



What Got You Here Won't Get You There

How Successful People Become Even More Successful!

Marshall Goldsmith with Mark Reiter
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Take-Aways

- Some of the behaviors that enable people to become successful can inhibit their ultimate rise to the top.
- The higher your level of success, the more destructive your bad habits become.
- When behavioral foibles become behavioral crises, the time has come to change.
- Stopping a bad behavior can be more productive than doing something right.
- Twenty common bad habits can undermine your leadership.
- These bad habits include overemphasis on needing to win, as well as not listening, playing favorites, placing blame and making excuses.
- Being judgmental, volatile, negative or secretive are also bad habits.
- The twenty-first bad habit is "goal obsession," which happens when your need to achieve a particular goal overshadows your overall mission.
- You can follow a simple, seven-step procedure to cure a bad workplace habit.
- First seek feedback. Then apologize, advertise, listen, show gratitude, follow up and practice "feedforward" thinking.

Rating (10 is best)

Overall	Applicability	Innovation	Style
9	9	8	8

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Relevance

What You Will Learn

In this Abstract, you will learn: 1) How to handle the “paradox of success” – the fact that the behavior that helped you succeed now can bring you down; 2) How to identify a leader’s 20 most common, bad workplace habits; and 3) How to get rid of a bad habit in seven steps.

Recommendation

You’ve worked hard, sacrificed and devoted yourself to your career. Now you are enjoying your success, feeling confident and, yes, even a bit smug. Don’t get too comfortable. Leadership expert Marshall Goldsmith is here to remind you that the very traits that enabled you to become successful might lead to your downfall. Now that you are a leader, your behavioral quirks and weaknesses take on more weight and significance, and can do more harm than they could when you were an up-and-comer. Lucky for you, Goldsmith identifies the 20 most common shortcomings and provides a seven-step procedure for improving without a complete personal makeover. Usually, making a small adjustment or simply stopping the negative behavior is all it takes. Goldsmith is respected as a savvy, insightful executive coach. The clarity, humor and down-to-earth style of his book demonstrate why. *getAbstract* recommends it to those who want to improve their leadership skills and keep climbing up the corporate ladder.

Abstract

“The higher up you go in the organization, the more you need to make other people winners and not make it about winning yourself.”

“One of the greatest mistakes of successful people is the assumption, ‘I am successful. I behave this way. Therefore, I must be successful because I behave this way!’”

When a Quirk Becomes a Problem

Why would people at the height of their success and productivity need behavior modification? Ironically, it’s because often the very same behavior that made them so successful creates problems for them at the top. Unfortunately, many people have no clue how their behavior affects their bosses, co-workers, employees and clients. For example, one executive might be deeply committed to nurturing his or her team, yet others could see that behavior as playing favorites. An executive who might choose to mull over suggestions before making a decision gets stuck with the label “unresponsive.” When such behavioral quirks become behavioral crises, the time has come to seek a cure. This simple process requires identifying the negative behavior, showing the damage it causes and demonstrating that a small adjustment can solve the problem.

The “Paradox of Success”

Successful people possess four key attitudes that helped them become successful. However, these attitudes also make it difficult for them to change. This is “the paradox of success.” The four beliefs are: “I have succeeded,” “I can succeed,” “I will succeed” and “I choose to succeed.” People who see the past, present and future in light of these beliefs may feel that they don’t need to change or they are too busy to change. They may be unable to acknowledge a reason to change.

“The Higher You Go, The Further You Fall”

Most self-improvement programs emphasize the steps you must take to get better. However, sometimes not doing something is more advantageous than doing something. Avoiding a bad decision, stopping a nasty habit or not making a mistake can contribute more to the

“Successful people literally believe that through sheer force of personality or talent or brainpower, they can steer a situation in their direction.”

“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.”

“Every choice, big or small, is a risk-reward decision where your bottom-line thinking is, ‘What’s in it for me?’”

“It’s one thing to pursue your dreams – but not if that pursuit turns a dream into a nightmare.”

bottom line than closing a big deal. Most successful people possess extraordinary skills; that’s why they do well. But once people attain success, their bad habits or behavioral foibles move to the forefront. In fact, often, the more successful leaders become, the more their issues relate to their behavior, and the more power a behavioral problem has to halt their rise or contribute to their downfall.

