

# THE INTERNATIONAL BESTSELLER

*by* The World's Number One Thinker On Leadership\*

**What Got You Here**

**Won't Get You There**

**How Successful  
People Become  
Even More  
Successful!**

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**Marshall Goldsmith** with Mark Reiter

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**Marshall Goldsmith** with Mark Reiter

**MARSHALL GOLDSMITH** is corporate America's pre-eminent executive coach. Goldsmith is one of a select few consultants who have been asked to work with more than eighty CEOs in the world's top corporations. He has helped implement leadership development processes that have impacted more than one million people. His Ph.D is from UCLA and he is on the faculty of the executive education programs at Dartmouth College's Tuck School of Business. The American Management Association recently named Marshall one of fifty great thinkers and business leaders who have impacted the field of management, and *Business Week* listed him as one of the influential practitioners in the history of leadership development. In 2006, Alliant International University renamed their schools of business and organizational psychology the Marshall Goldsmith School of Management.

**MARK REITER** has collaborated on thirteen previous books. He is also a literary agent in Bronxville, New York.

## **Marshall Goldsmith has been praised as:**

- a “great thinker and leader [in] the field of management” by the American Management Association;
- a “top executive educator” by *The Wall Street Journal*;
- a “great communicator” by *O, The Oprah Magazine*;
- one of the “five most-respected executive coaches” by *Forbes*;
- an “influential practitioner in the history of leadership development” by *BusinessWeek*; and
- one of “the most credible thought leaders in the new era of business” by *The Economist*.

# **What business leaders and learning professional have to say about working with Marshall Goldsmith:**

"I love Marshall Goldsmith for lots of reasons: his generous soul, his capacity to bring out the best in people, his zen-like ability to create an evocative community--the mark of a great teacher, and his way of getting people, just about everybody, to laugh their way into deep and penetrating insights. He is the very model of a professional--reliable, trustworthy, always 'on'—and always has your interest at heart."

—WARREN BENNIS, Distinguished Professor of Business,  
University of Southern California, and bestselling author

"We were a very successful team who took our performance to the next level. With Marshall's help we identified our two areas and went to work. We used everyone's help and support, exceeded our improvement expectations, and had fun! A team's dedication to continuous improvement combined with Marshall's proven improvement process ROCKS!"

—ALAN MULALLY, CEO, Ford Motor Company, former president and  
CEO, Boeing Commercial Airlines

"Helping high achievers recognize their sharp edges, become self-aware, and increase their personal effectiveness is at the heart of leadership development. Marshall brings to this task a deep commitment to excellence, sensitivity, candor, and results. Many years of patient practice have made him the best 'diamond cutter' in the business--he can take rough diamond and polish it rapidly to reveal its brilliance. He is one of a kind."

—C. K. PRAHALAD, bestselling author and Paul and Ruth McCracken  
Distinguished University Professor of Corporate Strategy and International Business, University of  
Michigan

"Marshall Goldsmith has helped me become a more effective leader, as judged by the people who are most important at Getty Images--our employees. Marshall has helped me and my executive team members to be much better positive role models for living our Leadership Principles."

—JONATHAN KLEIN, CEO, Getty Images

"Marshall is a great coach and teacher. He has done a lot to help both me and our high-potential leaders. His approach is practical, useful, helpful, and fun!"

—J. P. GARNIER, CEO, GlaxoSmithKline

"Marshall's valuable insights on leadership development and the related responsibilities of coaching and mentoring are critical to our general officers and their spouses. These are turbulent times, and the tools and techniques that Marshall shared with them are therefore vitally important as they return to their various commands and leadership responsibilities."

—GENERAL ERIC K. SHINSEKI, former Chief of Staff, U.S. Army

"Perhaps the greatest teacher of leadership on the planet. I have personally watched him help thousands of executives in three companies improve their leadership in measurable ways. As a result

their performance improved, their relationships improved, and they lived happier lives."

—JIM MOORE, served as the chief learning officer of Bellsouth,  
Nortel, and Sun Microsystems

"There is simply no better coach for your most important leaders than Marshall Goldsmith. He excels on the only metric that matters—he achieves positive, measurable change."

