

COACHING FOR BEHAVIORAL CHANGE



Marshall Goldsmith
Stakeholder Centered Coaching®

Measurably Improving Leadership
Around the World

INTRODUCTION

Marshall Goldsmith’s main mission is to help successful leaders achieve positive, sustainable, and measurable change in their behavior – for themselves, their teams, and the people in their lives.

Over the past 20+ years, Marshall Goldsmith Stakeholder Centered Coaching® has built the coaching industry with our unique approach to leadership development and quantifiable results in coaching. Our main goal is to help successful leaders achieve positive and sustainable change in their behavior for themselves and their stakeholders.

Our client list includes one in three Fortune 500 CxO’s, top executives at the world’s most innovative and cutting-edge organizations, and even non-profit/NGOs such as the World Bank and UNICEF. We boast the world’s largest executive coach network with over 4,500 coaches certified around the globe. Each coach’s success story is rooted in how they leverage our field-proven methodology that Marshall himself uses to improve leadership effectiveness for his client’s organizations.

With this ebook, you will gain valuable insights on Marshall’s world-renowned coaching process and how to involve stakeholders in your coaching – ensuring positive change in leaders.

The World’s Largest Executive Coaching Company Serving Leaders at Fortune500s and SMEs Around the World

Over the past 20+ years, we’ve improved leadership effectiveness around the world, including in one-in-three Fortune 500 companies, with our proprietary Stakeholder Centered Coaching® methodology. Our brand is trusted because we consistently deliver improved leadership with measurable results.

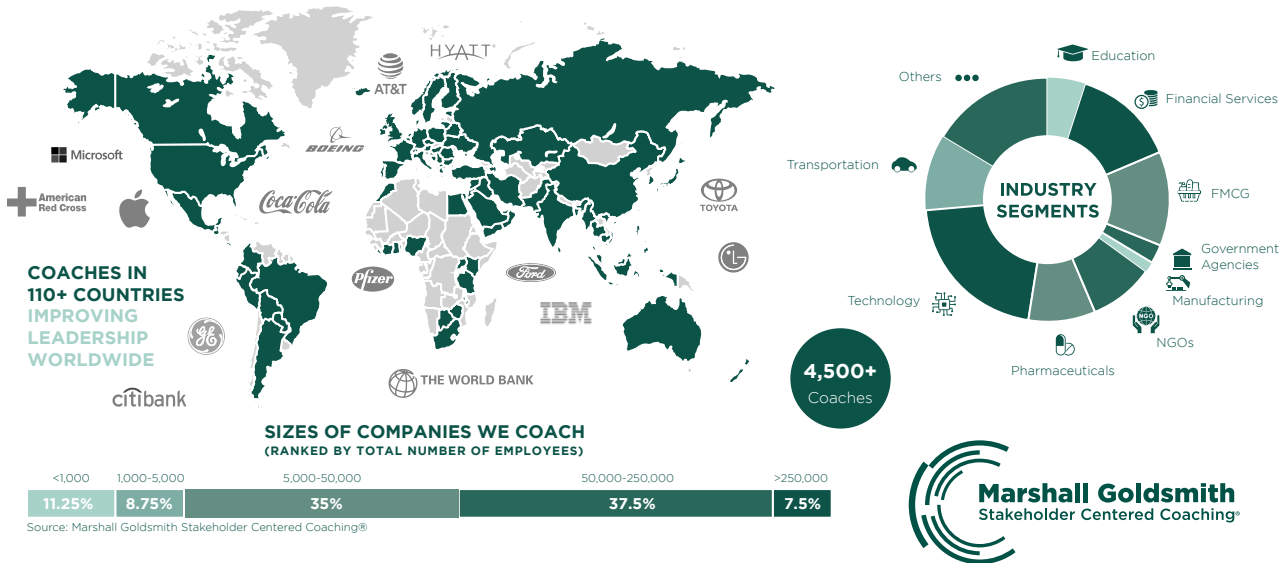


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CHAPTER 1

Lessons from a Great Leader: “Do You Want to Bet On It?”



Marshall Goldsmith believes that many leadership coaches are paid for the wrong reasons. Their income is mostly related to how much their clients like them and how much time they spend on their coachees. However, this is not a good metric when it comes to achieving positive, long-term changes in behavior.

