What Got You Here Won't Get You There

The owner of impressive credentials in the world of business, author and leadership coach Marshall Goldsmith details a practical pathway for leadership effectiveness in his book *What Got You Here Won't Get You There: How Successful People Become Even More Successful*. Putting the cookies on the lower shelf, a good chunk of the book is devoted to unpacking twenty annoying habits common to leaders, and how to fix them. From there, Goldsmith offers some insightful strategies about how the get the kind of candid feedback that leaders desperately need if they are going to get better.

Allow me to add one warning label: This book may be easy to read, but may be challenging to apply.

Check out these Book Notes to get an overview of the useful wisdom that Goldsmith presents.

Title: ***What Got You Here Won't Get You There: How Successful People Become Even More Successful***

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Book Description:

Whether you are near the top of the ladder or still have a ways to climb, this book serves as an essential guide to help you eliminate your dysfunctions and move to where you want to go.

Marshall Goldsmith is an expert at helping global leaders overcome their sometimes unconscious annoying habits and attain a higher level of success. His one-on-one coaching comes with a six-figure price tag. But, in this book, you get Marshall's great advice without the hefty fee!

Book Quotes:

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. LOCATION: 257

You are here. You can get there. But you have to understand that what got you here won't get you there. LOCATION: 271

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. LOCATION: 321

In other words, not only did he lean on his past success to maintain his successful attitude, but he relied on it even when his past performance was not so rosy—i.e., when the evidence contradicted his self-confidence. Successful people never drink from a glass that's half empty. LOCATION: 416

This is the classic definition of self-efficacy, and it may be the most central belief driving individual success. People who believe they can succeed see opportunities where others see threats. They're not afraid of uncertainty or ambiguity. They embrace it. They want to take greater risks and achieve greater returns. Given the choice, they will always bet on themselves. LOCATION: 441

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. When we do what we choose to do, we are committed. When we do what we have to do, we are compliant. LOCATION: 501

The only natural law I've witnessed in three decades of observing successful people's efforts to become more successful is this: People will do something—including changing their behavior—only if it can be demonstrated that doing so is in their own best interests as defined by their own values. LOCATION: 616

As a 10-year board member of the Peter Drucker Foundation, I had many opportunities to listen to this great man. Among the myriad wise things I have heard Peter Drucker say, the wisest was, "We spend a lot of time teaching leaders what to do. We don't spend enough time teaching leaders what to stop. Half the leaders I have met don't need to learn what to do. They need to learn what to stop." LOCATION: 691

There's a reason I devote so much energy to identifying interpersonal challenges in successful people. It's because the higher you go, the more your problems are behavioral. LOCATION: 830

That's why behavioral issues become so important at the upper rungs 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. LOCATION: 835

When people ask me if the leaders I coach can really change their behavior, my answer is this: As we advance in our careers, behavioral changes are often the only significant changes we can make. LOCATION: 855

Habits to break:

- Habit #1 Winning too much. LOCATION: 879

Winning too much is easily the most common behavioral problem that I observe in successful people. There's a fine line between being competitive and overcompetitive, between winning when it counts and when no one's counting—and successful people cross that line with alarming frequency. LOCATION: 880

- Habit #2 Adding too much value. LOCATION: 930

The problem is, you may have improved the content of my idea by 5 percent, but you've reduced my commitment to executing it by 50 percent, because you've taken away my ownership of the idea. My idea is now your idea—and I walk out of your office less enthused about it than when I walked in. That's the fallacy of added value. Whatever we gain in the form of a better idea is lost many times over in our employees' diminished commitment to the concept. LOCATION: 948

Don't get me wrong. I'm not saying that bosses have to zip their lips to keep their staff's spirits from sagging.

But the higher up you go in the organization, the more you need to make other people winners and not make it about winning yourself. LOCATION: 954

- Habit #3 Passing judgment. LOCATION: 972

Try this: For one week treat every idea that comes your way from another person with complete neutrality. Think of yourself as a human Switzerland. Don't take sides. Don't express an opinion. Don't judge the comment. If you find yourself constitutionally incapable of just saying "Thank you," make it an innocuous, "Thanks, I hadn't considered that." Or, "Thanks. You've given me something to think about." LOCATION: 1023

- Habit #4 Making destructive comments. LOCATION: 1037
- Habit #5 Starting with "No," "But," or "However." LOCATION: 1108

