SOFTWARE & TECH

Marshall Goldsmith What Got You Here

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Introduction: The Paradox of Success

In the world of leadership and personal development, few names resonate as powerfully as **Marshall Goldsmith**. A two-time Thinkers 50 #1 leadership thinker, his groundbreaking book *What Got You Here Won't Get You There* has become a cornerstone for executives, managers, and anyone striving to reach the next level of professional achievement. The central premise is deceptively simple yet profoundly challenging: the very behaviors that propelled you to your current success are often the same behaviors that will prevent you from going further. This article explores the key concepts of **Marshall Goldsmith What Got You Here** and provides practical insights for breaking through the plateau of personal performance.

The allure of "more success" can be intoxicating, but too often professionals find themselves stuck—still working hard, yet no longer seeing corresponding results. Goldsmith argues that this stagnation occurs because we fail to recognize that the rules of the game have changed. The capabilities that were once rewarded are now taken for granted, while unaddressed interpersonal habits begin to overshadow our achievements. Understanding the full depth of **Marshall Goldsmith What Got You Here** means accepting a hard truth: your next promotion or breakthrough depends less on getting better at what you already do, and more on stopping the counterproductive behaviors that annoy colleagues, limit influence, and undermine trust.

This article will walk you through the core lessons from Goldsmith's work, including his famous list of twenty habits that hold leaders back, the power of feedforward, and the simple yet transformative steps to create lasting behavioral change. Whether you are a CEO, a middle manager, or an individual contributor, the principles within **Marshall Goldsmith What Got You Here** offer a roadmap to shed old patterns and unlock new potential.

The Core Insight: Why Past Success Becomes a Liability

At the heart of **Marshall Goldsmith What Got You Here** is a counterintuitive observation: we become overconfident in the behaviors that brought us initial success. We assume that because these behaviors worked before, they will continue to work indefinitely. But the environment evolves, expectations shift, and what once made you a star can now make you a liability.

Goldsmith identifies a phenomenon called "the success delusion." Successful people are often surrounded by admirers who hesitate to offer honest feedback. Consequently, leaders can remain blissfully unaware of annoying habits that are eroding their effectiveness. The very confidence that helped them ascend can blind them to the need for change. This is why the concept of **Marshall Goldsmith What Got You Here** emphasizes that the path forward requires a radical shift in perspective: from adding new skills to subtracting bad behaviors.

The Twenty Habits That Hold You Back

Goldsmith catalogs twenty workplace habits that are particularly toxic for successful people. These are not

major ethical failures, but small, recurring interpersonal missteps. Here are some of the most significant ones:

- Winning too much: The need to win at all costs, including in situations where winning is not important.
- Adding too much value: The overwhelming desire to improve on every idea or suggestion, which can stifle others.
- Passing judgment: The habit of evaluating everything others say, making them feel judged.
- Making destructive comments: Sarcastic or cynical remarks that undercut the team spirit.
- Starting with “No,” “But,” or “However”: A verbal pattern that immediately dismisses other viewpoints.
- Telling the world how smart we are: An unconscious need to show off intelligence.
- Speaking when angry: Using emotional outbursts as a tool for control.
- Negativity, or “Let me explain why that won’t work”: A reflexive pessimism that drains energy from others.
- Withholding information: Keeping knowledge secret to maintain an advantage.
- Failing to give proper recognition: Not acknowledging the contributions of others.

Each of these habits is a classic symptom of the “success delusion.” The book argues that by recognizing and eliminating even two or three of these behaviors, a leader can dramatically improve relationships and long-term effectiveness. This is the essence of **Marshall Goldsmith What Got You Here**—identifying the specific habits that have become anchors rather than propellers.

Beyond Feedback: The Power of Feedforward

One of the most innovative ideas in **Marshall Goldsmith What Got You Here** is the concept of “feedforward” instead of traditional feedback. Goldsmith points out that feedback often focuses on past mistakes, which can trigger defensiveness and guilt. Feedforward, by contrast, offers suggestions for the future in a constructive and positive way.

Feedforward is particularly effective because it is solution-oriented. A colleague might say, “In the future, consider pausing before you add your opinion in a meeting.” This approach avoids dredging up past failures and invites the recipient to imagine a better version of themselves. Goldsmith recommends using feedforward in daily interactions, especially when combined with his “360-degree feedback” process. The combination allows people to see exactly which of the twenty habits they exhibit most frequently, and then use peer suggestions to design a change plan.

