

# LEADERSHIP HABITS THAT HOLD YOU BACK

by Beth Armknecht Miller



*In a world of rapid change, what worked yesterday often becomes a roadblock to your future.*

There is a difference between success that 1) happens *because* of our behavior, 2) happens by luck, and 3) that happens *in spite of* our behavior.

Marshall Goldsmith is one of the most successful executive coaches, working with Fortune 100 executives. The *Wall Street Journal* ranks him among the top 10 executive educators.

Goldsmith's primary insight in *What Got You Here, Won't Get You There* is that having good manners is good management and that bad habits keep highly successful people from succeeding to even higher levels. What differentiates the one from the other, he observes, has nothing to do with one's abilities, experience and training — and everything to do with behavior. Goldsmith explains that successful people often hold themselves back with limiting behaviors that they don't even know they have. Likewise, successful people tend to assume that the behaviors that got them to their current position, in time, will get them to the next level in an organization. Failing to realize either that their success has come in spite of their behavioral flaws, or that their behavior is preventing them from realizing their potential shows a lack of humility and the inability to self-reflect and assess.

**Directions:** On the next page are the top twenty habits discussed in *What Got You Here, Won't Get You There* by Marshall Goldsmith. No one is without bad habits. Pick the top three you need to improve on and then ask two people close to you to identify three they think you need to work on.

# Leadership Habits That Hold You Back

- 1. Winning too much: Goldsmith notes that the hyper competitive need to best others “underlies nearly every other behavioral problem.”
- 2. Adding too much value: This is when you can’t stop yourself from tinkering with your subordinates’ already viable ideas. “It’s extremely difficult,” Goldsmith observes, “for successful people to listen to other people tell them something where we believe we know a better way or can improve on their idea. The fallacy is that, while it may slightly improve an idea, it drastically reduces the other person’s commitment.
- 3. Passing judgment: It’s not appropriate to pass judgment when we specifically ask people to voice their opinions ... have you found yourself rating their answer?
- 4. Making destructive comments: We are all tempted to be brutally honest or even mean on occasion. What we should realize is that needless negative comments can harm our working relationships. “The question is not, ‘Is it true?’ but rather ‘Is it worth it?’
- 5. Starting with “No,” “But,” or “However”: We all do this from time to time, and most of us are totally unaware of it. Goldsmith says that if you watch out for it, “you’ll see how people inflict these words on others to gain or consolidate power. You’ll also see how intensely people resent it, consciously or not, and how it stifles rather than opens up discussion.’
- 6. Telling the world how smart we are: Our need to win drives us to let people know “I already knew that” or “I’m five steps ahead of you.” Being smart probably turns you on; announcing it turns those around you off.
- 7. Speaking when angry: When you get angry you are usually emotionally out of control. And you may justify it as a “management tool.”
- 8. Negativity or “Let me explain why that won’t work”: Goldsmith calls this “pure unadulterated negativity under the guise of being helpful.”
- 9. Withholding information: This behavior is all about control and power. How does it show up? 1) When we are too busy to get back to someone with valuable information, 2) when we forget to include someone in our discussions or meetings, 3) when we delegate a task to our subordinates but don’t take the time to show them exactly how we want it done.’

# Leadership Habits That Hold You Back

- 10. Failing to give recognition:** Failing to take the time or remember to do this, deprives people of the emotional payoff that comes with success. We may not realize how important it is to them.
- 11. Claiming credit we don't deserve:** To catch ourselves doing this, Goldsmith recommends listing all the times we mentally congratulate ourselves in a given day, and then reviewing the list to see if we really deserved all the credit we gave ourselves. Who else made that success possible?
- 12. Making excuses:** We do this both bluntly (by blaming our families on traffic, or the secretary, or something else outside ourselves) and subtly (with self-deprecating comments about our inherent tendency to procrastinate, or to lose our temper, that send the message, "That's just the way I am").
- 13. Clinging to the past:** "Understanding the past is perfectly admissible if your issue is accepting the past. But if your issue is changing the future, understanding will not take you there." Goldsmith notes that quite often we dwell on the past because it allows us to blame others for things that have gone wrong in our lives.
- 14. Playing favorites:** This behavior creates suck-ups; rewarding suck-ups creates hollow leaders. We all believe we don't like suck-ups, but maybe it's just the obvious suck-ups we don't like.
- 15. Refusing to express regret:** When you say "I'm sorry," you turn people into your allies, even your partners. The first thing Goldsmith teaches his clients is "to apologize — face to face — to every coworker who has agreed to help them get better."
- 16. Not listening:** This behavior says, "I don't care about you," "I don't understand you," "You're wrong," "You're stupid," and "You're wasting my time."
- 17. Failing to express gratitude:** "Gratitude is not a limited resource, nor is it costly. It is abundant as air. We breathe it in but forget to exhale." Goldsmith advises breaking the habit of failing to say thank you by saying it — to as many people as we can, over and over again.
- 18. Punishing the messenger:** This habit is a nasty hybrid of 10, 11, 19, 4, 16, 17 with a strong dose of anger added ... like the difference between asking the person "what went wrong?" and asking "what the \_\_\_\_\_ went wrong?" It's also the small annoyed responses we make throughout the day when we are inconvenienced or don't like the news we are hearing.

- 19. Passing the buck: “This is the behavioral flaw by which we judge our leaders — as important a negative attribute as positive qualities such as brainpower, courage and resourcefulness.”
- 20. An excessive need to be “me”: Making a “virtue of our flaws” because they express who we are amounts to misplaced loyalty — and can be “one of the toughest obstacles to making positive long-term change in our behavior.”

Bonus bad habit: Goal obsession, or getting so caught up in our drive to achieve that we lose track of why we are working so hard and what really matters in life.

We can change our future by changing how we act. The key to a better future comes from learning to listen to what others have to tell us about our behavior. We learn best if the lessons others have for us come not in the form of feedback” — which focuses on an irrecoverable past, centers on judgment, and makes us defensive — but on “feed forward,” which is constructively centered on the future, and takes the form of helpful advice about things we have the power to change.

Beth Armknecht Miller’s passion for learning, and dedication to helping others, are strands woven throughout her distinguished career, which continue to guide her work with Executive Velocity, a top talent and leadership development advisory firm.

*To Your Leadership Success*



Beth Armknecht Miller



<http://executive-velocity.com>



[beth.miller@executive-velocity.com](mailto:beth.miller@executive-velocity.com)



678.579.9191