



**Marshall Goldsmith**  
Stakeholder Centered Coaching



# FeedForward

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Dear Colleague,

*FeedForward* fits well into any program that seeks to help leaders or team members become more aware of their impact and work on behaviors that maximize their effectiveness.

We designed *FeedForward* so you can decide how to deliver it in a way that works best for your organization. You may gather your group for video instruction (there is a Group Exercise sheet on page 26). If you want participants to do some “homework” before or after you meet, we have provided links to the following sections of the program:

Thank you for purchasing *FeedForward*, and for making a commitment to productive leadership and improved relationships.

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## WHAT IS IT?

*FeedForward* is a positive, future-focused personal development process that, used with traditional feedback, takes the judgmental, critical sting out of feedback. Marshall Goldsmith and Jon Katzenbach coined the term after noticing the feedback process was more successful when *FeedForward* was added, shifting the focus from rehashing the mistakes of the past to concentrating on the promise of the future.

To understand how feedback and *FeedForward* work together, think of a shopping mall map and the little arrow pointing to “You Are Here.” Feedback is the arrow showing you where you are in key relationships. *FeedForward* is the map that directs you to where you want to be in your professional and personal relationships.

*FeedForward* has other benefits. Imagine the boss calls you and says, “Please come into my office. I have some feedback for you.” Your first reaction is not likely to be, “Oh goody! Fun, fun, fun!” Actually, fun is the last word that comes to mind. *FeedForward* helps you move toward the goal in a more productive and less intimidating way.

More than 80,000 people who have gone through the *FeedForward* process say it is positive, helpful, and, yes, fun. Why? Because:

- *FeedForward* is focused on a future you can change, not a past you cannot change.
- There is no judging or critiquing of the person or ideas.
- You learn from a diverse perspective.
- You can really listen because you don’t feel defensive.
- No feedback about the past (and all of the emotional baggage that comes with it) is allowed.
- It creates a rich pool of ideas with less work.



## HOW DOES IT WORK?

The steps in our *FeedForward* process are:

- 1. Get 360° Feedback**
- 2. Pick a Behavior**
- 3. Respond**
- 4. Involve**
- 5. Follow Up**

Let's get started...

### GET 360° FEEDBACK

Getting feedback will create a more complete picture of yourself from the perspective of those around you. If you have never asked others to complete a feedback survey about you, or been asked to give one, then you must realize getting or giving this kind of honest feedback can make some people feel uncomfortable. It's important to remind those around you that what they say is confidential and anonymous.

Next, to better prepare those you will be asking to participate in your feedback, we have a form explaining how it will all work so they feel more comfortable with the process and understand their role, your expectations and the level of commitment you are asking of them. You'll find this Feedback Participant Preparation Sheet on page 27.

Where do you find a 360° feedback survey? Your company may have one already. If it doesn't, here are a couple of options:

- [www.surveyonline.com](http://www.surveyonline.com) 1-503-699-1834
- [www.questarweb.com](http://www.questarweb.com) 1-800-688-0126

In each case, once you are on the site, call the company and ask them to help you find a 360° feedback survey that's right for you. They will walk you through the process and let you know their costs.

## PICK A BEHAVIOR

After you have gotten feedback, the next step is to Pick a Behavior to improve. Remember: It's pick a behavior, not five or thirty or fifty. To help, we have included a list of the most common behaviors that keep leaders from functioning effectively. The list, 21 Behaviors, starts on page 11.

If you are working with a coach, he or she will interview your key stakeholders and share a complete analysis with you. You, your coach and key stakeholders will then sign off on the one behavior that, when improved, would make you more successful.

If you're going it alone, follow the same steps except for interviewing your stakeholders. Using the feedback you've received, and consulting the 21 Behaviors on page 11, you will be able to narrow your selection down to two or three. From there you can ask your key stakeholders to vote on which behavior you should choose, or just pick one and move on to the next step.

## RESPOND

The next step in our process is Respond. Respond sets the stage for change and signals a turn ahead. Here's how it works. You begin by writing a "speech" that you'll be giving your key stakeholders (the people you asked for feedback).

### **Make sure to include these elements:**

First — *thank* the person for giving you feedback.

Second — *mention* your strengths listed in the feedback.

Third — *advertise* the one behavior you'd like to improve.

Fourth — *apologize* for the impact of this behavior.

Fifth — *ask* for ideas and suggestions to improve for the future. (*FeedForward*)

### **Important thoughts:**

Your response "speech" should be *positive, simple, focused* and *fast*.

Advertise is a vital strategy that starts in this phase and continues into the Involve and Follow Up phase. As you'll read about it later, it's a BIG key to why this process works.

Apologizing creates closure so you and those around you can move on. I'm often asked, "Do you get those big CEOs to apologize?" The answer is yes. If they don't, I won't work with them. It's that important!

**Here is a sample response:**

“Mr. Co-Worker, I just got this 360° feedback. The first thing I’d like to say is thank you very much for participating in this process. I really appreciate it. Next, a lot of my feedback is very positive—ethical, dedicated, hardworking, caring about our company and our customers. I want to say how grateful I am about all of this positive feedback that I have received.

“AND there is something I would like to improve. In the past, I have come off as a somewhat stubborn, opinionated, know-it-all, trying to win too much. If I’ve done that to you or the people around you, I am sorry. Please accept my apologies. And Mr. and Ms. Co-Worker, please give me some ideas to help me be a more positive and open-minded listener in the future.”

**Write your speech:**

## INVOLVE

This next step gets the key stakeholders in your life involved in your improvement. Involve begins with something leaders struggle with—asking for help. Peter Drucker said, “The leader of the past knew how to tell. The leader of the future knows how to ask.”

Ask your key stakeholders for ideas or suggestions on how to execute the new behavior. Don't ask for feedback about the past. Ask for *FeedForward* ideas to put into practice for the future. When your stakeholders are engaged in your progress, they are more likely to offer the positive reinforcement you will need when your energy and commitment are low, and that will challenge you to grow.