—MARC EFFRON, chief learning officer, Avon, and co-author of *Leading the Way* and *Human resources in the 20th Century*

"Marshall helped GE human resources professionals customize his coaching process for use with our high-potential leaders. Our internal HR coaches have achieved outstanding results with hundreds of our leaders. Marshall's model has been a real win for us!"

—LINDA SHARKEY, vice president, Organizational Development and Staffing, GE Capital solutions

"Marshall Goldsmith easily ranks among the very best teachers and coaches of executives anywhere—bar none. His years of experience and his proven methods have helped hundreds of leaders achieve positive, lasting behavioral change."

—JOHN ALEXANDER, president, Center for Creative Leadership

"Marshall helped us determine that the role of a leader is about inspiring others. He showed us how to inspire others and build lasting relationships. He challenged our team and they loved working with him."

—CASS WHEELER, CEO, American Heart Association

"For over a decade I have worked with Marshall in corporations and seen him teach at Dartmouth. In my opinion, Marshall is the best at what he does, bar none. He has that rare combination that makes a great teacher—thought leadership, classroom management, and presence. He is a tremendous asset to Tuck School at Dartmouth."

—VIJAY GOVINDARAJAN, professor and director,  
Center for Global Leadership, Tuck School, Dartmouth

"With great energy and excellent content, Marshall engaged, excited, and even enthralled his audience of several hundred participants at the Wharton Leadership Conference. Marshall was a star!"

—DR. MICHAEL USEEM, William and Jacalyn Egan Professor of Management and director of the Center for Leadership and Change Management, Wharton Business School, University of Pennsylvania

"I consider Marshall to be the number one thought leader and coach in the field of leadership and executive development today. I sincerely appreciate his honest, straightforward, positive, and purposeful approach to executive coaching—it is second to none."

—LOUIS CARTER, president and CEO, Best Practice Institute, a global leader in creating and sustaining communities of practice

"As the CEO of the Girl Scouts, I was working to help a great organization be 'the best that we could be.' The first person Marshall volunteered to work with was me—this sent an important message. I was exuberant about the experience, I improved, and we moved this process across the organization."

Twenty-four years later, I am chairman of the Leader to Leader Institute—and we are still working together to serve leaders.”

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—FRANCES HESSELBEIN, winner of the Presidential Medal of Freedom

“Marshall is a dynamo. He helps highly successful people get better and better and better. His advice helps me enormously at work, but it makes an even bigger impact at home. My wife and kids stand up and applaud Marshall for helping me become a better husband and dad. What could be better than that?”

—MARK TERCEK, managing director, Goldman Sachs & Co.

“At McKesson, we are on a mission—together with our customers—to fundamentally change the cost and quality of how health care is delivered. To fully realize the potential that lies in this transformation, our leaders must be able to demonstrate values-based leadership practices to maximize employee engagement each and every day. Marshall’s teachings remind us of how personal growth and change are a never-ending journey.”

—JOHN HAMMERGREN, CEO, McKesson

“A great coach teaches you how to improve yourself. Marshall is a great coach! He has a unique ability to help you determine what you can improve and what will have the greatest impact on the people you lead and love.”

—BRIAN WALKER, CEO, Herman Miller

“Marshall is the coach’s coach. No one is more of a listener, who learns from us (his students), from what we say or do not say. Taking from what he has heard, he molds for all of us a program to make us and our people better for having been in his presence.”

—ALAN HASSENFELD, chairman, Hasbro

“Marshall Goldsmith has a simple, yet powerful approach for helping leaders excel. Its power lies not only in its simplicity, but in his unique ability to deliver practical insights that leaders can act upon. I seldom leave a session with Marshall without feeling a bit wiser than before.”

—JON KATZENBACH, founder, Katzenbach Partners, former director, McKinsey and Company, and author of many books, including *The Wisdom of Teams*

“Marshall is the rock star of coaching. His adoration is well deserved. He cares about the people he works with. He focuses on their issues. He connects great people with other great people so that they can continue to learn. He is honest, helpful, bold, and sensitive. He focuses on what can be, not what has been, and creates a future unbound by the past.”

