

To Be Successful in Your Career, Remember ‘the Mission,’ says Goldsmith

Earlier this year, Marshall Goldsmith, a well-regarded executive coach, had his book, *What Got You Here Won't Get You There*, hit the number one spot on the business best-seller list on Amazon.com. Why? It holds many valuable truths for successful executives that, once identified and addressed, will help them become more successful and valuable to their organizations—and often, to their families. What works at work generally works at home, too.

Goldsmith describes some of the most common challenges in interpersonal behavior as transactional flaws that can be corrected if you work on them a bit. Even successful HR executives may exhibit some of these flaws that can be easily addressed by changing behaviors.

Watch ‘Transactional Flaws’

Goal obsession is often a classic problem with HR executives, says Goldsmith. “We become so fixated on the task, we forget the mission.” He provides the example of performance appraisals. Many times, HR professionals become upset when managers aren’t following the details of the process exactly. “We forget that our mission is to be the managers’ business partner; that our mission is to help the business achieve its long-term strategies,” he explains. “Don’t get so wrapped up in the details that you forget the big mission.”

Another flaw is one Goldsmith calls “adding too much value.” He notes that it is a prevalent one for HR professionals because many have an excessive need to save others. “Rather than accepting an idea that another executive puts forward, the HR executive says, ‘that’s a great idea, but let me add to it.’” Goldsmith says, “The quality of the idea might

go up by 5 percent, but the executive’s commitment to execution of the idea may go down to 50 percent. It’s no longer the person’s idea. The more we do this [add our ‘two cents’ worth’], the less the ideas are the other executive’s, and the more the ideas are ours.”

Winning too much is another flaw. “It’s very hard for smart, successful people to not always win, to not always be right,” explains Goldsmith. “For HR executives, [just] try to score for big points; don’t try to win all the points.” The key is to partner with other executives and managers. “The more you are seen as a partner with a win-win orientation, as opposed to a know-it-all expert, you’re better off,” he asserts.

Collaboration with other executives and managers is essential to getting others on board with new approaches and procedures. If a project becomes everyone’s, it is more likely to be followed through.

Be Careful with Comments

“Making destructive comments is another problem, so don’t fall into it,” says Goldsmith. And another flaw that blends right into this one is passing judgment. “Be very careful—it’s not that you shouldn’t give honest feedback; but do it in a way that helps a person get better, not in a way that’s designed to show how smart you are or that comes off as you playing God.”

Goldsmith shares three questions that you should ask yourself before you make a comment:

1. Will this comment help our customers?
2. Will this comment help our company?
3. Will this comment help the person I’m talking to?

If the answers are “no,” don’t make the comment. “Many HR people [and other executives] confuse honesty and disclosure, disclosing things to people that we shouldn’t be saying to them,” explains Goldsmith.

Goldsmith shares that he too has had some flaws he’s needed to work on. For example, when he participated in a 360 degree feedback process with his staff, he found that he scored poorly in the category of making destructive comments. Following his own practice that makes his coaching clients aware that they are exhibiting certain behavioral flaws, he told his staff to fine him \$10 every time he made a destructive comment, and by noontime that day he had already lost \$50!

One more important flaw that bears mentioning is starting sentences with ‘no,’ ‘but,’ or ‘however.’ “Starting with any of those words means I’m disregarding everything that was said before,” explains Goldsmith. “When we do that to people, we devalue them. Instead, listen to what they have to say.”

Perhaps as an HR professional, you are already aware of these words and careful not to use them. Goldsmith suggests that you listen for them in your colleagues’ discussion for a week: “You will see how people inflict those 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.”

Dealing with this flaw and the others discussed will make you and your colleagues more successful professionals. For resources and more information, visit www.marshallgoldsmithlibrary.com.