



Business Book Review™

We Select and Review Only the
Best Business Books You Should Read.

Volume 24, Number 18 • Copyright ©2007 Business Book Review, LLC • All Rights Reserved

What Got You Here Won't Get You There

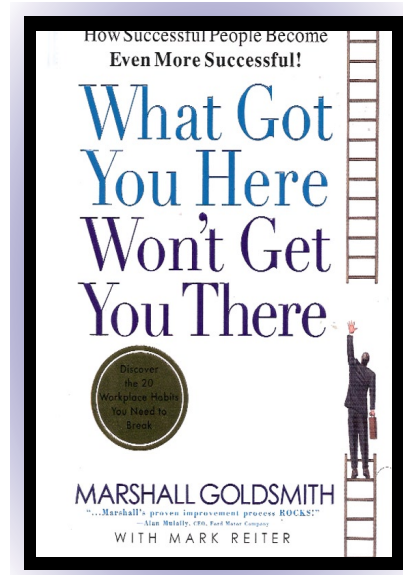
*How Successful People Become
Even More Successful*

Marshall Goldsmith with Mark Reiter

©2007 Marshall Goldsmith

Adapted by permission of Hyperion Books

ISBN: 1-4013-0130-4 / 1-4013-0130-9



Reviewed by Rick Long

Introduction

Career advancement is a topic of interest for most employees. Advancement often results from a specific knowledge, a specific skill set, or just hard work. In **What Got You Here Won't Get You There**, Marshall Goldsmith states these attributes may allow advancement to a certain level but may not be sufficient to get to the next level. Behavioral flaws often reduce the opportunities for further advancement. Goldsmith identifies and provides examples for twenty behaviors which can slow a career. The remainder of the book outlines feedback strategies to recognize these habits and corrective steps to change these behaviors.

SECTION ONE: THE TOUBLE WITH SUCCESS

There are leaders who go through their career without the need for a roadmap. Marshall Goldsmith, considered one of the most influential practitioners in the history of leadership development, describes these people as “grounded” and as “our role models and heroes.” Goldsmith sees his role as coaching successful people who have misplaced their “you are here” career map. Leaders typically possess a good work ethic, a high level of dedication, and a solid knowledge base. However, these attributes may not be sufficient to get these successful people to the next level. Many leaders reach a roadblock because of a particular interpersonal behavior, often unknown to them but offensive to others. The author believes these behavioral “bad habits” can hinder and even prevent successful people from getting to the next level. Through this book, Goldsmith aspires to help leaders identify behavioral flaws they may possess, show how those habits affect others, and help begin to correct those behaviors.

Goldsmith’s coaching process begins with obtaining 360 degree feedback to obtain a comprehensive list of a leader’s strengths and weaknesses. If the candidate accepts the feedback and agrees to attempt to change, the author leads them through a series of actions designed to correct the targeted behavior. Many people are reluctant to change their behavior, especially if they have been successful. Some view their annoying behaviors as one reason for their success. Goldsmith believes some leaders succeed “because of their behavior”, while others succeed “in spite of their behavior.” Most successful leaders are guilty of deluding themselves about their accomplishments and take more credit than is merited.

Successful leaders can be resistant to recommended changes in behavior, and these leaders believe they have succeeded in the past. Because of their past accomplishments, they believe they can succeed in the future. Leaders also believe it is their choice to succeed. The author thinks these beliefs can lead to superstitious behavior, defined as, “the mistaken belief that a specific activity that is followed by positive reinforcement is actually the cause of that positive reinforcement.” This thought pattern can lead to the belief success results from current behaviors and any change to behaviors, even annoying behaviors, may limit future success. Goldsmith

Key Concepts

Goldsmith lists twenty behaviors which can limit career success. These include:

1. Winning too much
2. Adding too much value
3. Passing judgment
4. Making destructive comments
5. Starting with “No,” “but,” or “however”
6. Telling the world how smart we are
7. Speaking when angry
8. Negativity, or “Let me explain why that won’t work.”
9. Withholding information
10. Failing to give proper recognition
11. Claiming credit that we don’t deserve
12. Making excuses
13. Clinging to the past
14. Playing favorites
15. Refusing to express regret
16. Not listening
17. Failing to express gratitude
18. Punishing the messenger
19. Passing the buck
20. An excessive need to be “Me”

* * *

Information about the author and subject:

www.marshallgoldsmith.com

Information about this book and other business titles:

www.hyperionpublishing.com

Related summaries in the BBR Library:

The Next Level

By: Scott Eblin

The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People

By: Stephen R. Covey

writes about the need to know the difference between “success that happens because of our behavior” opposed to “success that comes despite our behavior.” Changing detrimental work behaviors cannot be forced on someone. Goldsmith writes, “People will do something, including changing their behavior, only if it can be demonstrated that doing so is in their own best interests as defined by their own values.” The message is: changing bad behavior is more successful when it involves self interest.

SECTION TWO: THE TWENTY HABITS THAT HOLD YOU BACK FROM THE TOP

In this section, Goldsmith lists “twenty behaviors which hold you back from the top.” These behavioral flaws do not occur because of a lack of skills, a lack of intelligence, or an abnormal *“Successful leaders become great leaders when they learn to shift the focus from themselves to others.”* Rather, these flaws are described by the author as

“transactional flaws....challenges in interpersonal behavior, often leadership behavior.” These twenty habits and a brief description of each are outlined below.

1. *Winning Too Much*: This trait is defined as “needing to win at all costs and in all situations,” and is viewed by the author as the basis for many of the other behavioral flaws listed in the book. The overlying need to win can lead to reduced success because most issues turn into battles instead of resulting in compromise. The example used involves a couple arguing which restaurant to choose. If the choice turned out to be less than expected, Goldsmith asked

clients, would it be important to point out the mistake to your date? 75% of people said they would be critical, that it would be difficult not to declare victory. The author believes this “I told you so game” which results from the need to win is a losing strategy.

2. *Adding Too Much Value*: An extension of the need to win, this habit results in the desire to add opinions which are not wanted and more importantly, not needed.
3. *Passing Judgment*: This behavior is defined as “the need to rate others and impose our standards on them.” Passing judgment alienates others, especially if they are offering help. Goldsmith cites examples where people ask for opinions and then proceed to

pass judgment on the opinion. He suggests accepting ideas and opinions with “neutrality,” which should lead to decreased arguments and more productive conversations.

4. *Making Destructive Comments*: The author believes sarcasm and biting remarks often have unintended consequences. A speaker may view these remarks as amusing or clever, but a portion of the audience may be offended.
5. *Starting with “No,” “But,” or “However”*: Responding with any of these qualifying words can inadvertently send the message, “You are wrong.” This behavior usually leads to reduced communication.
6. *Telling the World How Smart We Are*: This behavior is another variation of the need to win. The author believes there is a tendency, sometimes overtly, sometimes covertly, to show others how intelligent we are. This behavior is boastful, insulting, and “rarely hits its intended target.” The example used for this behavior is a student interviewing with a professor for a research assistantship. The professor conducting the interview felt a greater need to prove his intelligence than to conduct the interview.
7. *Speaking When Angry*: Goldsmith describes this habit as “using emotional volatility as a management tool.” This behavior is viewed as ineffective in the long term because one becomes labeled by that

About the Author

Marshall Goldsmith is a preeminent executive coach who has worked with CEOs and other select business leaders worldwide. *BusinessWeek* listed him as one of the most influential practitioners in the history of leadership development. He received his PhD from UCLA and is currently on the faculty of the executive education program at Dartmouth College's Tuck School of Business. In 2006, Alliant International University renamed their schools of business and organizational psychology to The Marshall Goldsmith School of Management.

behavior, not by other measures of success. Bobby Knight, the college basketball coach, is used as an example. Because of his behavior, he is often viewed as the coach with a temper, rather than the coach with the most wins in NCAA Division I history. Anger directed at others often results because we are mad at ourselves.