—DAVID ULRICH, leading HR consultant and author of many books, including *Why the Bottom Line Isn’t*

“Marshall has a unique gift and a rare skill—the gift to get beneath the surface issues to identify the core developmental needs that must be resolved for someone to be successful, and the skill to make the person aware of them in a no-nonsense manner that, somehow, stimulates change rather than creating denial and resistance.”

—STEVE KERR, CLO, Goldman Sachs & Co., former CLO, GE, and president, Academy of Management

“In his charming, rascal-like manner, Marshall is able to address uncomfortable issues in a non-

threatening way. As a result, not only does the leader get better—the whole team gets better!”  
—GEORGE BORST, CEO, Toyota Financial Services

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“Marshall has helped me personally to improve as a leader and has provided the tools and dynamics to turn a well-functioning management team into a high-performance team where all the members have improved individually and considerably added to team performance.”  
—DAVID PYOTT, CEO, Allergan

“While Cessna focused on continuous improvement of business results, Marshall helped me focus on leadership team continuous improvement. The impact is amazing. His practical no-nonsense approach is making a positive impact both professionally and personally on all of us. I have never had so much fun working on such a tough topic. Thank you, Marshall!”  
—JACK PELTON, CEO, Cessna

“Marshall Goldsmith is the world’s greatest coach because he has extraordinary life skills, the ability to connect deeply with others while remaining objective, and a passion for sharing everything he knows. He focuses—and helps others to focus—on what matters most in life, and brings unforgettable insights and excitement to every encounter.”  
—SALLY HELGESEN, global expert on developing women leaders and author of *The Female Advantage* and *The Web of Inclusion*

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To all successful leaders  
who want to  
“take it to the next level”  
and get even better

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*“Happy are they that can hear their detractions and put them to mending.”*

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—WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE,  
*Much Ado About Nothing*

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Despite the help of all of the people named above, I am sure these pages contain at least a few errata or statements. For these I ask your forgiveness and take full responsibility. To paraphrase another hero of mine, Buddha: *Please just use what works for you and let go of the rest.*

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What Got You Here  
Won't Get You There

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## SECTION ONE

# The Trouble with Success

In which we learn how our previous success often prevents us from achieving more success

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# CHAPTER 1

## You Are Here

**YOU KNOW THOSE MAPS** in shopping malls that say, “You Are Here”? They exist to orient you in unfamiliar territory, to tell you where you are, where you want to go, and how to get there.

A few people never need these maps. They’re blessed with an internal compass that orients them automatically. They always make the correct turn and end up where they intended via the most economical route.

Some people actually go through life with this unerring sense of direction. It guides them not only in shopping malls but in their school years, careers, marriages, and friendships. When we meet people like this, we say they’re grounded. They know who they are and where they’re going. We feel secure around them. We feel that any surprises will only be pleasant surprises. They are our role models and heroes.

We all know people like this. For some of us, it’s our moms or dads—people who served as moral anchors in our stormy childhoods. For others it’s a spouse (the proverbial “better half”). For others (like me) it’s a college professor who was the first person to puncture our pretensions (more on that later). It could be a mentor at work, a coach in high school, a hero from the history books such as Lincoln or Churchill, a religious leader such as Buddha, Mohammed, or Jesus. It could even be a celebrity. (I know one man who solves every dilemma by asking himself, “What would Paul Newman do?”)

What all of these role models have in common is an exquisite sense of who they are, which translates into perfect pitch about how they come across to others.

A few people never seem to need any help in getting to where they want to go. They have a built-in GPS mechanism.

These people do not need my help.

The people I meet during the course of my working day as an executive coach are great people who may have lost their internal “You Are Here” map. For example:

**Case 1.** *Carlos is the CEO of a successful food company. He is brilliant, hard-working, and an expert in his field. He started out on the factory floor and rose through sales and marketing to the top spot. There is nothing in his business that he hasn’t seen firsthand. Like many creative people, he is also hyperactive, with the metabolism and attention span of a hummingbird. He loves to buzz around his company’s facilities, dropping in on employees to see what they’re working on and shoot the breeze. Carlos loves people and he loves to talk. All in all, Carlos presents a very charming package, except when his mouth runs ahead of his brain.*

*One month ago his design team presented him with their ideas for the packaging of a new line of snacks. Carlos was delighted with the designs. He only had one suggestion.*

*“What do you think about changing the color to baby blue?” he said. “Blue says expensive and upmarket.”*

*Today the designers are back with the finished packaging. Carlos is pleased with the results. But he muses aloud, “I think it might be better in red.”*

*The design team in unison roll their eyes. They are confused. A month ago their CEO said he*



preferred blue. They've busted their humps to deliver a finished product to his liking, and now he's changed his mind. They leave the meeting dispirited and less than enthralled with Carlos.

