What Got You Here Won't Get You There

Author Bio's

Marshall Goldsmith is America's preeminent executive coach, having worked with more than 80 CEO's in the world's top corporations. The American Management Association recently named Marshall one of fifty great thinkers and business leaders who have impacted the field of management, and *BusinessWeek* listed him as one of the most influential practitioners in the history of leadership development.

Section One: The Trouble With Success

Some people go through life with an unerring sense of direction. They know who they are and where they are going. When we meet them we say they're grounded. They have an exquisite sense of who they are, which translates into perfect pitch about how they come across to others. Those people don't need this book.

Other people are different. It's not that they don't know who they are or where they are going; it's not that they don't have an adequate sense of self-worth, or aren't successful. What's wrong is that they have no idea how their behavior is coming across to the people who matter—their bosses, colleagues, subordinates, customers, and even family.

--They think they have all the answers, but others see it as arrogance.
--They think they are delegating, but others see it as shirking responsibilities.
--They think they're holding their tongue, but others see it as unresponsiveness.

Over time these "minor" foibles begin to chip away at the goodwill they've accumulated in life, and eventually these minor irritations blow up into a major crisis. This happens when people's inner compass of correct behavior has gone out of whack, and they become clueless about their position among their coworkers.

These are usually not deep-seated neuroses. More often than not, they are simple behavioral tics—bad habits repeated dozens of times a day in the workplace—which can be cured by (a) pointing them out, (b) showing them the havoc they cause, and (c) demonstrating that with a slight behavioral tweak a much more appealing effect can be achieved.

Ironically, success can make us delusional. That's because we get positive reinforcement from our past successes, and then we leap to thinking that our past success is predictive of great things in our future.

That's not necessarily a bad thing. That belief gives us confidence, erases doubt, and blinds us to risks and challenges in our work. But, our delusions become a serious liability when we need to change. We sit there with the same god-like feelings of competence, and when someone tries to make us change we regard them with bafflement. We think they are confused, or we discredit them (they haven't been as successful as we have).

Four key beliefs help us become successful. Each can make it tough for us to change. And that's the paradox of success: The beliefs that carried us *here* may be holding us back in our quest to go *there.* Let's look a bit more closely at each of these beliefs:

Belief 1: I Have Succeeded

Successful people believe in their *skills and talent.* Successful people focus on the positive, remembering their victories and calling up images of winning performances. They tell stories about their triumphs, not their blunders. This "I have succeeded" belief, positive as it is most times, only becomes an obstacle when behavioral change is needed.

Belief 2: I Can Succeed

This is another way of saying, "I am *confident* that I can succeed." Successful people believe they have the capability within themselves to make desirable things happen. This is the central belief that drives individual success. Successful people tend to have a high "internal locus of control." In other words, they don't feel like victims of fate; they see success as largely a function of people's motivation and ability.

One of the greatest mistakes of successful people is the assumption that their success validates all their behavior. The challenge is to make them see that sometimes they are successful *in spite of* their behavior.

Belief 3: I Will Succeed

This is another way of saying, "I have the *motivation* to succeed." Successful people have an unflappable optimism. They not only believe that they can manufacture success, they believe it's practically their due. As a result, they tend to pursue opportunities with enthusiasm; it can be quite difficult to say "no" to desirable opportunities. The danger with this is that attitude can lead to staff burnout, high turnover, and a weaker team than the one you started with.

Overcommitment can be as serious an obstacle to change as believing that you don't need fixing or that your flaws are part of the reason you're successful.

Belief 4: I Choose to Succeed

Successful people believe that they are doing what they choose to do, because they choose to do it. They have a high need for self-determination. The more successful a person is, the more likely this is to be true. Here's the rub: the more we believe that our behavior is a result of our own choices and commitments, the less likely we are to want to change our behavior.

These four success beliefs—that we have the skills, the confidence, the motivation, and the free choice to succeed—make us superstitious.
"Superstitious?" you ask. "No way! I don't believe in that stuff."

Not so fast. To a degree, we're all superstitious. Superstitious behavior comes from the mistaken belief that a specific activity followed by positive reinforcement is actually the *cause* of that reinforcement. It's the confusion of correlation and causality.

Almost everyone I meet is successful *because of* doing a lot of things right, and almost everyone I meet is successful *in spite of* some behavior that defies common sense. One of the greatest challenges in helping leaders is to enable them to see the difference.