“There is no telling what a group can achieve when no one cares who gets the credit.”

8. *Negativity*: There are people in the workplace who seem incapable of being complimentary or positive. They frequently respond with phrases like “Let me tell you why that won’t work.” Workers, who use negativity as “a default response”, become viewed as critics and are often avoided.
9. *Withholding Information*: This trait is defined as a more devious form of the need to win. Not sharing information is used as a strategy to obtain advantage. In other instances information can be withheld simply because we are too busy, forgetful, or just “clueless.” Goldsmith believes “not sharing information Rarely achieves its desired effect. .. In order to have power, you need to inspire loyalty rather than fear and suspicion.”
10. *Failing to Give Proper Recognition*: Not providing praise and reward is often cited by subordinates as a major flaw of their superiors. To these workers, recognition provides a sense of closure. Goldsmith writes, “If you really want to tick someone off, don’t recognize their contributions.”
11. *Claiming Credit We Don’t Deserve*: This is yet another corollary of the need to win and ties in with failing to give proper recognition. Goldsmith says this “interpersonal flaw generates more negative emotion than any other infeedback interviews.”
12. *Making Excuses*: The author states making excuses can range from blatantly blaming others to not taking blame because “that’s just the way I am.” In either case, this habit often results in a negative view of the excuse maker.
13. *Clinging to the Past*: Goldsmith considers clients who “cling to the past” and “want to understand why they are the way they are” to be his toughest assignments. He believes it is difficult but necessary to realize that the past cannot be changed. It must be accepted so one can “move on.”
14. *Playing Favorites*: Treating people differently, especially subordinates, is fairly common in the workplace. This behavior can lead to unfairly rewarding workers defined as the “super-skilled suckups.” Goldsmith says while most workers detest pandering to leaders, they don’t always detect that same behavior when they are doing it.
15. *Refusing to Express Regret*: Not apologizing is often interpreted as saying, “I don’t care about you.” This behavior can be a major cause of hard feelings in the work environment. The author believes an apology can be cathartic because “it forces everyone to let go of the past.”
16. *Not Listening*: This is one of the most common complaints encountered by Goldsmith. Not listening sends a number of negative messages ranging from “I don’t care” to “You’re wasting my time.” This form of disrespectful behavior can inadvertently lead workers, especially younger staff, to look for other jobs.
17. *Failure to Express Gratitude*: Not saying thank you can elicit the same responses and reactions as not apologizing. The author believes “gratitude is a skill that we can never display too often.” He also believes this is one of the easiest behaviors to correct.
18. *Punishing the Messenger*: This behavior ranges from blowing up at a subordinate for delivering unwanted information to scoffing at an assistant who says the boss is currently busy. Goldsmith states, “If your goal is to stop people from giving you input, ...perfect your reputation for shooting the messenger.” This behavioral flaw is easily fixed by simply responding, “Thank you.”
19. *Passing the Buck*: The author believes “blaming others for our mistakes” is a common, but ultimately fatal, work behavior. Workers with perfectionist characteristics often fear being wrong and can use others as scapegoats if mistakes are made. Goldsmith writes, “Infallibility is a myth. No one expects us to be right all the time.” Taking responsibility for one’s

actions and apologizing when necessary is recommended to correct this behavior.

20. *An Excessive Need to be "Me"*: This behavior is defined as a "misguided loyalty to our true nature." An example is provided of an executive who has a difficult time providing positive recognition to his staff. He views himself as a person not good at praising others and doesn't want to appear phony. Goldsmith advises the executive to concentrate more on the feelings of his staff and less on the feeling of "This isn't me."