There are no previous studies that prove the correlation between a client’s love and behavioral change. In fact, most of the time, coaches who are too focused on getting the coachee to like them may not provide honest feedback when it is needed — which means, they are not helping the leader as effectively as they should be.

Marshall, on the other hand, has a unique approach to coaching — he doesn’t get paid if his clients don’t get better. “Better” is not judged by Marshall, nor the clients themselves. Better is judged by everyone around the client. Marshall usually coached busy executives in billion-dollar businesses — their time is very limited and valuable. So, Marshall tries to make the sessions and process as effective as possible to achieve the desired results.

To determine whether someone is actually willing to change and believes in what they're saying, Marshall will simply ask, "Do you want to bet on it?" If they say, "I believe it but I don't want to bet on it," then you know that they don't really believe they can change or achieve that goal.

However, if the answer is, "Here's the money!" — now that is the person that Marshall (and our coaches) will bet on every time.

“When you get paid for results, you learn a little humility.”

After years of coaching, Marshall discovered an interesting fact. A client he spent the most amount of time with did not show any improvement at all while another person he spent the least amount of time with improved more than anyone else he had ever coached.

Puzzled with his finding, he created a chart. On one dimension he recorded the time spent with Marshall Goldsmith and the other dimension showed the degree of improvement. As he analyzed the chart, he found that there seemed to be a clear negative correlation between spending time with Marshall and making improvements — which obviously troubled him. So, he talked to his client who he spent the least amount of time with but showed the most significant improvement in leadership skills.

That client was Alan Mulally, former CEO of Ford Motor Company



Alan Mulally is the former CEO of the Ford Motor Company. He has been dubbed as CEO of the Year in the United States and was ranked as the third-best leader in the world (ranked only behind the Pope and Angela Merkel) by Fortune Magazine.

Marshall once asked him, “Alan, of all the people I’ve coached, you improved the most. I spent the least amount of time with you. And you were great to start with. What should I learn about coaching from you?”

Alan gave Marshall two very important insights about coaching and leadership that day.

Lesson No. 1: Your biggest challenge as a coach is picking great clients

Alan said, “Your biggest challenge as a coach is picking great clients. If you pick great clients, your coaching process is always going to work. And if you pick the wrong clients, your coaching process is never going to work. Work with great people, pick great clients.”

Lesson No. 2: Don’t make the coaching process about yourself

Secondly, he told Marshall, “Don’t make the coaching process about yourself and your own ego and how smart you are. Make it about those great people you work with, how proud you are of them, and how hard they work.”

Alan told Marshall that his job isn’t that different from coaching. As the CEO of Ford Motors, he doesn’t build, design, nor sell the cars — he has great people at Ford to help him. Every day as he drives himself to work, he reminds himself, “Leadership is not about me, leadership is about them.” Marshall considers these insights as key learning points from a brilliant leader. This understanding can be applied to almost every aspect of our lives.

Marshall was teaching a class at Dartmouth when a woman raised her hand. The conversation went like this:

Marshall: Who were you trying to change, Mommy or Daddy?

Woman: Daddy

Marshall: What’s old Daddy’s problem?

Woman: He does not have a healthy lifestyle.

Marshall: How old is Daddy?

Woman: 94 years old

Marshall: Leave the old boy alone! I’m going to teach you an important lesson about being a great coach.

So, what was the lesson learned?

When it comes to coaching, if the client does not care enough to change, do not waste your time. How much of our lives have been wasted trying to change the behavior of adults that do not care? What is our return on that investment?

Leaders, if you do not care, do not waste your time either. If you’re going to get better at anything, the motivation for your improvement has to come from yourself. If your heart’s not in it, then there’s no way you’re going to put in the effort and do everything wholeheartedly.



In short, the essence of being a great coach is picking the right clients and working with great people who actually want to improve. Make sure that you realize that your success is not a function of you, but rather, a function of them. Work with those who want to actually see an improvement, specifically towards their stakeholders.

CHAPTER 2

Qualifying the Coaching Client: Knowing When Behavioral Coaching Won't Work



Since we are using a pay-for-results coaching process, it is important that coaches understand how to qualify their coaching clients. Coaching usually works for various organizations, cultures, and people with different personality types. However, leaders need to understand that the result will vary from person to person and that there are certain situations in which behavioral coaching is not suitable.

Here are 5 reasons why behavioral coaching might not work:

1. The participants don't care

No matter how good the coaching process is, it can never help someone who doesn't care. If they don't care to improve, they won't put in the effort and thus will not see much improvement. So don't waste your time on them.