Apologizing and Announcing Change

Another crucial step in the **Marshall Goldsmith What Got You Here** framework is the act of apologizing and making a public commitment to change. Goldsmith advises leaders to approach each colleague individually, acknowledge past mistakes (e.g., “I realize I have been winning too much in our conversations, and I want to stop”), and ask for their help. This apology is not a sign of weakness; rather, it shows emotional intelligence and a genuine desire to improve.

After the apology, the leader should ask for feedforward: “What could I do differently going forward to be a better listener?” This simple exchange builds trust and turns a vague intention into a concrete social contract. Goldsmith’s clients who follow this discipline report that colleagues become allies in the change process rather than silent critics.

Practical Steps for Implementing Change

Reading about the concepts is only the beginning. **Marshall Goldsmith What Got You Here** provides a clear, repeatable methodology for behavior change. Here are the essential steps distilled from the book:

1. Choose the habit to change: Identify one or two behaviors from the twenty that are most damaging to your professional relationships.

2. Gather input from trusted colleagues: Use a confidential 360-degree survey or direct conversations to confirm your blind spots.
3. Apologize and ask for help: Acknowledge your habit to key stakeholders and request their patience and feedforward.
4. Listen without defensiveness: When receiving feedforward, simply say “Thank you” and resist the urge to explain or justify.
5. Follow up consistently: Check in with colleagues every few weeks to ask, “How am I doing on stopping that habit?”
6. Celebrate progress: Reward yourself and thank those who support you. Publicly recognize the team’s role.

Goldsmith emphasizes that the follow-up process is the most critical element. Many change initiatives fail because people start with enthusiasm but then neglect the ongoing discipline of tracking behavior. By creating a routine of asking for feedback on your improvement, you transform a one-time resolution into a lasting practice.

Real-World Applications and Case Studies

The principles of **Marshall Goldsmith What Got You Here** have been tested with thousands of executives across industries. One example is a high-performing CEO who was constantly adding value in every meeting—interrupting others to improve their ideas. While his suggestions were often excellent, his team felt demoralized and stopped contributing. By applying Goldsmith’s method, the CEO learned to pause for ten seconds before speaking. That small change allowed team members to feel heard and valued, and the quality of collective decision-making improved dramatically.

Another case involved a senior vice president who had a habit of making destructive comments in emails. She never intended harm, but her sarcasm created a culture of fear. After reading **Marshall Goldsmith What Got You Here**, she committed to a “no sarcasm” rule for one month. She publicly apologized to her team and asked them to call out any relapses. Within weeks, the team’s morale soared, and collaboration increased. These stories illustrate that the changes required are not massive personality overhauls; they are small adjustments in daily behavior that accumulate into significant transformation.

Why This Matters for Everyone, Not Just Executives

While **Marshall Goldsmith What Got You Here** is often marketed to senior leaders, its insights apply to any professional. The twenty habits are universal: we all have some tendency to win too much, judge too quickly, or add unnecessary value. In a team setting, one person’s behavior can ripple through an entire department. By adopting Goldsmith’s approach, anyone can improve their influence, collaboration, and career trajectory.

Moreover, the book’s emphasis on stopping bad behaviors is a refreshing alternative to the constant pressure to learn new skills. In a world of crowded inboxes and endless webinars, sometimes the most effective improvement is to simply stop doing something that annoys others. That is the underlying wisdom of **Marshall Goldsmith What Got You Here**—less is often more.

Conclusion: The Journey to “What Will Get You There”

Marshall Goldsmith What Got You Here Won’t Get You There remains a timeless guide for anyone who is successful yet feels stuck. The book dismantles the illusion that more effort in the same direction will yield different results. Instead, it invites us to look inward, acknowledge our blind spots, and embrace the humble practice of change. From the twenty habits to the feedforward technique, every concept is actionable and free of jargon.

The key takeaway is that lasting change begins with a willingness to see ourselves as others see us. It requires the courage to apologize, the humility to ask for help, and the discipline to follow up. In doing so, we not only become more effective leaders but also more respected colleagues. If you have found yourself wondering why your career has plateaued despite your hard work, the answer may lie not in what you need to learn next, but in what you need to stop doing today. That is the transformative lesson of **Marshall Goldsmith What Got You Here** —and it is a lesson worth applying, one behavioral tweak at a time.

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