Regarding suggestions from stakeholders:

Whatever that person says, listen. Take notes, and say, “Thank you.” Do not judge or critique in any way. Just say, “Thank you.” And write down the person's suggestions. Let the person know that you may not be able to try all ideas, but you will commit to one. (You can't commit to everything, but you can commit to something.)

## FOLLOW UP

After seventeen years of research on this topic, we know who changes and who does not, why people change, and why they do not. The key to making change last is to follow up and stick with it.

Follow-up is important not only to change our behavior but to change perception. People sometimes wonder, “Do leaders really change their behavior or are they merely perceived as changing because they do all this follow-up?” Answer: It is much more difficult to change another person's perception than it is to change our behavior. One research principle in psychology is called “cognitive dissonance theory.” Summed up, it means we view people in a manner that's consistent with our previous stereotype. If I have a stereotype of you that says you're a bad listener, I'm going to look for that bad listener in whatever you do or say, and that will reconfirm my belief.

Let me give you an example to illustrate why follow-up and advertising the behavior you want to improve is so important, not only for changing the behavior but for changing perception.

**Situation A:** Say I get feedback that indicates I make too many destructive comments. I don't talk to my co-workers, I don't follow up, and I don't advertise what I'm looking to improve. I think, "All I need to fix this is to quit making the comments, and the problem will go away." Wrong. Here's why this doesn't work. Let's say that I go seven months without making a destructive comment about anyone. After seven months I slip and make a destructive comment. You're my co-worker, you hear me, what's your first reaction? "Marshall hasn't changed." That one negative comment, even though it's my first in seven months, will cue your previous negative stereotype and you will believe I have not changed.

**Situation B:** I've gotten feedback. I want to do a better job of being a great team player, not making destructive comments. You're my co-worker, and you don't necessarily believe I'm going to change, but you pretend to go along with it and take notes. What happens, though, when I follow up and re-advertise a month later? I say, "Remember, I said I wanted to do a great job of being a great team player, not making destructive comments. It's been a month. Based on my behavior last month, give me some ideas for how I can improve for next month." Every month I follow up, *advertise* what I'm trying to improve, you share ideas, and this goes on for several months. One day I say, "Those stupid idiots in finance, idiot accountants." You hear me. You come to me and say, "Marshall, you've been doing so well. You went eight months without doing that." I say, "You're right, my apologies."

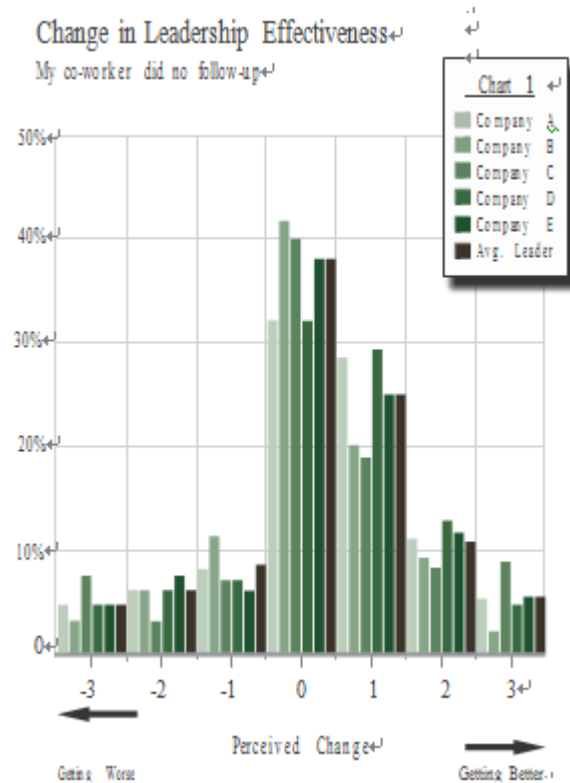
In situation A, did my behavior change? Yes. Did the other person's perception change? No. In situation B, did my behavior change? Yes. Did the other person's perception change? Yes. In leadership, it's not what you say that counts; it's what they *hear* that counts.

Here is a sample script for doing follow-up and advertising. The same guidelines apply as before—no criticizing or judging the ideas offered, and keep it positive, fast, and focused:

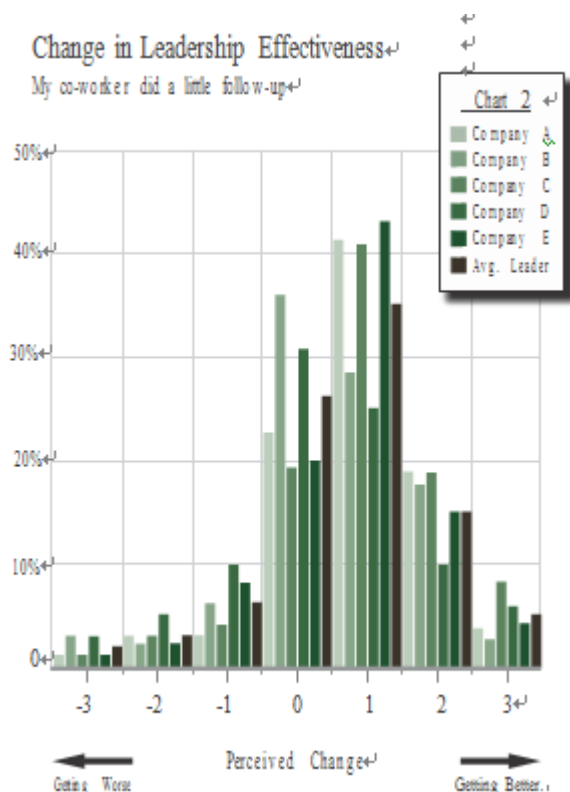
"Mr. Co-Worker, last month I said I wanted to be a more positive and open-minded listener. Based on my behavior last month, if you had an idea or two to help me next month, what might they be?"