2. They're not given a fair chance

Sometimes big companies simply write people off instead of giving them a fair chance to improve. They intentionally create a fake coaching process that is meant to drive people away instead of helping them.

3. Intellectual, technical, or functional issues

Just like its name, behavioral coaching can only help solve behavioral problems. It won't help solve intellectual, technical, or functional issues in your company.

4. Ethical or integrity problem

If someone lacks integrity or conducts themselves unethically, behavioral coaching is not the solution. How many ethical issues does it take to ruin the reputation of your company? One. So, don't coach them, fire them.

5. They have different goals

Behavioral coaching cannot help someone who's going in the wrong direction and has different goals. Coaching can only help people reach their goals faster, not turn them in the right direction.

CHAPTER 3

Involving Key Stakeholders

Marshall Goldsmith had gone through 3 distinct phases in his career as a behavioral coach.

In the first phase, he believed that the coach is the key to behavioral change and leadership success. However, after conducting research on leadership development that involved the input of more than 86,000 respondents, he found that he was wrong. The key variable that determines sustainable change in leadership behavior is not the coach, mentor, or advisor to the leader, but the leaders themselves and their co-workers.

During the second phase, Marshall spent most of his time focusing on his coaching clients. He noticed that a highly motivated and hard-working client is more important than a brilliant coach. Their ongoing efforts meant more than any clever ideas that the coach might have. In this stage, his clients' results improved even more dramatically.

Now, Marshall is in the third phase. He spends most of his time with key stakeholders instead of with the leaders. He believes that the key to leadership development is helping the coaching client learn from everyone around them. Through this shift in his coaching process, Marshall's clients showed even more significant improvement than ever before.



When involving key stakeholders in his coaching process, Marshall will ask them to do 4 important things.

1. Let go of the past

Bringing up the past can demoralize the people who are trying to change their behavior. That is why we should keep whatever happened in the past, in the past. Acknowledge and understand that it cannot be changed. Instead, focus on the future and work on how we can improve and help leaders achieve positive change.

2. Be helpful and supportive

Our coaching process requires our coaching clients to involve their key co-workers and ask them for help to improve. If the leaders reach out to their co-workers and are met with judgment, cynicism, or punishment for their past behavior, they will generally stop trying. Any one of us will feel unmotivated and do the same thing if the people we work with don't give us a chance to improve. So, it is important that everyone involved be as helpful and supportive to the leader's journey toward improvement.

3. Tell the truth

Always remind the stakeholders to be truthful when providing their opinion and suggestions on the leader. Fake glowing reviews are of no use to the clients or the company- it will not help them change their behavior or improve. We always encourage them to tell the truth, but in a positive manner that will not demotivate the leader in his/her quest to improve.

4. Pick something to improve yourself

To make the coaching process "two-way" instead of just "one-way", we often ask the key stakeholders to pick key areas to work on. It helps stakeholders act as "fellow travelers" who are trying to improve alongside the leader instead of "judges" who are pointing fingers at the leader. In the end, our coaching brings more value to the whole organization throughout the process. In one of Marshall's most successful case studies, he was asked to coach one top executive at an organization, but in the end, in the process, 200 other people at that organization showed improvement.

CHAPTER 4

Feedback vs Feedforward: Driving Impactful Change in Leaders in a Positive Manner

Marshall Goldsmith created a groundbreaking and positive approach to drive change in leaders and help others become a better version of themselves — it's called feedforward.

In feedforward, you will have 2 roles:
Learn as much as you can
Help as much as you can

Rule #1: No feedback about the past

We often spend too much time focusing on the past while giving feedback, when there's nothing we can do to change it. Implementing feedforward means that we choose not to dwell on the past but rather focus on what we can do to improve our future.

Rule #2: Don't judge or criticize ideas

When somebody gives you a gift, what do you say? You say thank you, and receive it without judging or criticizing — this is exactly what happens in providing feedforward. You should always treat your peer's input or ideas as a gift and receive them without judgment.

How does Feedforward work?



You can do the feedforward exercise with a team as small as 6 people, to larger groups of even 6,000 people. Each person has to pick one thing they want to improve on. Then all they have to do is follow this flow:

My name is..., I want to get better at

Other participants will give them 1-2 quick ideas for the future — no feedback about the past. Subsequently, the person will say ‘Thank You’ and move on to talk to other people in the group. The goal of this exercise is to talk to as many people as you can in about 5-6 minutes. At the end of the exercise ask them to complete this sentence with one word:

This exercise was...

