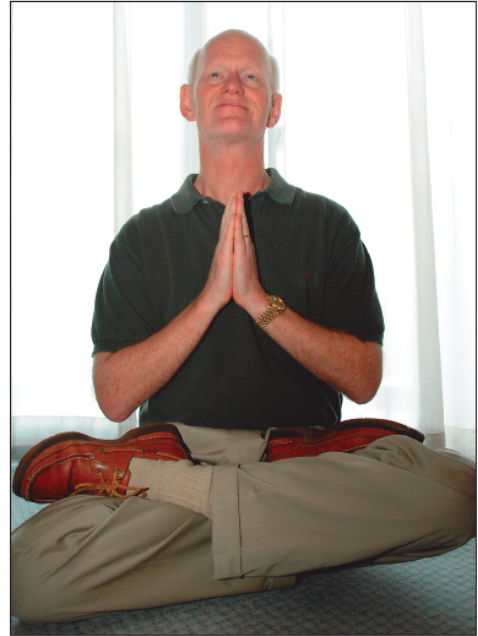


Pray tell, what's the secret to success?

Renowned executive coach Dr Marshall Goldsmith shares in an exclusive interview with The Chronicle on achieving career success

- Amelia Tan
Managing Editor



"Meditate, read and reflect on what you want to achieve in life," Dr Goldsmith advises. PHOTO ■ YEOH KEAT WEI

IF SELF-BELIEF is the secret of success, can it go too far? Maybe so.

"Successful people have very positive images," says American executive coach Dr Marshall Goldsmith. "They tend to be somewhat delusional about how good they actually are," he said.

"Seventy per cent of my clients think that they are in the top 10 per cent of their professional peer group. Well, they aren't. They just think they are. This makes it hard for them to hear negative feedback."

His revolutionary way of looking at management problems has won him many accolades.

He has been ranked by Forbes as one of top five executive coaches. In Singapore, he has given talks to the staff of investment banking company, UBS Singapore and top civil servants.

Dr Goldsmith, who is also a professor at Alliant International University, sees the shortcomings of his clients in students.

"I think students can be as stubborn and opinionated as CEOs. (Like CEOs), students may feel like they have to win arguments and have to prove how smart they are constantly. I think a lot of these issues start at a young age."

He knows these issues well, having dealt with them when he was young.

In an article he wrote titled “The person in the mirror”, he talked about the verbose monologues he gave, in which he addressed only his professor in his 12-person PhD class.

He was then reproached by his professor for trying to impress him, something that he did not realise he was doing.

That incident cemented his belief that problems that we may not realise we have, may be obvious to those around us.

Get feedback

Dr Goldsmith continues with this belief through the “360° feedback” exercise in which he gets colleagues and families of his clients to comment on their behaviour.

He then presents his clients with the information.

He said students should do the same by asking the people around them “how they can be a better classmate, student, friend, child and sibling”.

When told that students may look upon his words with scepticism, as their main goal is to get good grades, the jovial man turned serious.

He said: “Grades get you started. But grades don’t get you very far. If all you care about is grades or technical skills, all you’ll be is a technician. If your goal is to be a leader you have to learn about people. The sooner you learn about people the better.”

His latest book “What Got You Here Won’t Get You There” makes the point, with the theory that the qualities that make people successful don’t keep them that way. So, to stay at the top of the tree needs different skills than climbing it.

The book will be out in stores in January.

Pick a path

Dr Goldsmith pointed out that the main challenge facing graduates from Singapore is the stiff competition in the global job market.

“You will be competing with kids from less developed countries who are willing to work even harder than you. (That’s why) you have to find something that you love to do. If you love what you are doing, you don’t mind working hard.”

He said students should start by “picking a path and following it”.

Dr Goldsmith, who has been a Buddhist for the last 30 years, said: “Your path comes from inside. Meditate, read and reflect on what you want to achieve in life.”

He found his own path as a university student in Indiana. “I was 19 and had spent all night thinking what I wanted to with my life. I looked out of the window and saw people waiting to go to work. I realised I didn’t want to be doing that.”

Dr Goldsmith said he aspired to become a university professor but through his course of study, he found his passion in helping people become better leaders.

“I didn’t start out in life thinking I would become an executive coach. I didn’t know there was such a job. I just evolved along the years. You can change your path along the way.”

When asked what he wanted students to keep in mind, Dr Goldsmith said: “School is a game. You need to do well in school. Memorise the facts, suck up to professors and get your degree.

“But you have to realise this is not real learning. Real learning comes from inside. I hope students will take time to find their own personal identity.”