Section 2: The Twenty Habits That Hold You Back From the Top

Peter Drucker once said, "We spend a lot of time teaching leaders what to do. We don't spend enough time teaching leaders what to stop." Stopping a bad behavior is often easier than learning a good one.

For example, it's a lot easier to "stop being a jerk" than to "become a nicer person." All we have to do is…nothing, while becoming a nicer person actually requires a lot of proactive work. In order to fix our faulty behavior, we must identify the most common faults.

These aren't flaws of skill or intelligence, nor are they flaws of unchangeable personality. What we are talking about are challenges in interpersonal behavior; the everyday annoyances that make your workplace more difficult than it needs to be.

These are the flaws most commonly performed by one person against others:

1. Winning too much: winning at all costs, whether it really matters or not; unbridled competitiveness.
2. Adding too much value: adding our two cents to every discussion.
3. Passing judgment: The need to rate others according to our standards.
4. Making destructive comments
5. Starting with "No," "But" or "However," which introduces a negative comment and can be very deflating for others.
6. Telling the world how smart we are; always telling others about our successes.
7. Speaking when angry, which usually results in saying something you regret later.
8. Negativity, or "Let me explain why that won't work."
9. Withholding information
10. Failing to give proper recognition
11. Claiming credit we don't deserve—with #10, it almost guarantees resentment from staff or coworkers.
12. Making excuses—which we think are just "explanations"
13. Clinging to the past
14. Playing favorites
15. Refusing to express regret
16. Not listening—listening is more than just getting the facts right; it's giving your full attention to people, in a way that honors the speaker.
17. Failing to express gratitude
18. Punishing the messenger
19. Passing the buck—blaming others for our mistakes or failures.
20. An excessive need to be "me." We can hold on to bad habits because "that's just who we are." We are also free to change and grow.

Nobody has all of these failings. Successful people often have one of two, but they won't have a lot or they wouldn't be successful in the first place. At the higher levels of organizational life, all the leading players are technically skilled. They're all smart. They're all up to date on the key issues.

That's why behavioral issues become so important at the upper rings of the corporate ladder. All other things being equal, your people skills (or lack of them) become more pronounced the higher up you go. In fact, even when all other things are *not* equal, your people skills often make the difference in how high you go. Who would you rather have as a CFO? A moderately good accountant who is great with people outside the firm and skilled at managing very smart people? Or a brilliant accountant who's inept with outsiders and alienates all the smart people under him?

Not a tough choice, really. The people skills are much more important at that level. The technical skills can be hired if needed, and the one with the people skills can lead them.

Section 3: How We Can Change for the Better

The idea of feedback has been around forever. In the last 30 years, the idea of 360-degree feedback has become well-known. It is the best way I know of for successful people to identify what they need to improve in their relationships at work.

Successful people only have two problems dealing with negative feedback. Unfortunately, they are big problems: (a) they don't want to hear it from us, and (b) we don't want to give it to them.

It's not hard to see why people don't want to hear negative feedback. Successful people are incredibly delusional about their achievements. Over 95% of the members in most successful groups believe that they perform in the top half of their group. While statistically ridiculous, it is psychologically real. Giving people negative feedback means "proving" they are wrong. *Proving* to successful people that they are wrong works just about as well as *making* them change. Not gonna happen.

However, without honest feedback we can't see where we are, where we need to go, or how to measure our progress. We need it, and I have a foolproof method for securing it.

When I am coaching someone, I get confidential feedback from my client's coworkers at the beginning of the process. I ask them to make four commitments as part of the process of helping my client change:

1. Let go of the past
2. Tell the truth
3. Be supportive & helpful, not cynical or negative

4. Pick something to improve yourself, so everyone is focused more on "improving" than "judging."

These commitments draw coworkers into the process (usually 12-18 months) of helping people change.

This feedback is structured by a coach; it's also possible to get feedback on your own. There are several ways to effectively do this.

First is to ask—solicit it. The best way is to ask for confidential feedback. That way no one gets embarrassed or defensive; there are no emotional issues to sort through and no one to blame or retaliate against. The only problem is that you can't pull this off by yourself. You need a third party to do the polling and gather the information.

In seeking feedback, there is only one question that works: "How can I do better?" Feedback that makes change possible has to (a) solicit advice rather than criticism, (b) be directed towards the future rather than the past, and (c) be couched in a way that suggests you will act on it.

