

## **Interview with Marshall Goldsmith: An Expert's Perspective on Effective Coaching Techniques**

Interview conducted by: Louis Carter, VP of Research at Linkage, Inc.

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Linkage, Inc. recently conducted the following interview with Marshall Goldsmith, co-founder of Marshall Goldsmith Partners, LLC, in order to leverage his sage advice and experience in the field of coaching and consulting so that we may share his knowledge with today's managers. Whether your function in learning and development is related to human resources or you are a leader/manager who needs to coach your direct reports, peers, or managers, the following advice may provide deeper insight. The purpose of this interview is to delve into how managers can use self-knowledge and an understanding of the motivations of others to improve working relationships. Marshall's words of wisdom can be applied to the personal development of all members of the organization.

**Marshall Goldsmith** is rated as one of the "Top 10 Executive Development Consultants" by the *Wall Street Journal* and as one of *Human Resource Magazine's* "Top 25 HR Consultants." He will present a keynote on "Achieving Happiness and Self-Acceptance" at the **2004 Linkage HR Leaders Summit** and will also lead Skill Development sessions at the **2004 Linkage Global Institute for Leadership Development**. A full biography for Marshall is detailed at the end of this interview.

#### **INTERVIEW**

**Linkage:** *Tell us more about feedforward<sup>1</sup> and how it has made an impact on your own life and the lives of others within organizations?*

**Goldsmith:** I have been amazed at the positive reception that has been given to the *feedforward* process. After the original publication of "Try Feedforward Instead of Feedback" in *Leader to Leader*, the article has been republished in at least nine different journals in five countries. I have practiced the *feedforward* experiential exercise with over 10,000 leaders from around the world. It *always* gets a positive reaction.

*Feedforward* is also a key component of our behavior coaching process. My colleagues at Marshall Goldsmith Partners are currently using this process with leaders from many of the world's top corporations. It works! We are also training internal HR professionals to use our coaching process. At GE Capital, the internal coaches have been even more effective than external coaches.

On a personal note, *feedforward* helps me have a happier life. On a daily basis I try to "let go" of the past and focus on what I can do to make a better future. I am also trying to "help more and judge less" when dealing with clients, family and friends.

**Linkage:** *What can you tell us about the role of humility in coaching/developing others? How important is it to "check your ego at the door?"*

**Goldsmith:** You have identified one of the key challenges of coaching. Much of the coaching literature implies that the success or failure of clients is more about the coach than the client. I

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don't believe this at all! We as coaches need to "let go" of our need to be "deep" and "wise". We need to focus on helping the clients take responsibility for their own lives.

**Linkage:** *How much is it really "about the coach" when a client achieves positive results?*

**Goldsmith:** Howard Morgan and I just published an article in [strategy+business](#) that reports on findings from over 86,000 respondents in eight major corporations. The learning from this research is clear – the most important variable in determining increased leadership effectiveness is the leader's ongoing dialogue with co-workers – not the coach or the trainer.

**Linkage:** *Could you provide an example of this?*

**Goldsmith:** At Johnson and Johnson I taught a course for the top 2,000 leaders. 98% of the leaders *thought* they were going to apply what was taught in the course. A year later about 70% had applied the concepts and about 30% had done nothing. The 70% who applied the concepts were seen as becoming far more effective. The 30% who did nothing were not seen as improving. I was the same teacher. There was no difference in either group's reaction to me. My learning was clear. Their success or failure was not about me. It was about them. As our Governor Arnold has said, "Nobody ever got muscles by watching *me* lift the weights!"

**Linkage:** *Could you tell us more about how a coach/leader must be able to take a step back and explore one's environment and then make an informed choice about the purpose and authenticity of one's decisions?*

**Goldsmith:** We all tend to view life from our own perspective. To create positive change, we need to see the world as others see it. As you say, we need to explore our environment. One of my CEO clients loved debating. He thought that he was creating an open environment. In reality he was making lower level employees feel defensive and put down. He had no intention of closing down communication, but that was what happened. Once he began to understand their perspective, he made a huge positive change in leadership style.

In leadership it doesn't matter what we say – it only matters what they hear.

**Linkage:** *What other advice would you give to the emerging leader of today dealing with complex cultural, political, strategic, and other organizational challenges within organizations and social systems today?*

**Goldsmith:** Reach out and learn from everyone around you!

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<sup>1</sup>*Feedforward* is a phrase coined by Marshall Goldsmith and Jon Katzenbach. *Feedforward* focuses on creating a future, as opposed to feedback, which is often focused on past behaviors. For more information on *Feedforward*, please refer to Marshall's recent *Fast Company* article: "Leave It at the Stream" (May 2004).

### **About Marshall Goldsmith**

*This interview was conducted and written by Louis Carter, and published in Link&Learn (October, 2004), a free e-newsletter published by Linkage, Inc. ([LinkandLearn@LinkageInc.com](mailto:LinkandLearn@LinkageInc.com); [www.LinkageInc.com](http://www.LinkageInc.com)).*

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*Marshall Goldsmith is a world authority in helping successful leaders achieve positive, measurable change in behavior: for themselves, their people and their teams. Recently, the American Management Association named Marshall as one of 50 great thinkers and leaders who have influenced the field of management over the past 80 years. His work has been featured in a Harvard Business Review interview, Business Strategy Review cover story (from the London Business School) and New Yorker profile. He has also appeared in: The Wall Street Journal - as one of the top ten executive educators, Forbes - as one of five most-respected executive coaches, the Economist - as one of the most credible consultants in the new era of business, The Business Times (of Asia) - as one of 16 major thought leaders in his field and Fast Company - as America's preeminent executive coach. Marshall is a founding partner of Marshall Goldsmith Partners, LLC, which provides coaching for leaders around the world.*

*Marshall is a keynote presenter at **Linkage's 2004 HR Leaders Summit** and a Skill Development session leader at **Linkage's 2004 Global Institute for Leadership Development**.*

### **About Louis Carter**

*Louis Carter is Vice President of Research and Leadership Development at Linkage, Inc. Louis is also an Executive Coach at **Linkage's 2004 Sales and Marketing Leaders Summit**.*

For more information on the **2004 Sales & Marketing Leaders Summit**, which takes place October 17-20, 2004 in Palm Desert, California, please visit: <http://www.linkageinc.com/smls>

You may qualify for a **VIP Complimentary Pass** to the 2004 Linkage *HR Leaders Summit*, which takes place October 17-20, 2004 in Palm Desert, California. For more information on the **2004 Linkage HR Leaders Summit** and the VIP Pass, please visit: <http://www.linkageinc.com/hrleaders>

For more information on the **2004 Linkage Global Institute for Leadership Development**, which takes place October 17-22, 2004 in Palm Desert, California, please visit: <http://www.linkageinc.com/conferences/leadership/gild/default.shtml>