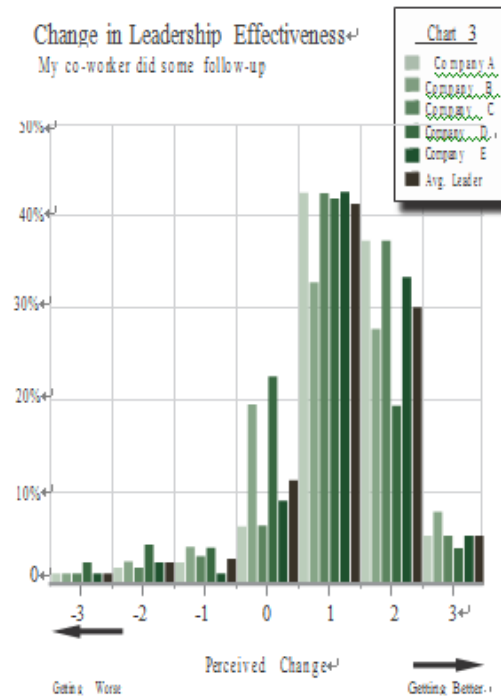
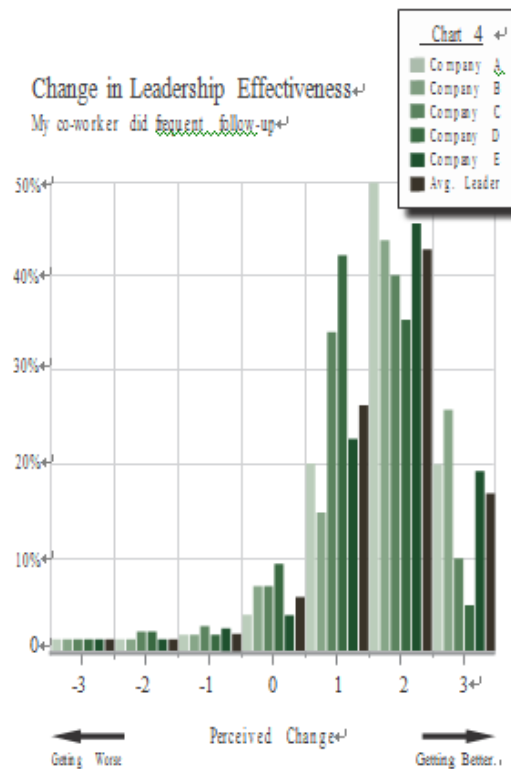
What happens if I follow up and advertise regularly, over several months? I'll answer this not from a theory point of view but from a research point of view. Check out the charts on the following pages.

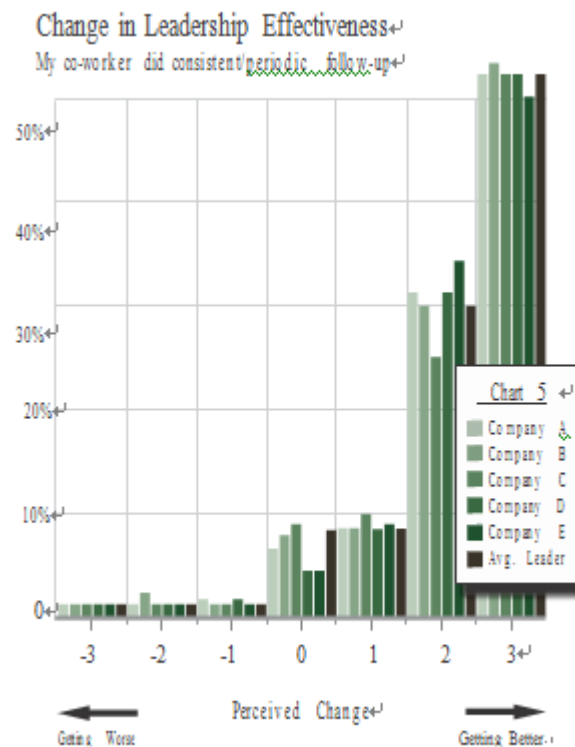
**Chart #1:** What happens when leaders get feedback but they don't follow up or advertise the behavior they're trying to change? Improvement looks like random chance.



**Chart #2:** A little follow-up, a little better.



**Chart #3:** Some follow-up, a lot better.**Chart #4:** Frequent follow-up, much better

**Chart #5:** Consistent or periodic follow-up, massive improvement

These people all went through the same program, in many cases taught by the same person or they had the same coach at the same time. What can we learn from this? If you take the process seriously, learn from everyone around you, and follow up on a regular basis, you're going to get better. Follow-up works, you will get better, and not as judged by you, but as judged by all the important people in your life.



## 21 BEHAVIORS

Peter Drucker, the world's greatest authority on management, said, "We spend a lot of time teaching leaders what to do. We do not spend enough time teaching leaders what to stop."

Here's a list of 21 of the most common behaviors that keep leaders from functioning effectively. Read through the list; you may find some habits that you recognize are not helpful in your life. The list will help you Pick a Behavior (step two in the *Feedforward* process on page 4) that you are going to work hard to improve.

**1. Winning too much**—If it's important, we want to win. If it's meaningful, we want to win. Trivial, we want to win. Not worth it, we want to win anyway. Successful people like to win; it's just that we like to win TOO much. The *Harvard Business Review* asked me, "What is the number one problem of the people you work with?" My answer: "Winning too much."

**2. Adding too much value**—Let's say I'm smart, young, enthusiastic, and I come to you with an idea. You think it's a great idea, but rather than saying it's great, your natural tendency is to say, "That's a nice idea. Why don't you add this to it?" The problem is that the quality of the idea may go up five percent, but my commitment to its execution goes down by fifty percent. Why? Because it's no longer my idea. David Ulrich says, "Effectiveness of execution is a function of two things: the quality of the idea *times* one's commitment to make it work." So when we get wrapped up in improving the quality a little bit, we damage the commitment a lot.

**3. Telling the world how smart we are—the need to show people we're smarter than they think we are.** I remember another CIO who got this one as feedback. He struggled for months to find an effective way to deal with it. Finally, during a *FeedForward* session, I asked, "What's so important about telling people how smart you are even when you know it's damaging your relationship and effectiveness?" He answered, "I feel like a phony, and if I don't keep telling people how smart I am, they may figure out I am a phony."

