

# ROOT SHOCK INSTITUTE

## The Nine Habits of a Highly Effective Recovery

Mindy Thompson Fullilove, MD

Stephen Covey's Seven Habits of Highly Effective People helped us understand that 1) we have habits and 2) some are better than others. If we learned anything in this past week, perhaps it's that the habit of racism is one of the worst we Americans have. Happily, we have some great habits. Here are nine habits we should practice in order to have a successful recovery (and the highly effective people who told me about them).

1. Acknowledge everyone's suffering, including your own. After 9/11, we tended to focus on the "heroes and victims." That was good, but I noticed that lots of other people in the New York metropolitan area were deeply hurt by the injury to the city. I hope we can acknowledge that people all across the nation and all around the world have suffered along with those who endured those horrendous days and nights waiting for rescue. In acknowledging the universality of suffering, we come in touch with the Higher Power of our understanding which is what we must lean on through these hard times. I learned this lesson from NYC RECOVERS, an alliance of organizations that incorporated NYC's post 9/11 recovery into their on-going work.
2. Practice democracy-in-diaspora using radios, newspapers and the internet. Democracy is the foundation of our republic. Getting everyone involved is essential. People living thousands of miles apart can be linked by media, including radio, newspapers and the internet. It was my father, Ernest Thompson, who taught me that the people, united, will never be defeated.
3. Build ecological cities, beautiful, sustainable, human-sized. The Gulf can be protected from some future harms by re-thinking river management and other ecological issues. As part of the construction, let's take this opportunity to create the schools of future, small and substantially equipped. Let's use great urban design, and build for people. It is Michel Cantal-Dupart, a French urbanist, who showed me many cities in his country and helped me appreciate the joy of a good town square.
4. Ensure the right of every person to go home. The real estate speculators are already thinking what land they want, and they are ecstatic that the whole city will be blighted: it will be so easy to use eminent domain to take their pick of valuable spots. Let's protect home ownership, and promise immediately to rebuild the homes of everyone who lacked flood insurance. Let's build affordable housing so that it is as easy for the poor to return as for the rich. It was Mr. Charles Meadows, a victim of eminent domain in Roanoke, VA, who taught me about this.

5. Ensure that local companies and workers and workers rebuild the Gulf. Construction will be booming in New Orleans and elsewhere in the Gulf. This work should go to local companies and local people. They can be supported to ensure success. Apprenticeship and other programs have opened the building trades, once the exclusive province of white men, to people of all races. Rebecca Doggett, of the NJ Institute for Social Justice ([www.njisj.org](http://www.njisj.org)), runs such program and shared her excitement with me.
6. Give excellent medical care to all. After the duress of the hurricane and flood and the long wait for rescue, people will need all kinds of care. We should give every person the very best care we can. The Institute of Medicine, with its excellent reports on disparities in medical care, taught me this imperative.
7. Support families as they re-establish themselves. Family life has been profoundly disrupted by the upheaval of the past weeks. Families need our help to get started again. Family Home Evening is a wonderful tool that any family can use to rebuild its strength and manage difficult times. I learned this lesson from Dr. Jeff Chipman while he was a medical student at Columbia University.
8. Celebrate the Gulf's history and culture. We've all been thinking about jazz and gumbo for the past week. Let's take this seriously. I hope that Wynton Marsalis, Ellen DeGeneris, Emeril, Harry Connick, Jr., and everybody from the Gulf area will lead us in this.
9. Be generous with the paper clips. Because of our American love of justice, we hate oppression AND welfare cheats. This can lead us astray: we start to worry about looters when we should be rescuing grandmothers. The money for succor of the evacuees will be the smallest part of the billions and billions we will spend in the next year. Let's give freely to ensure that those most injured make a full recovery. It was my first research chief, Dr. Stephen Hulley, who taught this lesson in team building.

Practicing new habits is hard. We will tend to fall back into old and, in this case, harmful ways. Ask your family, your religious organization and your work group to tackle change with you. Pick one habit a month and make it a part of your collective repertoire. By doing this together, we will make a full and even joyful recovery from this awful moment in our national history.