Carlos is a very confident CEO. But he has a bad habit of verbalizing any and every internal monologue in his head. And he doesn't fully appreciate that this habit becomes a make-or-break issue as people ascend the chain of command. A lowly clerk expressing an opinion doesn't get people's notice at a company. But when the CEO expresses that opinion, everyone jumps to attention. The higher up you go, the more your suggestions become orders.

Carlos thinks he's merely tossing an idea against the wall to see if it sticks. His employees think he's giving them a direct command.

Carlos thinks he's running a democracy, with everyone allowed to voice their opinion. His employees think it's a monarchy, with Carlos as king.

Carlos thinks he's giving people the benefit of his years of experience. His employees see it as micromanaging and excessive meddling.

Carlos has no idea how he's coming across to his employees.

**He is guilty of Habit #2: Adding too much value.**

**Case 2.** Sharon is the editor of a major magazine. She is highly motivated, energetic, articulate, and loaded with charisma. For someone who has spent much of her adult life working with words and pictures, she has developed impressive people skills. She can coax delinquent writers into meeting their deadlines. She can inspire her staff to stay at their desks late into the night when she decides to tear up the next issue at the last minute. She believes she can persuade anyone if she really puts her mind to it. Her publisher often invites her on sales calls to advertisers because of her charm and her ability to sell the magazine.

Sharon is particularly proud of her ability to spot and nurture young editorial talent. The proof is in the bright energetic editorial team she has assembled. Editors at competitive magazines call them the Sharonistas, because of their almost militant allegiance to Sharon. They've been working with her for years. Their loyalty is unwavering. And Sharon returns their affection with equally fierce loyalty. The loyalty may seem excessive, especially if you work for Sharon but don't quite qualify as a Sharonista.

In today's editorial meeting, where future assignments are meted out to the staff, Sharon offered up an observation that might make a good cover story. One of the Sharonistas immediately seconded the idea, saying it was "brilliant." Sharon assigned the story to her. And so the meeting proceeded, with Sharon handing out plum assignments to her staff favorites—all of whom returned the favor by fawning over Sharon and agreeing with everything she said.

If you happened to be one of Sharon's favored staffers, the lovefest at the editorial meeting would be the highlight of your month. On the other hand, if you were not one of Sharon's favored staffers or happened to disagree with her, the sycophancy level in the room would have been transparent and sickening. After a few months of this treatment, you would have been emailing your résumé to other magazines.

None of this was apparent to Sharon, who was otherwise extremely shrewd about people and their motives. She believed she was being an effective leader. She was developing people who shared her vision for the magazine. She was building a solid team that could operate seamlessly.

Sharon thought she was encouraging the staff to grow and eventually emulate her success. The staffers outside her inner circle thought she was encouraging sucking up.

**Sharon is guilty of Habit #14: Playing favorites.**

**Case 3.** *Martin is a financial consultant for a prominent New York City firm. He manages money for high-net-worth individuals. The minimum starting account is \$5 million. Martin is very good at what he does. He takes home a seven-figure salary. That's a lot less than most of his clients make in a year. But Martin doesn't envy or resent his clients. He lives and breathes investments. And he loves providing a valued service for his well-heeled clients, many of them CEOs, some of them self-made entrepreneurs, some of them entertainment stars, and the rest of them beneficiaries of inherited wealth. Martin enjoys rubbing shoulders with his clients. He likes talking to them on the phone and giving them the benefit of his expertise over lunch or dinner—almost as much as he likes beating the market by four points each year. Martin is not a manager of other people. He operates as a lone wolf at his firm. His only obligation is to his clients and seeing that they're happy with the state of their portfolios from year to year.*