Marshall has done the feedforward exercise in multiple countries and 95% of the people claimed that this exercise is positive, simple, helpful, and fun!

The feedforward exercise is fast

“Fun” is usually the last word you would use to describe a feedback activity. When Marshall asked why participants found this activity fun, most stated that they appreciated it because it was fast.

Sometimes during coaching, we can get carried away and talk too much. As we keep talking, we might provide more ideas, however, the quality of our ideas gets worse. The audience might forget the first great idea you gave them and are instead thinking about the not-so-good ideas you mentioned last. However, with this exercise, you will learn how to give one or two very quick ideas that will actually help others.

There are no judgments

Throughout the exercise, if you are allowed to judge or critique each others’ comments, you would have spent twice as much time debating about the comments as listening to the comments. But how much would you learn by proving others wrong and proving that you’re right? Nothing.

Around 65% of our interpersonal communication time is spent on proving how smart we are and how dumb someone else is — so when we cut that out, life becomes much more positive.

“I listened better in this feedforward exercise than I ever listened in my life. Normally, when other people talk to me I’m so busy composing my next comment to prove how smart I am, I am not really listening. I’m just composing,” said a gentleman in one of Marshall’s classes.

The irony is that he is a Nobel Prize winner. A Nobel Prize winner who was trying to prove that he was smart in a management class!

A common misconception in coaching

Oftentimes, coaches have the misconception that they must be smarter, more superior, or must understand their clients deeply in order to help them. This is simply not true. Most of the time we learn so much more from people we don’t actually know well because they don’t have any kind of stereotype, history, or baggage related to us that can skew their opinions.

Whenever we finished this feedforward exercise, no matter in what country, everyone felt the need to say “I have your problem too”. This shows that even though we have different cultures, we are not that different on the inside.

We don't have to be better than others to help.

What's great about feedforward is that the whole focus is on helping each other. It's a very simple and non-judgmental process. With this exercise, you'll learn how to ask for input, and to listen in a non-defensive manner. You will learn how to say thank you and give recognition for other people's ideas as you treat them like a gift. You don't have to use the gift, you just need to listen to it.

CHAPTER 5

Marshall Goldsmith's Coaching Process

As more leaders and organizations recognize the benefits of coaching, they are starting to actively build a culture of coaching within their organizations. A coaching culture means that an organization will promote coaching behaviors as a means of management, communication, and learning. They are focused on the development of the employees, with the main objective of helping them reach their full potential.

The problem is, many organizations are often unable to provide their leaders with the right coaching tools and frameworks to help their coaching process. Although coaching is a highly individualized process, leaders still need to draw upon techniques and tools to ensure that it can drive real improvement.



Marshall Goldsmith believes in creating a transferable coaching process. A system that can easily be taught and applied by coaches and leaders all over the world. A process that can provide results that are just as effective, as if they were trained by Marshall himself and works just as well with every level of management.

We have trained huge corporations like GE and thousands of coaches and leaders to use this coaching process — with fantastic results. Today, we will be sharing Marshall Goldsmith's coaching process so that you can help leaders in changing their behavior and improving their leadership skills.

1. Determine the desired behavior

Leaders cannot be expected to improve their behavior if they don't understand what the desired behavior looks like. This is where you can help them model the desired behavior that they should work towards in their leadership role.

2. Choose key stakeholders

Being known for our stakeholder-centered coaching methodology, we put importance on the involvement of stakeholders during the coaching process. Once the leaders are clear on what behavioral goal they want to achieve, they also have to identify who the key stakeholders are.

Sometimes leaders can deny the validity of the stakeholder's feedback. By having our clients and their managers agree on the goal and key stakeholders from the start, we can ensure that they trust the process. Key stakeholders can be peers, managers, board members, or everyone who works together with the individual being coached.

The least number of stakeholders Marshall Goldsmith has ever had is eight and the most is 40. There are no strict rules on how many stakeholders should be involved, but the average number is around 15-20 stakeholders.

3. Collect feedback from stakeholders

In Marshall Goldsmith Stakeholder Centered Coaching®, there are two ways to collect stakeholder feedback. When coaching CEOs or other C-suite executives, we will personally interview all key stakeholders to get honest feedback on the leader.