I told him, "Believe it or not, people already know how smart you are. What they don't know is how smart you think they are." He did a brave thing to break his habit: He asked his team to give him a signal when it was happening. Then he would say two things he thought were smart about the person he was with. It changed his life!

**4. Passing too much judgment—the need to rate others and impose our standards on them.** As we talk about *FeedForward*, four words to remember are “Help More” and “Judge Less.” The key to not passing judgment is to take a deep breath and look in the eyes of that person and ask yourself, “What’s more important, this little judgmental comment I’m about to make, or my relationship with this human being?” If we have the discipline to stop and think, you know what we learn? That little comment we’re about to make really doesn’t matter. But our relationship with that human being matters a whole lot.

**5. Destructive comments—sarcastic comments and remarks made at the expense of others.** Starting with negative qualifiers such as “No”, “But” or “However” unconsciously say to everyone, “I’m right. You’re wrong!”

I once coached a CIO. While reviewing his feedback report, he looked at me and said “But, coach.” I said, “That is free. If you ever speak to me again and you start a sentence with *no*, *but*, or *however*, I’m going to fine you twenty dollars for charity.” He said, “But, coach.” I said, “Twenty.” “No.” “Forty.” “No, no, no.” “Sixty, eighty, a hundred.” He lost four hundred twenty dollars in an hour and a half. At the end of an hour and a half, what did he say to me? “Thank you.” He said, “I had no idea. I did that twenty one times with you throwing it in my face. How many times would I have done it had you not been throwing it in my face? No wonder people think I’m stubborn.”

This guy got better at stopping destructive comments just by using a simple technique: Don’t start sentences with no, but, or however. Along the way, he also became a better listener.

**6. That’s great, but...** This is subtly different from number five and number ten, enough so it needed its own place on the list. This “but” is the KING of all “buts” because it combines the attributes from destructive comments and withholding recognition—leaving those around you feeling dismissed. “But” is a real morale breaker and innovation destroyer. If your company is working toward creating a more innovative culture, then get serious about removing the word from your leadership team’s vocabulary and watch what happens.

**7. Speaking when angry or out of control—using emotional volatility as a management tool.** When we get angry and start speaking when we’re out of control, it helps to take a deep breath, look in the mirror and ask ourselves a couple of hard questions: “How much of this problem is out there? How much of this problem is in here?” Eighty percent of the time, you know what we’re going to learn? When we speak when we’re angry or out of control the solution isn’t out there. It’s inside us.

**8. Playing favorites—failing to see we are treating someone unfairly.** A CEO I worked with struggled to see how his favorites were costing him his company. One of his favorites would create policies and procedures that drained morale while making his own job easier. Another favorite would work as an “island” on projects that required extensive collaboration, conveniently omitting information that the group needed—just so he could maintain his position. How did this go on, you ask? Simple. They were good suck-ups.

Here are some guidelines on how to avoid playing favorites and encouraging suck-ups. First, rank your direct reports, in order, in each of the following categories:

1. How much do they like me? Now, you don’t know how much they like you. What’s important isn’t what you know; it’s what you think. We all say we hate suck-ups. What we really hate are blatant suck-ups, obvious suck-ups, and embarrassing suck-ups. We hate bad suck-ups. We like those good suck-ups that don’t really look like they’re sucking up.
2. How much are they like me? How much do they remind me of that ever-so-special me? It sounds like this: “Ah, he’s a jerk, but he’s an engineer.” Or to put it another way, “Fine person, but he’s not an engineer.” What’s the message? If you’re not an engineer, you don’t have a brain.
3. What is their contribution to our company and our customers?
4. How much positive personal recognition do I give them?

If we’re honest with ourselves, too often our willingness to give recognition is more highly correlated with number one—Do they like me?—or number two—Do they remind me of myself?—than it is with number three—What kind of job are they doing for this company?

**9. Punishing the messenger—a misguided need to attack the innocents who are only trying to help us.** Another client struggled with hearing feedback. And by struggle, I mean he fired people who spoke the truth for very long. It was so bad; his direct reports gave him the nickname Emperor—like the one from the children’s story who had no clothes. What was he teaching the staff? If you want to survive here, don’t tell me the truth.

**10. Failing to give proper recognition—the inability to praise and reward.** One of the fastest ways a manager can demotivate a team is to have no clue about the unique level of contribution each individual has made on a project—let alone not verbalize it. A CEO I worked with, who had an unusually low score in this area, listed each person on his staff and the specific contribution that each person made to him, the company and the customer. As he read the list in our session, he cried as he realized how ungrateful and blind he had been.

So he created cards, one for each staff member, listing that person's contribution to him, the company and the customer. He kept the cards in his back pocket. At random times during the week as he would see people, he would try to remember as much from their card as he could without looking. Ultimately, this CEO could tell every detail of each person's contribution by heart—and he regularly let them know how much he appreciated it. His commitment to this exercise and the effect it had on the staff helped turn the company from unprofitable to profitable.

**11. Making excuses—shifting responsibility to others and repositioning our annoying behavior as a permanent fixture so people will excuse us for it.** I've seen feedback forms from literally thousands of people evaluating their bosses. How often have I seen leadership feedback that sounds like this: "We think you're a great leader because we love the quality of your excuses." Or how about this one: "I really thought you were screwing up but when you made those excuses, that turned it around for me."

Fight the incredible urge to make excuses when you get input, and just learn to shut up and listen. And before you ever start making the excuses, ask yourself this question: "Who am I impressing here?" The answer, in almost every case, is nobody.