*Today is one of the biggest days of Martin's life. He's been invited to manage a portion of the investment portfolio of one of America's most admired business titans. People with enormous net worth often do that, parceling out their millions to several money managers as a protective hedge. Martin has a chance to join an elite group in the titan's stable. If he's successful, there's no telling how many more clients will spring from this relationship.*

*He's calling on the titan in his office perched high atop Rockefeller Center. Martin knows that this will be his only chance to make a good impression on the titan. He has one hour to gain his confidence and trust—and the millions in his account.*

*Martin has done this many times. He has a veteran's poise and confidence when he sells himself to a prospect—and he also has a superlative track record of market-beating returns. So it's a little surprising that he doesn't rise to the occasion in his meeting with the titan.*

*Immediately upon entering the titan's office, when the titan says, "Tell me a little about yourself," Martin starts selling his expertise. He tries to dazzle the titan with a rundown of his more prescient trades, explaining in great detail his investment rationale and how he ended up miles ahead of the competition. He talks about some of his more prominent clients. He outlines some ideas he has for the titan's portfolio and where he sees various markets heading in the near and long terms.*

*Martin is on such a roll that he doesn't notice that the scheduled hour has gone by in a flash. That is when the titan stands up and thanks Martin for taking the time to see him. Martin's a little surprised by the abrupt ending to the meeting. He never got the chance to ask the titan about his goals, his attitude to risk, and what he was looking for in a portfolio manager. But as he rewinds the meeting in his mind, Martin is satisfied that he presented a strong case for himself, hitting all the high notes in his pitch.*

*The next day Martin receives a handwritten note from the titan thanking him again but informing him that he will be going in another direction. Martin has lost the account and he has no idea why.*

*Martin thought he was winning over the titan with overwhelming evidence of his financial acumen. The titan was thinking, "What an egotistical jackass. When's he going to ask what's on my mind? I'm never letting this fellow near my money."*

**Martin is guilty of Habit #20: An excessive need to be "me."**

It's not that these people don't know who they are or where they're going or what they want to achieve. Nor is it that they don't have an adequate sense of self-worth. In fact, they tend to be very successful (and their self-esteem can often be excessive). 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 clients. (And that's not just true at work; the same goes for their home life.)

They think they have all the answers, but others see it as arrogance.

They think they're contributing to a situation with helpful comments, but others see it as butting in.

They think they're delegating effectively, but others see it as shirking responsibilities.

They think they're holding their tongue, but others see it as unresponsiveness.

They think they're letting people think for themselves, but others see it as ignoring them.

Over time these "minor" workplace foibles begin to chip away at the goodwill we've all accumulated in life and that other people normally extend to colleagues and friends. That's when the minor irritation blows up into a major crisis.

Why does this happen? More often than not, it's because people's inner compass of correct behavior has gone out of whack—and they become clueless about their position among their coworkers.

In an article that ran in *The New Yorker*, film director Harold Ramis commented on the reasons behind the fading career of Chevy Chase, one of the stars of Ramis's *Caddyshack*. Ramis said, "Do you know the concept of proprioception, of how you know where you are and where you're oriented? Chevy lost his sense of proprioception, lost touch with what he was projecting to people. It's strange because you couldn't write Chevy as a character in a novel, because his whole attitude is just superiority: 'I'm Chevy Chase and you're not.' "

Well, I work as an executive coach with successful people who have a slightly dented sense of proprioception. They look at the map of their life and career. It tells them, "You Are Here." But they don't accept it. They may resist the truth. They may think (like Chevy Chase's famous line), "I'm successful and you're not." Which is their license to think, "Why change if it's working?"

I wish I had the power to snap my fingers and make these people immediately see the need to change. I wish I could beam them into *Groundhog Day* (another Ramis film and one of my all-time favorites because it's about how people can change for the better), and make them relive the same day—perhaps their worst day—over and over again until they mend their ways. I wish I had the temperament to shake them by the shoulders and make them face reality. I wish I could turn their flaws into life-threatening diseases—because it would compel them to change, on pain of death.

But I can't and I don't. Instead, I show these people what their colleagues at work *really* think of them. It's called feedback. It's the only tool I need to show people, "You Are Here." And in this book I will show you how to wield that weapon on yourself and others.