The author identifies the excessive need to win as the most common behavioral flaw seen through his experience as an executive coach. This behavior is the root of many of the other behaviors listed above. Goldsmith states, "We can become more successful if we appreciate this flaw [the need to win] and work to suppress it in our interpersonal relationships." Other behavioral flaws outlined in the book result from either arrogance or from the inability to take responsibility for problems or failures. Most of the habits mentioned also revolve around either providing too much or too little information, or showing too much or too little emotion.

Before moving on to how to deal effectively with these behaviors, Goldsmith writes briefly about goal obsession, the twenty first habit. Goal obsession is defined as losing sight of the bigger picture in order to achieve a goal. An example is given of an energetic and capable woman who has a problem retaining her talented staff. After obtaining feedback, it was determined the woman always needed to be in the spotlight. She claimed credit for everything, even if the credit was undeserved. Goldsmith believes goal obsession is actually a creator of flaws rather than an actual flaw itself. The author finishes this section with the example of the "Good Samaritan" research done by Darley and Batson at Princeton in 1973. Several theology students had prepared speeches on the Good Samaritan and were told they needed to hurry across campus to give the sermons to a waiting crowd. Along the way, a "victim" was acting as if he were hurt and suffering. Ninety percent of the students ignored the victim, and the message of their Good Samaritan sermon, to get across campus to give their sermons.

SECTION THREE – FEEDBACK AND ITS USES TO IDENTIFY BEHAVIORS

Goldsmith believes feedback, in the form of 360 degree feedback, is the best method to identify what is needed to improve work relationships. Feedback is useful to "tell us where we are, where we need to go, and then to help measure progress." The problem with feedback, especially negative feedback, is that workers don't want to hear it and colleagues don't want to give it. The majority of successful people only accept feedback which agrees with their view of themselves. They tend to disregard feedback which is inconsistent with their self-view.

In soliciting feedback for his clients, Goldsmith emphasizes the "Four Commitments" which are

1. Let go of the past. Feedback should focus on a "positive future" not on the past.
2. Tell the truth.
3. Be supportive and helpful, not cynical or negative.
4. Pick something to improve in yourself so everyone is focused on improving, not judging.

These commitments are designed to provide feedback providers a chance to be a helper, not just a critic. The feedback process can then become a win / win experience. Goldsmith writes, "Change is not a one-way street. It involves two parties: the person who's changing and the people who notice it." He also advises not to ask

"Successful people become great leaders when they learn to shift the focus from themselves to others."

for feedback and then state an opinion contrary to the feedback.

To obtain quality feedback, it is important to ask the right types of questions. A short list of questions designed to provide productive feedback is listed below.

1. Does the executive clearly communicate a vision?
2. Does the leader treat people with respect?
3. Does the executive solicit contrary opinions?
4. Does the leader encourage other people's ideas?
5. Does the leader listen to other people in meetings?

Other pertinent feedback questions are listed in an appendix to the book.

The author next spends some time on feedback which can be obtained outside of a formal 360 degree process. He lists three major forms of feedback which include solicited,

unsolicited, and observed. Solicited feedback is requested and is most useful when honest and most honest when confidential. This feedback should ask for advice rather than criticism, should be directed at future change not past behavior, and should be phrased in a way to inspire action. Goldsmith believes the most useful question to get answered when soliciting self feedback is “How can I do better?”

Unsolicited feedback often comes in the form of “blindsight moments”, where something is discovered which others know about us, but we don't know about ourselves. The author believes that humans are often shocked by this discovery and that “the rest of the world usually has a more accurate perspective [about ourselves]

“There's no telling what a group can achieve when no one cares who gets the credit.”

than we do.” Observational feedback is simply getting feedback by “paying closer attention to the world around you.” Goldsmith outlines a number of methods to obtain observational feedback.

1. Make a list of casual remarks made about you.
2. Carefully watch non verbal behavior.
3. Listen to your self-aggrandizing and self-deprecating remarks.
4. Examine relationships and actions at home.

