

Book Summary: "What Got You Here Won't Get You There"

by Marshall Goldsmith

Subtitled "*How Successful People Become Even More Successful*," this book focuses on continuous improvement, especially for those people who have already achieved a certain level of success. The issue lies in a belief that "I'm successful" and the thinking of "Why change if it's working?" However, these people have as much reason to change and improve as any of us...and to recognize that **the skills and habits that have taken them this far might not be the rights skills and habits to take them further.** What got them here won't get them there.

To set the stage, Goldsmith writes about the "success delusion," where we delude ourselves about our achievements, our status, and our contributions. For example, in the workplace, we:

- Overestimate our contributions to a project
- Take credit for successes that truly belong to others
- Have an elevated opinion of our professional skills
- Conveniently ignore the costly failures and time-consuming dead-ends we have created

In addition to other obvious issues, our delusions become a serious liability when we need to change. And change is even more difficult because **one of the greatest mistakes of successful people is the assumption, "I am successful. I behave this way. Therefore I am successful *because* I behave this way!"** **The challenge is to make them see that sometimes they are successful *in spite of* this behavior.**

Goldsmith focuses on practices that successful people need to *stop* doing because too often we limit our change initiatives to what we need to *start* doing. He also contends that it is easier to stop doing bad things (an act of omission) than it is to institute many positive changes at one time (acts of commission). So he identified **twenty habits, the most common faults and challenges in interpersonal behavior, "transactional flaws performed by one person against others," that successful people who are committed to change need to *stop* doing.**

1. **Winning too much:** The need to win at all costs and in all situations-when it matters, when it doesn't, and when it's totally beside the point.
2. **Adding too much value:** The overwhelming desire to add our two cents to every discussion.
3. **Passing judgment:** The need to rate others and impose our standards on them.
4. **Making destructive comments:** The needless sarcasms and cutting remarks that we think make us sound sharp and witty.
5. **Starting with "No," "But," or "However":** The overuse of these negative qualifiers which secretly say to everyone, "I'm right. You're wrong."
6. **Telling the world how smart we are:** The need to show people we're smarter than they think we are.
7. **Speaking when angry:** Using emotional volatility as a management tool.

8. **Negativity, or "Let me explain why that won't work"**: The need to share our negative thoughts even when we weren't asked.
9. **Withholding information**: The refusal to share information in order to maintain an advantage over others.
10. **Failing to give proper recognition**: The inability to praise and reward.
11. **Claiming credit that we don't deserve**: The most annoying way to overestimate our contribution to any success.
12. **Making excuses**: The need to reposition our annoying behavior as a permanent fixture so people excuse us for it.
13. **Clinging to the past**: The need to deflect blame away from ourselves and onto events and people from our past; a subset of blaming everyone else.
14. **Playing favorites**: Failing to see that we are treating someone unfairly.
15. **Refusing to express regret**: The inability to take responsibility for our actions, admit we're wrong, or recognize how our actions affect others.
16. **Not listening**: The most passive-aggressive form of disrespect for colleagues.
17. **Failing to express gratitude**: The most basic form of bad manners.
18. **Punishing the messenger**: The misguided need to attack the innocent who are usually only trying to help us.
19. **Passing the buck**: The need to blame everyone but ourselves.
20. **An excessive need to be "me"**: Exalting our faults as virtues simply because they're who we are.

Goldsmith devotes so much energy to identifying interpersonal challenges in successful people because **the higher you go, the more your problems are behavioral**. It's typically not about flaws of skill, flaws in intelligence, or even flaws of unchangeable personality. **As we advance in our careers, behavioral changes are often the only significant changes we *can* make.**

Having identified these common challenges in interpersonal behavior, how can an already-successful person change for the better? We'll cover Goldsmith's **seven-step method for changing our interpersonal relationships and making these changes permanent** next month in [part 2 of this book summary](#).

Seven-step method for already-successful people to change their interpersonal relationships and to make these changes permanent:

Step 1: Feedback

Goldsmith writes that successful people only have two problems dealing with negative feedback, but that 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. However **obtaining honest, confidential feedback is critical to understanding what a person needs to change**. Goldsmith prefers conducting a 360-degree feedback review, soliciting input about his client from all the people he or she works with regularly. The really interesting stuff that is learned is the information that's known to others but unknown to us (in other words our "*blind spots*").

Step 2: Apologizing

The author regards apologizing as "the most magical, healing, restorative gesture human beings can make." And it is the centerpiece of his work with executives who want to get better - because **without the apology there is "no recognition that mistakes have been made, there is no announcement to the world of the intention to change, and most important there is no emotional contract between you and the people you care about."** The healing process begins with an apology. His simple process for apologizing is to say "I'm sorry. I'll try to do better in the future." And then...you say nothing. Don't explain it. Don't complicate it. Don't qualify it. Merely apologize and then move on to telling the world.

Step 3: Telling the World, or Advertising

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. Goldsmith writes that **it's a lot harder to change people's perception of your behavior than it is to change your behavior**, and that you have to get 100% better in order to 10% credit for it from your coworkers. But the odds improve considerably if you tell people that you are trying to change and how hard you are working at it, repeating the message week after week. And your odds improve even more if you ask everyone for ideas to help you get better.

Step 4: Listening

Goldsmith contends that 80% of our success in learning from other people is based upon how well we listen. However listening is not, as many people believe, a passive activity where you sit there and don't do anything while you hear someone out. Good listeners regard what they do as a highly active process - with every muscle engaged, especially the brain. Basically, there are **three things that all good listeners do**: They think before they speak; they listen with respect; and they're always gauging their response by asking themselves whether what they're about to say is worth what the other person will feel after hearing it.

Step 5: Thanking

Thanking works because it expresses one of our most basic emotions: gratitude. Saying "Thank you" is a crucial feature of etiquette and being mannerly, and, if done sincerely, can create closure in any potentially explosive discussion. **What can you say after someone thanks you?** You can't try to prove them wrong. You can't trump them or get angry or ignore them. The only response, Goldsmith writes,

"is to utter two of the most gracious, inviting, and sweet words in the language: "You're welcome." It's music to anyone's ears." So, get used to saying "Thank you."

Step 6: Following Up

Once you master the subtle arts of apologizing, advertising, listening, and thanking, you must follow up - relentlessly. Go back to coworkers every month or so and ask for them for comments and suggestions. If you do this your colleagues will eventually begin to accept that you're getting better - but not because you say so but because they do. The bottom-line from Goldsmith's research is that **people don't get better without follow-up**. Following up shows that you care about getting better. Following up with your coworkers shows that you value their opinions. And following up *consistently* shows that you are taking the process seriously. Becoming a better person is a process, not an event.

Step 7: Practicing Feedforward

With the previous six skills, you're now ready for *feedforward* (as opposed to *feedback* which focuses on the past). It's a simple idea that has **four simple steps**:

- 1) Pick the one behavior that you would like to change which would make a significant, positive difference in your life;
- 2) Describe this objective in a one-on-one dialogue with *anyone* you know;
- 3) Ask that person for two **suggestions for the future** that might help you achieve a positive change in our selected behavior (these two ideas represent *feedforward*); and
- 4) Listen attentively to the suggestions. Don't judge, rate, or critique the suggestions in any way. The only response you're permitted is "Thank you." Then repeat this four-step process with others.

It works because we can change the future but not the past.