Questions for the key stakeholders:

Question 1: What is this person doing well?

Question 2: What does this person need to change? What suggestions do you have?

Question 3: Imagine you're this person's mentor, coach, or advisor on any topic large or small, what advice would you have for this person?

This more involved level of feedback makes sense because the company is making a real investment in the leader's development. However, for the lower levels of the organization, a traditional 360° feedback can work just as well and it's more affordable.

Either way, feedback is critical to the success of the coaching process. We cannot evaluate behavior change if there are no agreements on what behavior needs to be changed.

4. Agree on key behaviors to change

Together with the leader and their managers (unless you're working with the CEO), pick key areas to work on. Try to stay focused on 1-3 goals, as it ensures that the leader can give their maximum effort and attention to the most important behavior. This ensures that we won't waste time trying to improve the wrong behavior and we can increase the probability of improvement.

5. Have leaders respond to key stakeholders



The key to the success of our process is not us talking to the leaders, but the leaders talking to their co-workers. So, aside from collecting feedback from key stakeholders, you should also ask the person being reviewed to talk with each stakeholder and collect additional “feedforward” suggestions on how to improve on the key areas targeted for improvement.

Don't forget to remind the person being coached to keep the conversation simple, positive, and focused on actively listening — not judging their suggestions. When mistakes have been made in the past, it's generally a good idea to apologize and ask the stakeholders for support in changing in the future.

The conversation should be similar to this
The leader: “I want to get better at [Insert goal], please help me.”
The stakeholder: “First, thank you so much for doing this. I appreciate you putting in the effort. I'm going to do my best to help you. I'm going to give you ideas for the future. [Insert ideas]. Here's something you can improve [Insert goal].”

6. Review suggestions and develop an action plan

After receiving suggestions from key stakeholders, it's time for the leader to create an action plan. As a coach, you can provide ideas throughout the process, asking them to listen to your ideas in the same way they are listening to ideas from their stakeholders. The action plan needs to come from them — our role here is to review and encourage them to live up to their commitments.

As Marshall Goldsmith says, “I am much more of a facilitator than a judge. My job is to help great, highly motivated executives get better at what they believe is most important – not to tell them what to change.”

7. Create an ongoing follow-up process

Following up with the leader is the most important part of the coaching process. The leaders can ask their key stakeholders questions like “Based upon my behavior last month, what ideas do you have for me so that I can improve next month?” These kinds of questions keep the focus on the future, making the follow-up process efficient and focused.

Within six months, you can conduct a mini-survey consisting of 2-6 question items. Stakeholders can be asked to respond to these questions using a Likert scale or an interval rating scale. The goal is to ask the stakeholders whether the leader has gotten better, gotten worse, or stayed the same in the areas targeted for improvement.

8. Review and repeat

If the leader is taking the coaching process seriously, the stakeholders will almost certainly report improvement in their behavior. We will then build on that success by repeating initial goals and uncovering additional areas that need improvement. The stakeholders can be asked to fill out a simple questionnaire to see if they notice positive results. In this way, the person being coached will also benefit from constant follow-up and targeted steps to improve their behavior.

9. End the coaching process when results have been achieved

Our goal in coaching is not to create a dependent relationship between us and the person being coached. That is why, when they have achieved the desired results on targeted behavior, we should stop the coaching process. You can always keep in touch with your coachees for however long you like, but you don't need to have an ongoing business relationship.

Can you see why this is a transferable coaching process? Marshall Goldsmith emphasized that everything in this process is not driven by him or you as a coach. It's from the leader you're coaching and everyone around them.

CHAPTER 6

“Team Building Without Time Wasting”

Many of today’s leaders are currently facing a dilemma. As the need to build effective and high-performing teams increase, the time available to build these teams is decreasing. However, the need to have a solid high-performing team is more important than ever, as leaders are pulled in a hundred different directions and organizations have to face the rapidly changing environment.

Gone are the days of traditional, hierarchical leadership, as a new focus on networked team leadership emerged. Now, you can find new types of teams; virtual teams, autonomous teams, cross-functional teams, and so on.

Recognizing the importance of increasing leadership effectiveness and team building, Marshall Goldsmith conducted a study involving thousands of participants. The research showed that focused feedback and follow-up from stakeholders can increase leadership effectiveness. Furthermore, a parallel approach to team building can help leaders build teamwork without wasting time.