It doesn't take much to get people reoriented—out of the maze and back on the right path. The problems we'll be looking at in this book are not life-threatening diseases (although ignored for too long they can destroy a career). They're not deep-seated neuroses that require years of therapy or tons of medication to erase. More often than not, they are simple behavioral tics—bad habits that we repeat dozens of times a day in the workplace—which can be cured by (a) pointing them out, (b) showing the havoc they cause among the people surrounding us, and (c) demonstrating that with a slight behavioral tweak we can achieve a much more appealing effect.

It's a little like a stage actor who keeps stepping on a pivotal line in a comedy, thus ruining any chance of securing a big laugh from the audience. It's the director's job to notice this and alter the actor's delivery so that the line elicits the essential roar of laughter from the audience. No laugh, no play. If the actor can't adjust his delivery successfully, the producer will find someone who can.

Well, think of me as a caring director who helps you deliver your lines for maximum effect.

A journalist once told me that the most important thing he's learned in his career is this: "Put a comma in the wrong place and the whole sentence is screwed up." You may have an admirable skill set for a journalist. You can investigate the facts like the CSI team. You can interview people as if you've known them all your life. You can empathize with victims and excoriate the bad guys. You can

spin words together beautifully on deadline and create rich meaningful metaphors that leave readers gasping with admiration. And yet, if you put a comma in the wrong place, that tiny sin of commission can wipe out the rest of your contributions.

Think of me as a friendly grammarian who can shield you from bad punctuation.

A chef at one of my favorite restaurants in San Diego told me that his signature dish succeeds or fails on one secret ingredient (which, like Coca-Cola's heavily guarded recipe, he refuses to reveal). Leave it out and the patrons' plates come back to the kitchen only half eaten. Sprinkle it in the proper amount and the plates come back clean.

Think of me as the honest diner who sends back the meal untouched to let you know that something is missing.

Actors stepping on a line. Writers misusing commas. Chefs leaving out a key ingredient. That's what we're talking about here in the workplace: People who do one annoying thing repeatedly on the job—and don't realize that this small flaw may sabotage their otherwise golden career. And, worse, they do not realize that (a) it's happening and (b) they can fix it.

This book is your map—a map that can turn the maze of wrong turns in the workplace into a straight line to the top.

In the arc of what can be a long successful career, you will always be in transit from “here” to “there.”

Here can be a great place. If you're successful, here is exactly the kind of place you want to be. Here is a place where you can be the CEO of a thriving company. Here is a place where you can be the editor of one of America's top magazines. Here is a place where you can be an in-demand financial manager.

But here is also a place where you can be a success in spite of some gaps in your behavior or personal makeup.

That's why you want to go “there.” There can be a better place.

There is a place where you can be a CEO who is viewed as a great leader because he doesn't get in the way of his people. There is a place where you can be a great editor who builds a strong team and treats all of her direct reports with respect. There is a place where you can be a financial pro who listens well and delivers the message that he cares more about his clients' goals than his own needs.

You don't have to be a CEO or leading editor or financial wizard to benefit from this book. Look at your own personal map. Trace the distance between your vision of here and there.

You are here.

You can get there.

But you have to understand that what got you here won't get you there.

Let the journey begin.

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## CHAPTER 2

### Enough About You

**LET'S TALK ABOUT ME.** Who am I to tell you how to change?

My career as an executive coach began with a phone call from the CEO of a Fortune 100 company. I had just given a leadership clinic to the CEO's human resources department. That's what I was doing back then in the late 1980s: Advising HR departments about identifying future leaders in their companies and creating programs to form them into better leaders. The CEO attended the session and must have heard something that struck a nerve. That's why he was using his very valuable time to call me. Something was on his mind.

"Marshall, I've got this guy running a big division who delivers his numbers and more every quarter," said the CEO. "He's a young, smart, dedicated, ethical, motivated, hard-working, entrepreneurial, creative, charismatic, arrogant, stubborn, know-it-all jerk.

"Trouble is, we're a company built on team values, and no one thinks he's a team player. I'm giving him a year to change, or he's out. But you know something, it would be worth a fortune to us if we could turn this guy around."