A second way to get feedback is by seeing your world anew. You are actually getting feedback all day long via eye contact, body language, response times, etc; the trick is to spot it. Here are three ways you can get feedback by paying closer attention to the world around you.

1. Make a list of people's casual remarks about you. Write down any comment that people make that remotely concerns you or your behavior and review it at the end of the day. Patterns will probably begin to emerge.
2. Listen to your self-aggrandizing remarks. In an odd bit of reverse psychology, it seems that the stuff people boast about as their strengths more often than not turn out to be their most egregious weaknesses. The same is often true about self-deprecating remarks: they often reveal areas we actually think we are strong in.
3. Look homeward. A lot of people think they are different at work from how they are at home. Ask the family—you might be surprised at their response. *Your flaws don't vanish when you walk through the front door at home.*

Feedback tells us what we need to change, not how to do it. But when you know what to change, you're ready to begin to take the first step.

What is the first step? It's the most magical, healing, restorative gesture a person can make: **Apologizing**. Without that, there is no recognition that mistakes have been made, no announcement to the world of your intention to change, and no emotional contract between you and the people you care about.

Once you are prepared to apologize, here's the instruction manual:

You say, "I'm sorry."

You add, "I'll try to do better in the future."

Then….nothing. Don't explain it, don't complicate it, and don't qualify it. Get in and out as quickly as possible. That doesn't mean being insincere (that never works) but be clear and brief. Then you are ready to go to the next step.

After you apologize, you must *advertise.* It's not enough to tell everyone that you want to get better; you have to declare exactly in what area you plan to change. In other words, now that you have said you're sorry, what are you going to do about it?

I tell my clients, "It's a lot harder to change people's *perception* of your behavior than it is to change your behavior. In fact, I calculate that you have to get 100% better in order to get 10% credit for it from your coworkers."

It's hard to change perceptions. If someone thinks you are an arrogant jerk, and you do something wonderful, they will consider it an exception to the rule and still think you are a jerk. However, the odds improve considerably if you tell people that you are trying to change. Suddenly, your efforts are on their radar screen, and you can begin to chip away at their preconceptions.

Your odds improve again if you tell everyone how hard you're trying, and repeat the message week after week. And your odds improve *even more* if you ask everyone for ideas to help you get better. Now your coworkers become invested in you; they pay attention to see if you're paying attention to their suggestions.

Eventually the message sinks in and people start to accept the possibility of a new improved you. It doesn't happen overnight, but it does happen, especially if you can learn a lesson from a good politician: stay on message. Effective politicians focus on one basic message and repeat it with extreme discipline until it sinks in. It's the same for you: you can't just apologize and say you're trying to do better just once. You have to drill it into people repeatedly, until they have internalized it. Your changes may be obvious to you, but it takes a lot more than a few weeks for people to notice the new you.

In apologizing and advertising, you are beginning a process of learning from those around you *about you.* In order to be effective at it, you must become a good listener. Jack Nicklaus said that 80% of a successful golf shot begins with a proper grip and stance. It's the same with listening—80% of your success in learning from others is based on how well we listen.

There are three things that all good listeners do: they think before they speak; they listen with respect; and they are always gauging their response by asking themselves, "Is it worth it?"

How we speak establishes how we are perceived as a listener. It pays to think about both *what* we are going to say and *how* we are going to say it.

Bill Clinton was a master at listening with respect. It didn't matter if you were a head of state or a clerk, when you were talking to Bill Clinton he acted as if you were the only person in the room. Every fiber of his being, from his eyes to his body language, communicated that he was locked into what you were saying. He conveyed how important you were, not how important he was. This is probably the key skill that separates the near-great from the great. This ability to make a person feel that he or she is the most important person in the room, is the great divide. We all have done it sometimes (on a first date; during an important interview or meeting). The super-successful just do it *all the time*.

Good listening also requires us to answer a difficult question before we speak: "Is it worth it?" Asking this question forces you to consider what the other person will feel after hearing your response. Without asking this question, people often get hurt or discouraged, and become less likely to engage with you in the future.

This doesn't mean don't be honest. If you think what you want to say is "worth it" then speak freely. All I'm saying is consider it ahead of time.