To make this team-building process successful, you need to assume the role of a coach or facilitator instead of a “boss” or an “instructor”. By letting team members come up with their own behavioral change strategies instead of simply executing the strategy imposed upon them by the “boss”, they will show a greater improvement in team effectiveness. The team members also need to have the courage to constantly ask for and learn from the input they receive from fellow team members.

1. Ask the team whether team building is needed

Before we start, ask all team members to confidentially record their answers for these two questions:

On a 1 to 10 scale (with 10 being ideal), how well are we doing in terms of working together as a team?

On a 1 to 10 scale, how well do we need to be doing in terms of working together as a team?

This is important to determine whether the team feels that team building is important and needed. Your team members may report to the same manager, but have little reason to work together interactively as a team. Other people may believe that teamwork is important, but they already feel that the team is functioning well and a team-building activity might be a waste of time.

2. Calculate and discuss the results with the team

Ask one of the team members to calculate the results of the questionnaire and discuss it together. If the team believes that there’s a need for team building, then we can proceed to the next step in the process.

In most cases, team members believe that improving teamwork is both important and needed. Interviews with hundreds of teams in multinational companies showed that an average team member believed that their team is functioning at a 5.8 level of effectiveness, but needed to be at an 8.7 level — hence the need for team building.

3. Create a “behavior to change” flipchart

Now, ask the team members to answer the following question and record their selected behavior on flip charts.

“If you could change two key behaviors that would help us close the gap between where we are and where we want to be, which two behaviors should we try to change?”

4. Choose the most important behavior to change

Filter out the same or similar behaviors and help the team members prioritize the most important behavior for everyone to change using consensus.

5. Personal behavioral change dialogue (Feedforward)

Have each team member do a one-on-one dialogue (feedforward exercise) with everyone on the team. Team members will request their colleagues to suggest 2 personal behaviors that they can improve (other than the one agreed upon).



The feedforward exercise can be done simultaneously and will take about 5 minutes each. Doing this will help close the gap between where the team currently is and where they want to be. There are several pointers that can help make this exercise more effective. The most important thing is to focus on what can be improved in the future instead of focusing on mistakes of the past.

6. Choose one key behavior for personal change

After having a one-on-one discussion with everyone on the team, the team member will have a list of suggested behaviors to change from their colleagues. Let them review their list and ask them to choose one that seems to be the most important. After that, have everyone on the team announce their one key behavior for personal change to the team.

7. Do a monthly “suggestions for the future” questionnaire

Every month, encourage all team members to ask their colleagues for brief “suggestions for the future” to help increase their effectiveness in:

- The one key behavior that all team members are trying to improve
- The one personal behavior based on the team’s input
- The overall effectiveness as a part of the team

8. Conduct a mini-survey

Six months into the team-building process, conduct a mini-survey to determine the team’s improvement. Through the mini-survey, each team member will get confidential feedback from their colleagues on their perceived change in effectiveness.

Just like the monthly “suggestions for the future” questionnaire, this survey will include :

- The one key behavior that all team members are trying to improve
- The one personal behavior based on the team’s input
- The overall effectiveness as a part of the team

As an additional question, you can ask about the level of the follow-up, so that the team can see the connection between their level of follow-up and their increased effectiveness. This survey can be distributed electronically or printed out (Click here to download a sample of the mini-survey).

9. Calculating results and summary report

Ask someone outside of the team to calculate the results for each of the team members on all items in the mini-survey. They will then receive a confidential summary report indicating the degree to which their colleagues see their effectiveness in demonstrating desired behaviors (team, personal and general).

Our “before and after” studies have shown that team members who had followed up regularly with their colleagues will almost invariably be seen as increasing their effectiveness in their selected areas of behavioral improvement — whether it is personal, team, or overall team member behaviors.

The mini-survey summary report will provide the team with positive reinforcement for improvement and learn what has not improved after a short period of time. It will also validate the importance of discipline and following up with their colleagues.

10. Discuss key learnings

Arrange a meeting so that each team member can discuss key learnings from their mini-survey results. After that, conduct a short feedforward exercise, asking for further suggestions in a brief one-on-one dialogue with every team member.

11. Review summary results with the team



Facilitate a discussion on how the team as a whole is progressing in terms of increasing its effectiveness on the two key behaviors that were selected. Don't forget to provide the team with positive recognition for increased effectiveness and encourage everyone on the team to stay focused on improving those key behaviors.