Feedback is the beginning of positive change. It tells one what to change, but does not provide details on how the changes should be made. Goldsmith covers this process in the next section of the book.

SECTION FOUR – HOW WE CAN CHANGE FOR THE BETTER

Goldsmith strongly believes the change process must begin with apologizing. He calls apologizing “the magic move” because it encompasses both the recognition of mistakes and the attempt to get better. Apologizing also adds closure to a situation which permits moving forward. Richard Clark's apology to the 9/11 commission is cited as an example. Clark said “Your government failed you, those entrusted with protecting you failed you, and I failed you.” This apology gave a sense of closure allowing people to move forward. Apologizing is both easy to do and effective. When apologizing, Goldsmith advises, “Get in and get out. Don't explain it. Don't complicate it. Don't qualify it.”

The next step in the process of changing a bad behavior is to advertise the changes are being made. Showing effort to change helps coworkers realize one is trying to correct a behavioral fault. The author states “...you have to get 100% better in order to get 10% credit from you coworkers.” This is because co-workers view each other in a way which matches previous observations. Behavior needs to be consistently changed for a period of time for people to notice. This requires perseverance with patience.

Listening and saying thank you, the next steps to changing behavior, tie in with feedback. Active listening is a great source of information on how the change process is progressing. Good listening involves thinking

before speaking, respecting the speaker, and judging if a response is worth saying. Good,

active listening makes people feel special. Goldsmith lists a set of listening rules which appear simple, but can be difficult to follow consistently. These rules include not interrupting, not finishing someone else's sentences, not saying, “I knew that”, not being distracted, and asking intelligent questions. A skill seen in great listeners is the ability to make the other person feel “as if they are the only person in the room.” Bill Clinton was used as an example of someone possessing these qualities. After being a good listener, especially to feedback, Goldsmith advises not to agree or disagree with the person, but to simply say “thank you.” Expressing gratitude creates closure and allows the change process to continue.

After apologizing, advertising, listening, and saying thank you, the next step in the process is following up. This often takes longer than the other steps because it is a continual process. “Follow-up is the most protracted part of the process of changing for the better,” says Goldsmith. He uses the example of former New York City Mayor Ed Koch who often asked his constituency, “How am I doing?” Follow up is important because it measures progress. It is how we remind ourselves and others we are trying to change and that this change is an evolving and ongoing project. Goldsmith acknowledges that not everyone responds to executive development. In his work, he finds approximately 70 percent of his participants make an effort to change after his coaching. The other 30 percent don't follow up often because, “they were simply too busy.” This suggests there is a disconnect between understanding

and doing. For the leaders who did follow up consistently, their perceived effectiveness rose markedly. This leads Goldsmith to the observation that people don't get better without follow-up. He states, "Becoming a better leader (or a person) is a process, not an event."

"The final step in the change process is *feedforward*. Feedforward is "feedback in the opposite direction". It is asking someone how we can get better. Feedforward has four steps.

1. Pick one behavior to change.
2. Describe this behavior and your objective to change to one person.
3. Ask for two suggestions from that person on how to change positively for the future.
4. Listen intently to the suggestions and say thank you.

Unlike feedback, which focuses on the past, feedforward focuses on the future. Goldsmith believes feedforward works because it is less personal than feedback and is viewed as help not criticism. Feedforward also concentrates on the future, which can be changed, not on the past.

SECTION FIVE – PULLING OUT THE STOPS

Goldsmith believes changing bad behaviors is a possible but difficult task. In this section of the book, he provides the rules of change, partially outlined below.