None of this is particularly complex; it's actually pretty simple. However, simple does not mean easy. Why don't we do it regularly? We forget, or get distracted, or don't use disciplined effort to turn it into a habit.

When working with people, one other trait is essential to develop: the art of giving thanks. When someone does something nice for you, *they expect gratitude*—and they think less of you for withholding it. Get used to saying "thank you." It is music to people's ears.

You do not get better without follow-up.

Once you master the subtle arts of apologizing, advertising, listening, and thanking, you must follow up—relentlessly. Or, everything is just a "program of the month." I teach my clients to go back to *all* their coworkers every month or so and ask them for comments and suggestions. This keeps them engaged with you in the process.

If you do this every month, your colleagues eventually begin to accept that you're getting better, not because you say so but because it's coming from *their* lips. When I tell you, "I'm getting better," I believe it. When I ask you, "Am I getting better" and you say I am, then *you* believe it.

Follow-up is the most protracted part of the process of changing for the better. It goes on for 12-18 months. Fittingly, it's the difference-maker in the process.

Follow-up is how you measure your progress.
Follow-up is how we remind people we're making an effort to change, and that they are helping us.
Follow-up is how our efforts eventually get imprinted on our colleagues' minds.
More than anything, follow-up makes us act. It gives us the momentum, even the courage, to go beyond knowing what we need to do to actually doing it, and changing.

Follow-up enables us to change because it addresses some key hindrances.

First, as we studied leaders who went through our coaching process, we found that the number one reason they didn't change was because they were simply too busy. They got distracted by their day-to-day responsibilities.

Second, a lot of leadership development revolves around one huge false assumption: If people understand, then they will do. That's not true. Most of us understand, we just don't do. We know being overweight is bad for our health; not all of us actually do anything to change our condition.

As we evaluated our client's results, we found a pattern that was astonishingly consistent. At one end of the spectrum, when leaders did little or no follow-up with their subordinates, there was little or no perceived change in the leader's effectiveness. At the other extreme, when leaders consistently followed up, the perception of their effectiveness jumped dramatically. People just don't get better without follow-up.

The importance of follow-up highlights one other truth: becoming a better leader (or a better person) is a process, not an event. Historically, much of executive development has focused on events: a seminar, retreat, training program, etc. But real leadership development is a process that takes time. Time, coupled with good follow-up, equals real change.

With these skills, you are now ready for feedforward. Feedforward is a variation on feedback with some significant advantages. Feedforward asks you to do four simple steps:

1. Pick one behavior you would like to change that would make a significant, positive difference in your life.
2. Describe this goal in a one-on-one dialog with *anyone* you know.
3. Ask that person for two suggestions *for the future* that might help you achieve a positive change in the behavior you've chosen.
4. Listen attentively to the suggestions. Don't judge or critique them; the only response you're permitted is "Thank you."

That's it. Then repeat the process with someone else.

While feedback, both positive and negative, looks backward, feedforward comes in the form of ideas that you can put into practice in the future. It also shrinks the interaction down to something relational between you and the other person.

This is important: this book and its process for getting better hinges on one inalterable concept:

I don't establish what you need to do to change for the better.
You don't establish it either.
They do.
Who are they?

Everyone around you. Everyone who knows you, cares about you, thinks about you, has you pegged.

Let's say you want to do a better job of listening. A coach can give you advice on how to be a better listener, but it will be generic. It's much better to ask the people around you, "What are some ways I can do a better job of listening to you?" They'll give you specific, concrete ideas that relate to them—how they perceive you as a listener—not the vague ideas a coach would give.

Until you get everyone who is affected by your behavior on your side and working to help you change, you haven't really begun to get better. That's why the concept of feedforward is so important.

It works because while no one likes criticism, successful people love getting ideas for the future. It works because we can change the future but not the past. It works because helping people be "right" is more productive than proving them "wrong." And it works because people don't take feedforward as personally as feedback.

SECTION 4: Pulling Out the Stops

If you study successful people, you'll see that one of the things that contributes to their success is they avoid high-risk, low-reward situations and do everything they can to increase the odds in their favor. The following seven rules will help you get a better handle on the process of change. If you obey them, you'll be stacking the deck in your favor.