When you start a sentence with "no," "but," "however," or any variation thereof, no matter how friendly your tone or how many cute mollifying phrases you throw in to acknowledge the other person's feelings, the message to the other person is You are wrong. It's not, "I have a different opinion." It's not, "Perhaps you are misinformed." It's not, "I disagree with you." It's bluntly and unequivocally, "What you're saying is wrong, and what I'm saying is right." Nothing productive can happen after that. The general response from the other person (unless he or she is a saint willing to turn the other cheek) is to dispute your position and fight back. From there, the conversation dissolves into a pointless war. You're no longer communicating. You're both trying to win. LOCATION: 1124

- Habit #6 Telling the world how smart we are. LOCATION: 1160

This is another variation on our need to win. We need to win people's admiration. We need to let them know that we are at least their intellectual equal if not their superior. We need to be the smartest person in the room. It usually backfires. Many of us do this covertly and unwittingly all day long. LOCATION: 1161

- Habit #7 Speaking when angry. LOCATION: 1214

Emotional volatility is not the most reliable leadership tool. When you get angry, you are usually out of control. It's hard to lead people when you've lost control. LOCATION: 1216

- Habit #8 Negativity, or "Let me explain why that won't work." LOCATION: 127
- Habit #9 Withholding information. LOCATION: 1327

Intentionally withholding information is the opposite of adding value. We are deleting value. Yet it has the same purpose: To gain power. It's the same old need to win, only more devious. LOCATION: 1330

- Habit #10 Failing to give proper recognition. LOCATION: 1398

This is a sibling of withholding information. In withholding your recognition of another person's contribution to a team's success, you are not only sowing injustice and treating people unfairly but you are depriving people of the emotional payoff that comes with success. LOCATION: 1399

- Habit #11 Claiming credit that we don't deserve. LOCATION: 1430
- Habit #12 Making excuses. LOCATION: 1479
- Habit #13 Clinging to the past. LOCATION: 1546

But even with the blunt talk, clients who cling to the past—who want to understand why they are the way they

are—remain my toughest assignments. It takes me a long time to convince them that they can't do anything about the past. They can't change it, or rewrite it, or make excuses for it. All they can do is accept it and move on. LOCATION: 1560

- Habit #14 Playing favorites. LOCATION: 1585
- Habit #15 Refusing to express regret. LOCATION: 1631

Apologizing is one of the most powerful and resonant gestures in the human arsenal—almost as powerful as a declaration of love. It's "I love you" flipped on its head. If love means, "I care about you and I'm happy about it," then an apology means, "I hurt yu and I'm sorry about it." Either way, it's seductive and irresistible; it irrevocably changes the relationship between two people. It compels them to move forward into something new and, perhaps, wonderful together. LOCATION: 1661

- Habit #16 Not listening. LOCATION: 1690
- Habit #17 Failing to express gratitude. LOCATION: 1727
- Habit #18 Punishing the messenger. LOCATION: 1791
- Habit #19 Passing the buck. LOCATION: 1832
- Habit #20 An excessive need to be "me." LOCATION: 1887

Study the twenty annoying habits and you'll see that at least half of them are rooted in information compulsion. When we add value, or pass judgment, or make destructive comments, or announce that we "already knew that," or explain "why that won't work" we are compulsively sharing information. We're telling people something they don't know. We're convinced that we're making people smarter or inspiring them to do better, when we're more likely to achieve the opposite effect. Likewise, when we fail to give recognition, or claim credit we don't deserve, or refuse to apologize, or don't express our gratitude, we are withholding information. Sharing or withholding. They're two sides of the same tarnished coin. LOCATION: 2042

Until something better comes along, confidential 360-degree feedback is the best way for successful people to identify what they need to improve in their relationships at work. LOCATION: 2077

Successful people only have two problems dealing with negative feedback. However, 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. LOCATION: 2079

We need honest, helpful feedback. It's just hard to find. But I have a foolproof method for securing it. LOCATION: 2104

When I work with a coaching client, I always get confidential feedback from many of my client's coworkers at the beginning of the process. LOCATION: 2106

Each interview lasts about an hour and focuses on the basics: What is my client doing right, what does my client need to change, and how my (already successful) client can get even better! LOCATION: 2109

As part of my interview process, I enlist each of my client's coworkers to help me out. I want them to assist, not sabotage the change process. I let the coworker know how my process works by saying, "I'm going to be working with my client for the next year or so. I don't get paid if he doesn't get better. 'Better' is not defined by me. It's not defined by my client. 'Better' is defined by you and the other coworkers who will be involved in this process." LOCATION: 2117

