other challenges at the workplace. Yet each battle is being overcome with discipline, determination as well as commitment, which have been cultivated through habits but not limited to those advocated by Covey, away from the public eye.

Indeed each habit becomes a plus factor when, or if, it is revealed in the public domain and can even continue to support

ensuing public victories.

This rule of thumb is simple but remains vital especially to those in public office or aspire to be in the public sphere.

Once you are a public personality, your life is an open book.

Take the case of celebrities whose private lives come under public scrutiny.

Social media users are reminded to think before posting anything because it can come back to haunt you. The skeleton in the cupboard surfaces more vividly in this day and age.

Take former US Secretary of State Colin Powell as an example.

He was not keen to be a presidential candidate because he did not want to be subjected to inordinate media and public scrutiny, particularly as the first African American to run for office.

Reportedly, he valued his privacy

more.

In fact, little is known about his family life despite his widely publicised work ethics and humble beginnings which are the credentials that propelled him into the highest office in the military.

This is a case of a person of high integrity and a public icon who still shied away from the public eye.

But not everyone is like Colin Powell.

Many are lured by the limelight and seduction of power, wealth and fame, sometimes at the risk of bringing to life the many skeletons in the cupboard.

In such cases, the so-called public victories can be found wanting because the private ones are in shambles.

Those in leadership positions are not dependable or trustworthy. More often than not, their word is

mere lip service, and their actions no more than opportunities for even more publicity to convince others of their self-worth.

They have no qualms about lying from time to time to make things look credible, without any sense of guilt or shame as long as the ends justify the means.

In politics, this is justified as "the art of possible", but everyone knows that it is a shameless form of deception that many have mastered well to survive.

Covey even implied that their private victories are won through lies and deception, even to loved ones.

To borrow another of Covey's expression, their "emotional bank account" is overdrawn making them vulnerable publicly.

If they are prepared to deceive even their loved ones, chances are they will also fool the *rakyat*.

But as the saying goes, we deserve the person we chose — or chosen on our behalf ^١ to lead us.