“Twenty Bad Workplace Habits”

Leaders commonly manifest 20 specific bad habits. Any one of them can contribute to creating a destructive, unhappy or adversarial workplace. However, leaders can easily correct these flaws with a slight tweak in behavior. Most leaders are guilty of only one or two of these faults:

1. **“Winning too much”** – The most common behavioral problem among successful people is the all-consuming need to win, even when winning doesn’t matter. This need is often the root of many other bad workplace habits such as arguing, tuning people out, taking credit for someone else’s idea or withholding information.
2. **“Adding too much value”** – When someone comes to you with an idea and you immediately feel the need to improve it, you are guilty of adding too much value. This fault is common among experienced, successful people who feel that they are being told something they know or who believe that they already know a better way.
3. **“Passing judgment”** – Offering an opinion in a business setting is okay. But asking people for their opinion and then making a comment about it is not okay. Nobody likes to be judged. The next time you get a suggestion, remain neutral and simply say, “Thank you.”
4. **“Making destructive comments”** – Many successful people believe they are straight-shooters and pride themselves on their candor. But making critical comments or sarcastic remarks is never constructive. If you speak carelessly and thoughtlessly, the recipient will be hurt and will remember, even after you apologize. Comments that undermine someone are never instructive or funny; they only cause pain and humiliation.
5. **“Starting with ‘no,’ ‘but’ or ‘however’”** – No matter how well intentioned you are, when you listen to an idea, suggestion or comment, and begin your reply with “no,” “but” or “however,” you are communicating that you know better.
6. **“Telling the world how smart [you] are”** – Many leaders can’t resist letting everyone know just how smart they are. If you use phrases such as, “I already knew that,” you insult and alienate people, which is not very smart. Before you speak, ask yourself, “Is anything I might say worth saying?” If the answer is “no,” simply say, “Thank you.”
7. **“Speaking when angry”** – The problem with losing your temper at work is that you also lose control. Some managers use anger as a tool, but this approach often backfires. If you get angry, you’ll gain a reputation for being volatile and unbalanced.
8. **“Negativity,” or “Let me explain why that won’t work”** – Some people’s first response to any input is to point out that it won’t work and why. Such negativity may disguise itself as being helpful, but it is criticism wrapped in an “I know better” attitude. If your first response is always negative, people will become reluctant to present you with new ideas.
9. **“Withholding information”** – In the chess game of power in the workplace, withholding information is a favorite, albeit devious, gambit. Rather than giving you an advantage, however, this power play only breeds mistrust.
10. **“Failing to give proper recognition”** – If you want to foster resentment among your co-workers, this failing will do just that. People need to experience the emotional payoff of having their hard work, contribution and success acknowledged and appreciated.

“The beauty of knowing what to stop – of achieving this state of inspired neutrality – is that it is so easy to do.”

“People who can’t apologize at work may as well be wearing a t-shirt that says, ‘I don’t care about you.’”

“What matters is how easily we slip into small behavioral patterns that create friction in the workplace – and how just as easily we could assume behavioral patterns that don’t create friction.”

“In the past very bright people would put up with disrespectful behavior, but in the future they will leave.”

11. **“Claiming credit that [you] don’t deserve”** – Even worse than withholding recognition is claiming credit for someone else’s work. To avoid this workplace crime, just decide that the group’s achievement matters more than your individual achievement.
12. **“Making excuses”** – Excuses are not acceptable. They come in two categories: “blunt and subtle.” A blunt excuse is, “Sorry I’m late; I got caught in traffic.” A subtle excuse is when you blame some inherent failing like, “I’m bad at returning phone calls.” Ask yourself why you have such failings, and then do something about them.
13. **“Clinging to the past”** – This is an offshoot of the general tendency to place blame, and it stems from assigning the fault for mistakes to someone or some event that happened years ago. It reflects a lack of accountability.
14. **“Playing favorites”** – Managers often say that they want to be challenged, but in reality, it is often the yes-men and -women who get in the boss’s good graces. When an employee gets the boss’s approval based on something other than performance, favoritism is often the cause.
15. **“Refusing to express regret”** – Apologizing is very painful for many successful people, because they hate admitting that they were wrong. However, when you do apologize, you enable people to release ill feelings from the past and forge a new relationship in the future.
16. **“Not listening”** – Not listening is a common problem. This rude habit sends many negative messages such as, “I don’t care enough to pay attention” or, “Stop wasting my valuable time.” Leaders are often guilty of this tendency because they feel they already know what someone is about to say or they are two steps ahead of the other person.
17. **“Failing to express gratitude”** – Your automatic response to any suggestion should be, “Thank you.” Yet many successful people have difficulty uttering these two simple words. Many people wait for the perfect moment to express gratitude, or feel that showing gratitude will make them appear weak. However, “gratitude is a skill that we can never display too often.”
18. **“Punishing the messenger”** – This is several bad habits rolled into one. Specifically, it is the fault of responding with anger when someone tells you something you don’t want to hear even if it might be very constructive. Again, the best response is, “Thank you.”
19. **“Passing the buck”** – Exceptional leaders take responsibility, not only for themselves, but for the people who work for them. Not accepting blame is the flip side of taking credit for other people’s accomplishments. And, it is just as destructive.
20. **“An excessive need to be ‘me’”** – Transforming a failing into a virtue is the result of feeling that the flaw is an essential part of your make-up. When you excuse negative or destructive behavior with this attitude, it keeps you from deciding to change.