**12. Not listening.** Peter Drucker says, "One of the common qualities of great leaders is they are great listeners." Well, listening sounds simple. It's often not as easy as we think and we often make mistakes in listening. And a lot of it isn't just what we say, it's how we look. Let me ask you a question. Has anyone ever looked at you and said, "You're not listening, you're not listening"? Well, my guess is the answer to that is probably a big yes. How many of us have then said, "What do you mean, I'm not listening?" and repeated what the other person said verbatim to prove they were wrong? Well, did this really improve your relationship with that other human being? I don't think so. Next time somebody looks at you and says, "You're not listening," you know what you're going to say? "I'm sorry. Please accept my apologies. I'm going to try to do better." Because, you see, even if we were listening, how much of an "I care about you" message were we sending to that other person by contradicting them? Zero. What's the other person really saying? "Why don't you care?"

So, two important qualities of listening: 1.) Listen. Listen to hear what people have to say. Fight the urge to talk or express our opinions when other people speak to us. Learn to shut up and do some other things we've talked about, like say thank you to them for having the guts to tell us the truth. 2.) Look like you're a good listener. Show that by the way you react and the way you sound; communicate a message to the other human being that says I care about you, what you're saying has value.

**13. Passing the buck—the need to blame everyone but ourselves.** Passing the buck occurs when, say, you have an argument with your manager and at the end of the day your manager says, “Well you want to do X, but we’re going to do Y, and it’s a done deal.” But rather than just go try to make it work, we have a tendency to say, “He made me tell you we’re going to do it this way.” That’s passing the buck, or even worse, “That fool made me tell you we’re going to do it this way.”

The problem with passing the buck is if we say, “He made me tell you we’re going to do it this way” or “She made me tell you we’re going to do it this way,” what do our direct reports learn to think of us as leaders? We’re not leaders, just messengers. Even worse, when we say, “That idiot told me we’re going to do it this way,” and basically stab our boss in the back in front of our direct reports, what do we teach our direct reports to do when they disagree with us? Stab us in the back.

**14. Negativity, or “Let me explain why that won’t work”—the need to share our negative thoughts even when we aren’t asked.** I was shocked recently when I read a study showing the average American is spending fifteen hours a month complaining about upper management. I thought, “That’s impossible.” Since I didn’t do the research, I concluded they must be wrong. Guess what? I interviewed my first two hundred clients and you know what I learned? They were exactly right. I am amazed how much of our lives get wasted critiquing other people, or complaining about upper management.

Because we often confuse disclosure with honesty, we excuse inappropriate or unnecessary disclosure by saying, “But it’s honest.” There are a thousand honest things we can say that we don’t *have* to say. I may not like one of my co-workers, but I don’t have to tell the world about it.

A CEO was coaching one of her direct reports and the direct report complained about something. The CEO said, “Have you ever gone to a Broadway play and watched one of the actors in the middle of the play say, ‘Oh, by the way, I have a hurt foot today, and I’ve got a headache, and my aunt died last week, and I have a cold and isn’t it too bad?’” “Of course not,” the direct report replied. “You know why the actor doesn’t complain?” the CEO said. “Because that person is a professional.” Before you speak, ask yourself: Is this a comment a professional would make in this job?

The CEO went on to give the direct report this helpful technique: As a leader, every day you go out, it's show time. Everybody is looking at your face, they're listening to your comments, and they're looking at you for inspiration. Don't whine, don't complain, and don't make excessive negative comments. Every day when you go to work, say, "I'm going to be up. I'm going to be positive. I'm going to make a difference today."

**15. Refusing to express regret—the inability to take responsibility for our actions, admit we were wrong, or acknowledge how our actions affect others.** One of the greatest things a leader can say when they make a mistake is, "I'm sorry." What happens when leaders stand up, admit what they did wrong, express regret and ask people to help them? Does people's respect for them go down? No. It goes up!

We all screw up sometimes. Don't hide from it. Apologize. By the way, this isn't just true at work; it's true at home. One thing I ask my clients to do is make a list of everyone in life that you need to apologize to—and then apologize to them. So far, I've never had a client with nobody's name on that list.

**16. Failure to express gratitude—the most basic form of bad manners.** To do a better job of recognizing people, try this: Make a list of the key people that impact your life—friends, family, direct reports, co-workers, key customers. Twice a week—once on Wednesday and once on Friday—look at that list and ask yourself: Did anybody on this page do something I should recognize? If they did, send them an e-mail, voicemail, or little note and say thank you. If they didn't, don't do anything. You don't want to look like a hypocrite or a phony.

**17. Withholding information—refusing to share information so that you gain or maintain an advantage over others.** Here's a way for managers to improve communication and let your team know that you aren't holding back any information they need. Once a quarter, have a one-on-one dialogue with each of your direct reports using these six questions:

**Number one:** Where are we going? If you're the manager, say, "Here's where I see us going and here is where I see our part of the business going. What do you think?" Really listen and have a dialogue.

**Number two:** Where are *you* going? I would say, "Here's where I see you and your part of the business going," and then ask, "Where do you think you and your part of the business should be going?" These first two questions create alignment two ways—one with the manager and the team member, and two with the larger picture and the smaller picture.

**Number three:** Tell the person, “Here’s what I think you’re doing well.” Then ask that person, “What do you think you’re doing well?” A lot of times we don’t recognize other people enough, not out of maliciousness but out of ignorance. We don’t recognize what they’ve done because we actually don’t know.

**Number four:** Offer suggestions for improvement. Give the person positive ideas of how they can do things better in the future and ask them: “If *you* were the coach for you, what ideas would you have?”

**Number five:** Ask, “How can I help?”

**Number six:** Ask, “As a manager, any suggestions for me?”

Just by sharing this needed information, you can undo the perception or reality of withholding information.

**18. Claiming credit we don’t deserve—overestimating our contribution to any success.** We don’t realize how difficult it is for us to let other people take credit. We also don’t realize how we unconsciously can be perceived as taking this credit ourselves.

Say your team comes up with a project and does great work. You’re the manager, so you get the recognition. Everybody’s applauding you! What a fantastic job you’ve done! Don’t just sit there and think, “Aren’t I wonderful?” Take a second, acknowledge what your team members have done and give them credit.