1. *Behavior change may not work for all flaws.* The example was cited of a polished CFO who has the loyalty and respect of his colleagues but is getting blasted over financial matters by the media. This CFO believed the feedback he is receiving which said he was not a good listener. Goldsmith discovered the problem was not tied to listening skills but rather a case of not being good at spinning the media. The conclusion was the CFO needed to improve his media skills, not change an interpersonal behavior.
2. *Pick the correct thing to change.* It is important to prioritize and choose something that is changeable. The author also believes it is important not to over commit by focusing on more than one behavior at a time.
3. *"There is no ideal behavior."* Goldsmith believes leaders sometimes want to be perfect, which often stops them from attempting to become better. Setting a specific goal to get better and measuring the progress toward that goal will help the improvement process.

4. *"The best time to change is now."* Goldsmith writes only seventy percent of the people he coaches actually follow through and attempt to make positive change. The main reason stated for not following through was the lack of time. The author believes it is essential to take the time to change, now.

* * *

A chapter-by-chapter summary and a bibliography are provided.

Remarks

The contents of this book are appropriately condensed in the title, **What Got You Here Won't Get You There**. Goldsmith believes there are many attributes, including hard work and persistence, which are important for advancement especially in the early phases of a career. These characteristics help leaders to get where they are now, which is "Here". However, there is often a point in a career path where workplace "bad habits" can prevent one from getting to the next level, defined as "There". The author identifies and defines twenty behavioral flaws, most related to interpersonal relationships, which can prevent one from getting from "Here to There". Goldsmith explains each behavior in detail and provides clear, concise examples.

In later sections of the book, the author outlines strategies to help identify which of these behaviors may be slowing one's career. The chapter describing feedback is particularly helpful and interesting. Goldsmith next provides a framework for permanently changing behaviors which prevent career advancement. These strategies and frameworks are described in full detail with useful examples.

This book is for leaders, aspiring leaders, and anyone who would like to improve interpersonal job performance. The author advises readers not to concentrate solely on behaviors they believe they possess. He believes it is important to understand each of the habits and their effect on the workplace environment to ease the journey from "Here to There".

Reading Suggestions

Reading Time: 8-10 Hours, 223 Pages in Book

What Got You Here Won't Get You There is divided into four sections. The first section serves as an introduction, the second section outlines twenty behavioral habits which can hinder advancement, the third section outlines strategies for positive change, and the last section lists the rules for changing. The book is filled with examples and lists so reads rather quickly. It is recommended to read the entire book in the order presented.

CONTENTS

Section One: The Trouble with Success

- Chapter 1: You Are Here
- Chapter 2: Enough About You
- Chapter 3: The Success Delusion or Why We Resist Change

Section Two: The Twenty Habits Which Hold You Back From the Top

- Chapter 4: The Twenty Habits
- Chapter 5: The Twenty-First Habit: Goal Obsession

Section Three: How We Can Change for the Better

- Chapter 6: Feedback
- Chapter 7: Apologizing
- Chapter 8: Telling the World, or Advertising
- Chapter 9: Listening
- Chapter 10: Thanking
- Chapter 11: Following Up
- Chapter 12: Practicing Feedforward

Section Four: Pulling out the Stops

- Chapter 13: Changing: The Rules
- Chapter 14: Special Challenges for People in Charge
- Coda: You Are Here Now

A Note to Our Readers

We at BBR encourage our readers to purchase the business books we review. BBR Reviews are intended as a service to busy professionals, as we recommend only those books that are worth your time to read in their entirety. We apply stringent criteria in selecting only the best business books, and in that selection process, strive to help you make informed book-purchasing decisions.

[Click to Buy
this Book](#)

This book is available at bookstores and online booksellers.

Business Book Review™ is a service of Business Book Review, LLC
For more information about BBR, to subscribe to BBR,
or to provide us feedback, visit our Web site.

www.businessbookreview.com

Business Book Review, LLC
1549 Clairmont Road, Suite 203
Decatur, GA 30033

Copyright © 2007 Business Book Review, LLC • All Rights Reserved
No copies may be made of this review unless appropriate license has been granted.
ISSN 0741-8132