“The Twenty-First Bad Habit”

“Goal obsession” happens when a particular goal becomes more important than your overall mission. While this is not a bad habit in and of itself, it can instigate many questionable practices. For example, this obsession can cause people to lose their manners, adopt less than honest work methods or take advantage of others.

“A Seven-Step Method for Changing for the Better”

The seven steps you can take to correct any of the above bad habits are: “Feedback, apologizing, telling the world (or advertising), listening, thanking, following up and practicing ‘feedforward.’”

“We can’t see in ourselves what we can see so clearly in others.”

“As human beings we almost always suffer from a disconnect between the self we think we are and the self that the rest of the world sees in us.”

“If you want to change anything about yourself, the best time to start is now.”

The best method for identifying areas of strength and weakness is “360-degree feedback.” With this tactic, several people at every level in an organization provide information about how you – or someone else – is doing at work. If you are requesting feedback, ask the person you are interviewing to “Let go of the past, tell the truth, and be supportive and helpful.” Ask your friends, family members, co-workers and clients to participate. If you are interviewing a person to learn about someone else, pose such questions as, “Does this leader clearly communicate a vision, treat people with respect and solicit contrary opinions?” Responders rate their colleagues numerically, and should concentrate on “improving” not “judging.”

You can also gather feedback by closely observing people’s behavior, asking those closest to you for their input and heeding any remarks about your behavior that you hear often.

An apology serves three purposes. First, it claims responsibility for past mistakes. Second, it announces your commitment to change and, third, it works as an agreement between both parties. When you apologize, say the words, “I’m sorry. I’ll try to do better.” Then say nothing else. Do not qualify your behavior or make excuses for your actions.

Just saying you’re sorry for past behavior is not enough. You must announce loudly and clearly, again and again, that you are committed to making a change. This personal advertising helps you change other people’s perceptions of your behavior and it holds you accountable. It also gives people permission to monitor your progress and offer suggestions.

What separates merely successful people from the truly great leaders? One big difference is the ability to listen attentively and make the person you are listening to feel like the most important person in the room. Good listeners “think before they speak” and “listen with respect.” To employ exceptional listening skills, don’t interrupt or complete the other person’s sentence. Don’t respond with phrases such as “I knew that” or with phrases that include “no,” “but” and “however.” Ask intelligent, relevant questions.

To express gratitude, begin by simply saying, “Thank you.” Conveying sincere gratitude is a talent and an asset. It also helps diffuse potentially volatile situations. Go beyond good manners by performing this exercise: List the 25 people who have helped you the most in your life. Now, write a thank-you note to each of them.

Real, lasting change cannot occur without follow-up, which allows you to measure your improvement and reminds people that you’re working on changing. It shows you are serious about the process: and holds you accountable; it demonstrates that you care, and that other people’s perceptions and opinions matter to you. If you are undergoing a change, you also can ask someone supportive to coach you as you progress.

Seeking feedforward is a four-step process. First, choose a behavior you would like to change. Have a one-on-one conversation with someone to explain your desire for making this change. Ask that person for two suggestions about how you can make the change. Then, accept these suggestions as feedforward ideas you will implement. Repeat this process over and over with different people. Unlike feedback, feedforward is not about your past behavior. You can’t change the past. But, you can use sincere, feedforward suggestions to shape a better future.

About The Authors

Leadership expert **Dr. Marshall Goldsmith** has worked with more than 80 corporations. He serves on the teaching staff of the executive education program at the Tuck School of Business at Dartmouth. Literary agent **Mark Reiter** is a collaborator on 13 other books.