Challenge yourself by making a list of all the people you work with. Ask yourself, “What are my biggest achievements?” Then, for each of these achievements, ask yourself a tough question: “How much of this was because of me and how much of this was because of somebody else? How much of this is where I deserve the credit or how much of this is an area where they should get the credit?” Go out of your way to share the credit, or even to give credit and not take any for yourself.

**19. Clinging to the past—the need to deflect blame away from ourselves and onto events and people from the past.** One of the biggest challenges of clinging to the past is saying, “This is the way we’ve always done it” or “That has never worked in the past.” Using the past as kind of an excuse for the future.

America experienced a financial meltdown in 2008. One of the reasons was a lot of mathematical models were used to determine the future of the United States economy. These mathematical models were all based on one assumption:



*What never has happened never can happen.* Guess what? Sometimes what never has happened happens. And as soon as this happened in our economy, every mathematical model fell apart.

It's important to keep an open mind. Don't cling to the past. Look at the future, and ask yourself not just what has happened, but also ask, "What *can* happen?"

**20. An excessive need to be me—exalting our faults and virtues simply because they are who we are.** Just about anybody can change. The motivation for that change has to come from one place, though—inside us. None of us have to be a certain way if we don't want to be. But when we cling to the excuse, "That's just the way I am," then that's the way we stay.

One of our client's feedback report showed he didn't recognize people well. To which he said, "That's just the way I am." Then he asked, "Why do they need so much recognition anyway?" On and on he went. I finally looked at him and said, "If you gave other people better recognition, would they perform more poorly or perhaps better?" He responded, "Well, they'd perform better." "Would customer satisfaction go down or go up?" "It would go up." "Would you make less money or more money?" "We'd probably make more money." I finally said, "Can you explain to me again why you are doing a bad job of giving these people recognition?" He looked at me and he said, "Well, that's just the way I am." But I think he realized that "just the way I am" didn't have to be just the way he was.

**21. Goal obsession—the overarching behavior which underlies all of these behaviors.** Goal obsession occurs when we get so wrapped up in achieving a goal that we forget our ultimate mission. My favorite example of this is a fascinating study by a couple of people, Darley and Batson, at Princeton Theological Seminary.

They took all these ministers. To half of them they said, "You're late! Get across campus. You've got to deliver a sermon on the topic of the Good Samaritan." Well, on the way across campus, they plant an actor playing the role of a hurt person. The actor's going, "I need help. Help me, help me, help me, help me!" Ninety percent of the ministers in Princeton Theological Seminary, when told they were ten minutes late to deliver a sermon on the topic of the Good Samaritan, ignored the pleas of a person in need. In two cases, the actor tries to grab the ministers. In both cases, they brushed the person off and moved on to deliver that sermon. And, by the way, so would we. It is very difficult for successful, goal-driven people—especially when we write down that goal and state that goal—it is incredibly difficult to stop, back away and ask a question, "What's more important here—this goal or the broader mission?"



**What behavior did you pick?**

**What do you hope to accomplish by changing this behavior?**



## MARSHALL'S BEHAVIORAL COACHING PROCESS

Many of us work in organizations that preach the following sermon: “We want to create an environment where we tear down the silos that isolate us, and build positive, collaborative, win-win relationships with our colleagues.”

Yet too often, as leaders, our actions don't line up with this corporate happy talk. Worse, no one holds us accountable (primarily because of a silent cultural norm called “Say Nothing About It,” which leaders help create and perpetuate).

This accountability breakdown creates cynicism, lack of trust and low morale, which sap organizations of energy and momentum. This disconnect, between what our words say is important and what our actions say is important, is a huge frustration for employees. This issue, and many like it, is what behavioral coaching addresses.

While the coaching process can improve consistency—which will restore faith in the leadership of the organization—the following conditions must be in place:

- The person who is being coached must make a sincere effort to change. Behavioral coaching only works if you are willing to make the needed commitment.
- The organization has faith in the process and the individual who is going through that process, and will create an environment to support that person. If not, don't bother going through this process.
- The person going through the coaching process has the intelligence or functional skills to do the job. If a manager does not have the capacity or experience required, don't expect behavioral coaching to help. This process won't turn a bad engineer into a good engineer!
- The person is committed to the same mission as the organization. Coaching is a “how to get there” process, not a “where to go” process. If the people being coached are headed in the wrong direction, behavioral coaching will only help them get there faster!

If these conditions exist, the behavioral coaching process is set up for success!



## The steps for Behavioral Coaching

**1. Involve the leaders being coached in determining the desired behavior in their leadership roles.** Leaders cannot be expected to change behavior if they don't have a clear understanding of what desired behavior looks like. The people we coach (in agreement with their managers) work with us to determine desired leadership behavior.

**2. Involve the leaders being coached in determining key stakeholders.** Not only do clients need to be clear on desired behaviors, they need to be clear (again in agreement with their managers) on key stakeholders. There are two major reasons why people deny the validity of feedback: wrong items or wrong raters. By having our clients and their managers agree on the desired behaviors and key stakeholders in advance, we help ensure their "buy in" to the process.

**3. Collect feedback.** In my coaching practice, I personally interview all key stakeholders. The people I am coaching are all potential CEOs, and the company is making a real investment in their development. However, at lower levels in the organization (which are more price sensitive), traditional 360° feedback can work very well. In either case, feedback is critical. It is impossible to get evaluated on changed behavior if there is not agreement on what behavior to change.

**4. Reach agreement on key behaviors for change.** As I have become more experienced, my approach has become simpler and more focused. I generally recommend picking only one to two key areas for behavioral change with each client. This helps ensure maximum attention to the most important behavior. My clients and their managers (unless my client is the CEO) agree upon the desired behavior for change. This ensures that I won't spend a year working with my clients and have their managers determine that we have worked on the wrong thing!

**5. Have the coaching clients respond to key stakeholders.** The person being reviewed should talk with each key stakeholder and collect additional *Feedforward* suggestions on how to improve on the key areas targeted for improvement. In responding, the person being coached should keep the conversation positive, simple and focused. When mistakes have been made in the past, it is generally a good idea to apologize and ask for help in changing the future. I suggest that my clients listen to stakeholder suggestions and not judge the suggestions.