In soliciting feedback for yourself, the only question that works—the only one!—must be phrased like this: "How can I do better?" LOCATION: 2286

If it isn't obvious by now, I regard apologizing as the most magical, healing, restorative gesture human beings can make. It is the centerpiece of my 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. Saying you're sorry to someone writes that contract in blood. LOCATION: 2546

You failed to appreciate that every successful project goes through seven phases: The first is assessing the situation; the second is isolating the problem; the third is formulating. But there are three more phases before you get to the seventh, implementation. Unfortunately, a lot of people don't pay close attention to phases four, five, and six—the vital period when you approach your coworkers to secure the all-important political buy-in to your plans. In each phase you must target a different constituency. In phase 4, you woo up—to get your superiors to approve. In phase 5, you woo laterally—to get your peers to agree. In phase 6, you woo down—to get your direct reports to accept. These three phases are the sine qua non of getting things done. You cannot skip or skim over them. You have to give them as much, if not more, attention, as you do phases one, two, three, and seven. If you don't, you may as well be working alone in a locked room where no one sees you, hears you, or knows you exist. That's the guaranteed result of committing "one, two, three, seven." LOCATION: 2700

Jack Nicklaus said that 80 percent of a successful golf shot begins with a proper grip and how you stand over the ball. In other words, success is almost a foregone conclusion before you exert one muscle. It's the same with listening: 80 percent of our success in learning from other people is based upon how well we listen. In other words, success or failure is determined before we do anything. LOCATION: 2750

The ability to make a person feel that, when you're with that person, he or she is the most important (and the only) person in the room is the skill that separates the great from the near-great. LOCATION: 2864

The only difference between us and the super-successful among us—the near-great and the great—is that the great ones do this all the time. It's automatic for them. For them there's no on and off switch for caring and empathy and showing respect. It's always on. They don't rank personal encounters as A, B, or C in importance. They treat everyone equally—and everyone eventually notices. LOCATION: 2889

After that, you're ready for a test drive. Put this book down and make your next interpersonal encounter—whether it's with your spouse or a colleague or a stranger—an exercise in making the other person feel like a million bucks. Try to employ the tiny tactics we've outlined here.

- Listen.
- Don't interrupt.
- Don't finish the other person's sentences.
- Don't say "I knew that."
- Don't even agree with the other person (even if he praises you, just say, "Thank you").
- Don't use the words "no," "but," and "however."
- Don't be distracted. Don't let your eyes or attention wander elsewhere while the other person is talking.
- Maintain your end of the dialogue by asking intelligent questions that (a) show you're paying attention, (b) move the conversation forward, and (c) require the other person to talk (while you listen).
- Eliminate any striving to impress the other person with how smart or funny you are. Your only aim is to let the other person feel that he or she is accomplishing that.

LOCATION: 2913

Once you master the subtle arts of apologizing, advertising, listening, and thanking, you must follow up—relentlessly. Or everything else is just a “program of the month.” LOCATION: 3007

This taught me a second lesson: There is an enormous disconnect between understanding and doing. Most 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. LOCATION: 3068

My conclusion was swift and unequivocal: People don’t get better without follow-up. LOCATION: 3083

The whole experience taught me a fourth lesson: Becoming a better leader (or a better person) is a process, not an event. LOCATION: 3096

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. LOCATION: 3252

Unlike feedback, which often introduces a discussion of mistakes and shortfalls, feedforward focuses on solutions, not problems. LOCATION: 3261

I have learned a hard lesson trying to help real people, change real behavior in the real world. There is no “couple of weeks.” Look at the trend line! Sanity does not prevail. There is a good chance that tomorrow is going to be just as crazy as today. If you want to change anything about yourself, the best time to start is now. Ask yourself, “What am I willing to change now?” Just do that. That’s more than enough. For now. LOCATION: 3680

I could see the scales slowly lifting from his eyes, so I pressed on with my theory about what may be the most egregious source of corporate dysfunction: the failure of managers to see the enormous disconnect between understanding and doing. Most leadership development revolves around one huge false assumption—that if people understand then they will do. That’s not true. Most of us understand, we just don’t do. LOCATION: 3919

This may sound harsh, but some people are unsalvageable. You’re only banging your head. LOCATION: 4056

Note: should you wish to find any quote in its original context, the Kindle “location” is provided after each entry.