My ears perked up at the word "fortune." Up until then I had been teaching large groups of leaders how to change behavior—their own and that of their peers and direct reports. I had never worked one-on-one with an executive before, and certainly not with someone who was one click away from the CEO's chair at a multi-billion-dollar company. I didn't know this fellow, but from the CEO's terse description I had a good picture in my mind. He was a success junkie, the kind of guy who had triumphed at each successive rung of the achievement ladder. He liked to win whether it was at work or at touch football, in a poker game, or in an argument with a stranger. He could charm a customer, turn everyone around to his position in a meeting, and get his bosses to want to help him advance through the organization. He had "high potential" stamped on his forehead since the day he entered the company. He was also financially independent—rich enough that he didn't *have* to work, he *wanted* to.

All of these ingredients—the talent, charm, and brains, the unbroken track record of success, the screw-you money in the bank that let him think he could flip off the world—made this fellow a potent mix of stubbornness and pride and defensiveness. How could I help someone like this change, someone whose entire life—from his paycheck to his title to the hundreds of direct reports who did his daily bidding—was an affirmation that he was doing everything right? More important, even if I had an inkling how to do it, why would I want to beat my head against this particular wall?

I was intrigued by the challenge—and the word "fortune." I had coached plenty of mid-level managers in groups before. These were people on the verge of success, but not quite there yet. Could my methods work on a more elite flight of executive material? Could I take someone who was demonstrably successful and make him or her more successful? It would be an interesting test.

I told the CEO, "I might be able to help."

The CEO sighed, "I doubt it."

"Tell you what," I said. "I'll work with him for a year. If he gets better, pay me. If not, it's all free."

The next day I caught a return flight to New York City to meet the CEO and his division chief.

That was twenty years ago. Since then I've personally worked with more than one hundred executives of similar status, brainpower, wealth, and achievement, who have at least one incredible

career-damaging interpersonal challenge.

That's what I do now. I have a Ph.D. in organizational behavior from UCLA and 29 years of experience measuring and analyzing behavior in organizations. Now I apply it one-on-one with very successful people who want to be more successful. My job is not to make them smarter or richer. My job is to help them—to identify a personal habit that's annoying their coworkers and to help them eliminate it—so that they retain their value to the organization. My job is to make them see that the skills and habits that have taken them this far might not be the right skills and habits to take them further.

What got them here won't get them there.

But I don't work only with the super-successful. That's a critical part of my business, but I spend most of my time teaching people who reside somewhere below the absolute top rungs of the organizational ladder. They need help too. There is no correlation between an individual's standing in the corporate pyramid and what his coworkers think of his interpersonal skills. Middle managers are no less immune than CEOs to being perceived as arrogant, inattentive, rude, and unfoundedly omniscient. My target audience is the huge cohort of people who are successful in their own minds but want to be even more successful.

I train people to behave effectively in the workplace—by enrolling them in a simple but brutal regimen.

First, I solicit “360-degree feedback” from their colleagues—as many as I can talk to up, down, and sideways in the chain of command, often including family members—for a comprehensive assessment of their strengths and weaknesses.

Then I confront them with what everybody really thinks about them. Assuming that they accept this information, agree that they have room to improve, and commit to changing that behavior, then I show them how to do it.

I help them *apologize* to everyone affected by their flawed behavior (because it's the only way to erase the negative baggage associated with our prior actions) and ask the same people for help in getting better.

I help them *advertise* their efforts to get better because you have to tell people that you're trying to change; they won't notice it on their own.

Then I help them *follow up* religiously every month or so with their colleagues because it's the only honest way to find out how you're doing and it also reminds people that you're still trying.

As an integral part of this follow-up process, I teach people to *listen without prejudice* to what their colleagues, family members, and friends are saying—that is, listen without interrupting or arguing.

I also show them that the only proper response to whatever they hear is *gratitude*. That is, I teach them how to say “Thank you” without ruining the gesture or embellishing it. I am a huge apostle for thanking.

Finally, I teach them the miracle of *feedforward*, which is my “special sauce” methodology for eliciting advice from people on what they can do to get better in the future.

It's often humbling for these overachievers, but after 12 to 18 months they get better—not only in their own minds but, more important, in the opinions of their coworkers.

As I say, it's a simple process but how I got here could fill a book—this book. And I hasten to add that it is a book that can help a lot more people than just the super-successful among us. That would be like writing a golf instructional just for PGA Tour players. An interesting exercise, perhaps, but useful to only .000001 percent of the golf playing universe. It's not worth the effort.