**6. Review what has been learned with clients and help them develop an action plan.** As stated earlier, my clients have to agree to the basic steps in our process.

On the other hand, outside of these basic steps, all of the other ideas that I share with my clients are suggestions. I just ask them to listen to my ideas in the same way they are listening to the ideas from their key stakeholders. I then ask them to come back with a plan of what they want to do. These plans need to come from them—not me. After reviewing their plans, I almost always encourage them to live up to their own commitments. I am much more of a facilitator than a judge. I usually just help my clients do what they know is the right thing to do.

**7. Develop an ongoing follow-up process.** Ongoing follow-up should be efficient and focused. Questions like, “Based upon my behavior last month, what ideas do you have for me next month?” Keep the focus on the future. Within six months conduct a two- to six-item mini-survey with key stakeholders. They should be asked whether the person has become more or less effective in the areas targeted for improvement.

**8. Review results and start again.** If the person being coached has taken the process seriously, stakeholders almost invariably report improvement. Build on that success by repeating the process during the next twelve to eighteen months. This follow-up will assure continued progress on initial goals and uncover additional areas for improvement. Stakeholders will appreciate the follow-up. No one minds filling out a focused, two- to six-item questionnaire if they see positive results. The person being coached will benefit from ongoing, targeted steps to improve performance.

## The Value of Behavioral Coaching for High-Potential leaders

While behavioral coaching is only one branch in the coaching field, it is the most widely used type of coaching. Most requests for coaching involve behavioral change. While this process can be very meaningful and valuable for top executives, it can be even more useful for high-potential future leaders. These are the people who have great careers in front of them. Increasing effectiveness in leading people can have an even greater impact if it is a twenty- year process, instead of a one-year program.

Finally, people often ask, “Can executives really change their behavior?” The answer is definitely yes. If they didn’t change, we would never get paid (and we almost always get paid). At the top of major organizations, even a small positive change in behavior can have a big impact. From an organizational perspective, the fact that the executive is trying to change anything (and is being a role model for personal development) may be even more important than what the executive is trying to change. One key message that I have given every CEO that I coach is “To help others develop—start with you!”

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

### Coaching Tips

#### **Tip Number One: It's Not About You**

One of the greatest lessons I've learned about coaching over the years is that it's not about me. It's about the clients.

You know, the client I coached who improved the most is the client I spent the least amount of time with. He told me, "I manage 50,000 people and my job is no different than yours. If these are not great people, I'm not going to get great results. That's why every day when I come to work, I tell myself, 'Leadership is not about me. Leadership is about them.'"

This CEO taught me a valuable, humbling lesson. He said, "Don't make the coaching process about you. Make it about your clients and everyone around your clients. The way your coaching process works, if you have the right clients, you will always succeed. If you have the wrong clients, even God's not going to succeed. Don't make it about you. Make it about getting great clients." What did I say to him? "Thank you very much."

#### **Tip Number Two: They Have to Care**

When does behavioral coaching not work? When people don't care. Have you ever tried to change the behavior of a husband, wife or partner who had absolutely no interest in changing? How much luck did you have there? Don't coach people who don't care.

My mother was a first grade school teacher. In my mother's mind, I was always in the first grade, my father was in the first grade, all of our relatives were in the first grade—and she corrected us like we were in the first grade. With my dad, she sounded like this... "Bill, Bill, Bill!" How irritating and annoying! Well, we ended up getting a talking bird. You guessed it, after a while, the bird starts going, "Bill, Bill, Bill!" Now old dad's being corrected by a bird. He's 80 years old, on his little cane, and he looked up at the bird and my mother and said, "Honey, I'm 80 years old, let it go!"

Remember, if they don't care, don't waste your time! Behavioral coaching only works with people who care.

**Tip Number Three: It's Got To Be Behavioral**

Behavioral coaching only solves behavioral problems. I get ridiculous requests for coaching. A pharmaceutical company called me up, "Marshall, we want you to coach Dr. X." I said, "Great. What's his problem?" They said, "He's not updated on recent medical technology." I said, "Neither am I." Behavioral coaching can't make a bad doctor a good doctor or a bad scientist a good scientist. Behavioral coaching only helps people with behavioral issues.

**Tip Number Four: You Fire Integrity Issues, Not Coach 'Em**

Never coach an integrity violation. You fire integrity violations, not coach them. How many integrity violations does it take to ruin the reputation of your company? Um, that would be . . . one. Sometimes it's just the wrong person in the wrong company in the wrong job. When that happens, you know the best thing you can do? Encourage them to leave. Because when you do behavioral coaching you're not helping them be a better professional, you're helping them be a better phony. It's not really them.

In other cases, people get written off by upper management and they're not going to be given a fair chance and the companies don't have enough guts to fire them. They do this phony behavioral coaching. It's not really about development or behavior. If you want to help people, help them. If you want to fire people, fire them. Don't jerk them around.

**Tip Number Five: Get Clear**

I begin by getting a clear contract with my clients. If I coach my clients, they will receive confidential feedback from everyone around them; they will pick important behavior to improve; and they will follow up, apologize for previous mistakes, involve their co-workers, and get measured twice. If they refuse to do these things, I don't work with them. Again, in my coaching process, I don't get paid if my clients don't get better, period.

**Tip Number Six: Internal Coaches**

Three conditions must exist for internal coaching to work. One, credibility: the client has to give you the credibility to talk with you. Two, confidentiality: the client has to believe the coaching is confidential and won't be used against them later in a performance appraisal discussion. Three, time: it takes time to build the reputation of having the first two. If the internal coach is given the credibility and can be seen doing coaching in a confidential way, and given the time, there is no reason why internal coaches cannot be just as effective as external coaches. The key to their success: they coached only high-potential future leaders and not people who were going to be fired.