1. Your Issue may not be one that behavioral change can cure. Some problems are skill problems or technical shortcomings.
2. Pick the right thing to change. Don't try to change everything; pick the *one thing* that needs fixing—the thing that most of your colleagues would pick as most important.
3. Don't delude yourself about what you *really* must change. It's easy to pick something that isn't the most important thing *to those around you.*

4. Don't hide from the truth you need to hear. Sometimes we don't ask questions because we are afraid of what the answers will be.
5. There is no ideal behavior. The goal is improvement, not perfection. No one can be the best at everything; better to not make that the goal.
6. If you can measure it, you can achieve it. It's the only way we can know how we're doing. Measuring "soft" values can be difficult, but it's possible, and greatly increases your chance of success.
7. Monetize the result, create a solution. Giving financial incentives for progress motivates people to get creative.
8. The best time to change is now. Many of us are deceived by a dream: that we are working on some unique challenges, and a time will come when we are less busy, when everything will change. It's not a dream; it's a mirage. Tomorrow will be just as busy as today.

Special Challenges for People in Charge

1. Help your staff know how to work with you!

Some years ago I worked with a public relations executive who was having a hard time hanging on to personal assistants. He hired great people, and in six months they were gone. I asked him to try an experiment: imagine the feedback the departed assistants would give, and write that down in a memo titled "How to Handle Me." He gave that to his new assistant, and 18 months later she was doing great.

If you are in charge, don't assume that your people know what you want. Or that all that you want is a good idea! Writing that kind of memo will help your people and stimulate valuable dialog with the troops.

2. Stop letting your staff overwhelm you!

As a boss, you know how much you depend on your people. But it's possible to be too accessible, or to let them depend on you too much. You can't let the staff control you. Delegate responsibilities and empower your people.

3. Stop acting as if you are managing people who are just like you!

A lot of bosses assume their staff is just like them—in behavior, in enthusiasm, in intelligence, and in how they apply that brainpower. Even though they were smart enough to hire a variety of people, they fall into the trap of thinking those people will approach things the same way the boss does. If the boss likes to debate, he assumes everyone does…although some people may find that intimidating.

4. Stop checking the box!

Some managers think that just by saying something it will happen. They said it, now they can check it off their to-do list. In reality, getting things done requires ongoing communication and follow-up.

5. Stop trying to coach people who shouldn't be coached!

Some people refuse to believe they have a problem; others shouldn't be in their position in the first place. Still others think everyone else has the problem. Those aren't the people to invest your time in; there are others who will provide a better return on investment.

Conclusion

Imagine that you're 95 years old. You have the chance to go back through time and give yourself some advice on how to have a better personal and professional life. What would you write? Take your time and answer the questions on both levels, personal and professional.

Once you've written these words down, the rest is simple: Just do whatever you've written. Make it your resolution for the rest of this year, and the next. You have just defined your "there."

You are here now.

You can get there!

Let the journey begin.

From the Pastor's Perspective

It's understood that churches are a place for hurting, broken people to come and get well. We emphasize grace and forgiveness, and accepting people as they are. That's good—we should. However, many churches can be somewhat suspicious of success, or encouraging or

equipping people to become more successful. We often see success linked to pride or greed, so we don't validate it.

We presume grace and forgiveness from others, rather than try to do the hard work of changing. Marshall's book is all about how to help successful people become *more* successful. I actually think he has a healthy attitude and that a lot of church leaders could benefit by adopting it.

There are a couple insights that I think pastors and church leaders should pay particular attention to.

The first is recognizing that we have blind spots—and that other people are often very aware of them. We tend to be defensive about our weaknesses or in denial about them. Marshall's approach recruits those who know about our weaknesses and flaws so they will actually help us change. It seems a very "Christian" approach that takes a fair amount of humility, or at least desperation. But it is rooted in reality and can help us grow if we are willing to exercise the courage to get the feedback.

The "feedforward" approach is brilliant. To get practical suggestions from those closest to us on how to improve in something almost guarantees that those suggestions will have a big impact when implemented. People notice when you act on what they say, and you build up a lot of relational equity in the process.

I think the importance of follow-up is also worth noting. Pastors are not exempt from the "checking the box" syndrome. We think if we say something, or if people know something, it will happen. But life doesn't actually work that way. Nothing happens without follow-up! That's just as true in church as it is in the workplace. Unfortunately, we can sometimes view follow-up as not being "nice" since it can include asking hard questions. So, since being nice is one of the highest values we have in some churches, we don't follow up…and too many things end up not happening.