I don't use a golf analogy lightly. I live next to a golf course, where I can observe golfers, and I am

convinced that in the context of helping successful people get better, nothing is more relevant than golf instruction. Golfers suffer all the symptoms of successful people, perhaps even more acutely.

For one thing, they're delusional about their success. They claim (and even believe) they're doing better than they really are. If they break 90 one time out of a hundred rounds, that exceptional round will quickly become their "usual game."

Golfers are also delusional about how they achieved success. That's why they award themselves second shots (called mulligans) when the first ones go in the wrong direction, move the ball from an awkward lie, conveniently neglect to count the occasional errant stroke, and otherwise fiddle with the rules and scorecard, all in an effort to buff up their handicaps and take credit for a better game than they actually possess.

Golfers, like business people, also tend to be delusional about their weaknesses, which they deny. This explains why they spend much of their time practicing what they're already good at and little time on areas of their game that need work.

How are these traits any different than bosses who claim more credit for a success than they're entitled to, who stretch the truth to gain an advantage, and who think they're strong in areas where others know they are weak?

Golfers, like the leaders I coach, have one singularly noble quality: No matter how good they are, whether they sport a 30 handicap or play to scratch, *they all want to get better*. That's why they're always practicing, scheduling lessons, trying out new equipment, fiddling with their swing, and poring over instructional advice in magazines and books.

That's the spirit underlying this book. It's aimed at anyone *who wants to get better*—at work, at home, or any other venue.

If I can help you consider the possibility that, despite your demonstrable success and laudable self-esteem, you might not be as good as you think you are; that all of us have corners in our behavioral makeup that are messy; and that these messy corners can be pinpointed and tidied up, then I can leave the world—and your world—a slightly better place than I found it.

Okay. Enough about me. Let's get back to you.

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## CHAPTER 3

# The Success Delusion, or Why We Resist Change

UNUM, THE INSURANCE COMPANY, ran an ad some years ago showing a powerful grizzly bear in the middle of a roaring stream, with his neck extended to the limit, jaws wide open, teeth flaring. The bear was about to clamp on to an unsuspecting airborne salmon jumping upstream. The headline read: YOU PROBABLY FEEL LIKE THE BEAR. WE'D LIKE TO SUGGEST YOU'RE THE SALMON.

The ad was designed to sell disability insurance, but it struck me as a powerful statement about how all of us in the workplace delude ourselves about our achievements, our status, and our contributions. We

- Overestimate our contribution to a project
- Take credit, partial or complete, for successes that truly belong to others
- Have an elevated opinion of our professional skills and our standing among our peers
- Conveniently ignore the costly failures and time-consuming dead-ends we have created
- Exaggerate our projects' impact on net profits because we discount the real and hidden costs built into them (the costs are someone else's problems; the success is ours)

All of these delusions are a direct result of success, not failure. That's because we get positive reinforcement from our past successes, and, in a mental leap that's easy to justify, we think that our past success is predictive of great things in our future.

This is not necessarily a bad thing. This wacky delusional belief in our godlike omniscience instills us with confidence, however unearned it may be. It erases doubt. It blinds us to the risks and challenges in our work. If we had a complete grip on reality, seeing every situation for exactly what it is, we wouldn't get out of bed in the morning. After all, the most realistic people in our society are the chronically depressed.

But our delusions become a serious liability when we need to change. We sit there with the same godlike feelings, and when someone tries to make us change our ways we regard them with unadulterated bafflement.

It's an interesting three-part response.

First, we think the other party is confused. They're misinformed and don't know what they're talking about. They have us mixed up with someone who truly does need to change, but we are not that person.

Second, as it dawns on us that maybe the other party is not confused—maybe their information about our perceived shortcomings is accurate—we go into denial mode. The criticism does not apply to us, or else we wouldn't be so successful.

Finally, when all else fails, we attack the other party. We discredit the messenger. "Why is a smart guy like me," we think, "listening to a loser like you?"

Those are just the initial surface responses—the denial mechanisms. Couple them with the very positive interpretations that successful people assign to (a) their past performance, (b) their ability to



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