12. Conduct monthly “Progress Report” sessions

Ask team members to continue doing monthly “Progress Report” sessions with everyone on the team. Then, re-administer the mini-survey 8 months after the beginning of the process and again after 1 year.

13. One-year summary session

A year after the team-building process started, conduct a summary session with the team to review the results of the final mini-survey. Ask the team to rate their team's effectiveness now and where they need to be in terms of working together as a team. Compare this rating to the original rating calculated at the beginning of the process.

If everyone on the team followed the team-building process with discipline, the team will see a significant improvement in how they work as a team. As always, provide positive recognition for their hard work and improvement over the past 12 months and have each team member do the same for each other in a brief one-on-one dialogue.

14. Continue or work on something else

Now, it's time to ask the team whether they believe that more work on team building will be needed in the upcoming year. If they believe that doing so would be beneficial, then continue the process. But if they don't think more work is needed, declare victory and try working on something else!

Why this team-building process works



Highly focused

Most feedback surveys ask team members to complete too many items — making the participants feel like they are wasting time. As a result, they will be less likely to put in the effort in changing their behavior or following up with their colleagues. On the contrary, team members would almost never object to completing our four-item mini-survey that is specifically designed to fit their unique needs.

More frequent

Unlike most surveys that provide team members with feedback every 1 to 2 years, our process works because it occurs more frequently. The constant feedback and reinforcement for behavior change help participants in improving their effectiveness.

Self-improvement

Many team-building processes do not succeed because team members are mainly focused on solving someone else's problems. However, this process encourages team members to focus on 'solving' their own self-improvement.

Download our mini-survey sample and template by clicking this link

<https://bit.ly/3efeybD>

CHAPTER 7

Real Change or Perception: Can Leaders Change Their Behavior?

Do people really change their behavior or are they merely perceived as changing their behavior because we followed up? This is one of the most common questions that people ask Marshall Goldsmith about his coaching process — and the answer is kind of the opposite of what you might believe.

It's easier to change behavior than change perception.



One of the best research principles in psychology is called the Cognitive Dissonance Theory. According to the theory, we all perceive people in a manner that's consistent with our previous stereotypes. We don't necessarily see what's there, we see what we think is there.

Here's a question for you.

What do the 10 and the 4 look like in a Roman-numeral watch?

Most people will answer that 10 is an X and 4 is an IV.

Now, look closely at the Roman numeral watch or clock. 98% of the time, the 4 is not an IV, it's four I's. Even those who own the watch and look at it every day can't tell what's there. Why?

We don't see what's there, we see what we think is supposed to be there.

Now here's an example of how this is related to behavioral change. Let's say that you have a habit of making destructive comments about the people you work with and you're trying to change that.

In situation A, you go seven months without making a destructive comment about anyone. But one day, something ticked you off and a co-worker heard you make a destructive comment. In the mind of your co-workers, they will deem that you have not changed.

In situation B, you tell your co-worker that you want to stop making negative comments and become a team player. You ask them to provide you with ideas for the future. Do you think your co-workers will believe that you're going to change? Not necessarily.

However, if you constantly practice these good techniques at home, in two months, when we do the follow-up, your co-worker will probably say, "You're doing a good job, keep it up."

It's been four months now, and you haven't made any hurtful comments about anyone.

So your co-workers will say the same thing, "Keep it up."

Now, it's been six months and your coworkers say, "You know, to be honest, I didn't think you'd change at all. It's been six months. You've worked very hard. I'm proud of you, keep it up."

But in the seventh month, you got angry and made a negative comment. Your co-worker will say, "You know, you shouldn't have said that. You went seven months without doing that."

You answer, "You're right, I'm going to apologize".

In situation A, did behavior change? Yes. Did perception change? No.
In situation B, did behavior change? Yes. Did perception change? Yes.

What is the key difference between the two situations? The involvement of the stakeholders in your leadership development process.

So going back to the initial question, "Do people really change their behavior?" The answer is definitely yes, because if they didn't change, we would never get paid (and we almost always get paid).

In major organizations, even a small positive change in behavior can have a big impact. In fact, the simple fact that the executive is trying to change their leadership behavior itself may be even more important than the behavior they're trying to change.

“To help others develop – start with yourself.”

Marshall Goldsmith



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