**Tip Number Seven: Don't Be Condescending**

One of the mistakes a lot of people with behavioral training make is that we come off as overly empathetic and almost talk down to our clients. This overly sensitive, I'm-in-touch-with-your-pain approach can be a huge turnoff to real-world business executives. My clients are adults. These are successful people. I don't feel sorry for them or pity them. These folks are doing great and just have a couple of things they want to do even better. So don't come off as "Poor you" or "I feel sorry for you" or "Isn't this whole process traumatic?" I keep things positive, simple, focused and fast. My clients are executives. That's what they respond to. They don't have time for things that are highly complicated. And the last thing they need is the feeling that someone they hired to help them is talking down to them.

**Tip Number Eight: Work It!**

One of the biggest struggles for external coaches is marketing and self-promotion. The average income from coaching for someone who says they're a life or executive coach is very, very low. Some might say \$20,000 to \$30,000 per year from coaching. A lot of people who are really talented as a life or executive coach are not skilled with personal marketing. Make peace with self-promotion. If you're going to be an external executive coach, you have to market yourself. And there's nothing wrong with that.

If you think you're going to have clients just because you do a great job, you make no more sense than a company that thinks it's going to have clients because it makes good products and doesn't market. Any great company has to market itself in the same way that you as an executive coach need to market yourself. My suggestion: Establish a clear identity as a coach. My job is helping successful leaders achieve positive lasting change in behavior for themselves or people on their teams. That's all I do. Establish a clear brand identity as a coach, figure out who you want to be, focus on being a world authority at that, and don't be ashamed to promote yourself.

**Tip Number Nine: Talk Less**

One thing we often do in coaching is talk too much. It starts with giving you my best idea, then I keep talking and feel the need to give you my second best idea, and on and on, until I've given you my seventy-fifth best idea. What happens to the quality of our ideas as we keep babbling? They get worse and worse. People don't remember our first *great* idea; they remember our last *stupid* idea.

## Group exercise Instruction sheet

**Objective:** Exchange ideas to support an individual's identified behavior for change.

**Group Size:** 2 to 1000

**Materials:** Pen and paper

**Set Up:**

*Participant Role and Responsibilities*

Each participant takes a turn in a sharing or learning role. In the sharing role, participant offers suggestions to help their partner implement their behavior change in the future. (No dialogue about what has been tried in the past.)

In the learning role, participant writes down all ideas to try for the future without judging or critiquing. (No dialogue about if the idea is good, bad or how it hasn't worked in the past.)

**Directions:**

Find a partner.

Decide who plays which role first—sharer or learner.

Partners have 60 seconds to discuss behavior to be changed.

Take 2-3 minutes for idea sharing and writing.

Switch roles, and take 2-3 minutes more for sharing and writing.

Switch partners and start again.

**Debrief:**

What did you learn?

What suggestion most expanded your understanding?

What are you going to try?

What will change because of this?

How will you be accountable to try these suggestions?

To whom will you be accountable to try these suggestions?



## Feedback Participant Preparation sheet

Thank you for participating in my personal development and growth. As part of the process, I need your anonymous and confidential feedback. A survey will be sent to you to fill out. All the data will be compiled and I will use the whole group's input to pick a behavior to improve.

As part of the ongoing process, I will be checking in with you to get ideas for how I can improve. To be best prepared, here are suggested guidelines for us:

### **My role and responsibilities:**

- Listen to ideas fully without criticizing or judging. I may only say "Thank you."
- I will write down shared ideas and pick one to try over the next month. (I can't promise to try everything, but I can promise to try *something*.)
- Work on behavior and change.
- Schedule monthly follow-up sessions (a three to five minute meeting ).

### **Your role and responsibilities:**

- Promise to let go of the past.
- Tell the truth about my progress.
- Be supportive and positive.
- During follow-up sessions, come with one or two suggestions to try in the future that will help me change the behavior. (No feedback, just *FeedForward*.)

Thank you in advance for all I am sure to learn from you and for your willingness to help me succeed.

## Mini follow-Up survey Instruction sheet

Do you believe this person has become more (or less) effective in the past six months on the following items? (Please circle the number that best matches your observation of any change in effectiveness.)

	Less Effective			No Perceptible Change			More Effective	No Change Needed	Not Enough Information
Team Items:									
1. Clarifies roles and expectations with fellow team members.....	-3	-2	-1	0	1	2	3	NCN	NI
2. Supports the final decision of the team (even if it was not his/her original idea).....	-3	-2	-1	0	1	2	3	NCN	NI
Individual Items:									
1. Genuinely listens to others.....	-3	-2	-1	0	1	2	3	NCN	NI
2. Strives to see the value of differing opinions.....	-3	-2	-1	0	1	2	3	NCN	NI

How has this person followed up with you on areas that he/she has been trying to improve? (Check one)

- ☐ No Perceptible Follow-Up  
☐ Little Follow-Up  
☐ Some Follow-Up  
☐ Frequent Follow-Up  
☐ Consistent (Periodic) Follow-Up

What can this individual do to become a more effective team member?



## Behavior Aid - Withholding

Schedule a quarterly meeting and use these six questions to help overcome the perception of withholding.

**Number one:** Where are we going? If you're the manager, say, "Here's where I see us going and here is where I see our part of the business going. What do you think?" Really listen and have a dialogue.

**Number two:** Where are you going? You say, "Here's where I see you and your part of the business going." Then ask, "Where do you think you and your part of the business should be going?" These first two questions create alignment two ways. One with the manager and the person, and two with the larger picture and the smaller picture.

**Number three:** Tell the person, "Here's what I think you're doing well." Then ask that person, "What do you think you're doing well?" A lot of times we don't recognize other people enough—not out of maliciousness but out of ignorance. We don't recognize what they've done because we actually don't know.

**Number Four:** Suggestions for improvement. I recommend *FeedForward* more than feedback in this stage of the game. Give the person positive ideas of how they can do things better in the future and ask them: "If you were the coach for you, what ideas would you have?"

**Number Five:** "How can I help?"

**Number Six:** "As a manager, any suggestions for me?"

Just by sharing this needed information, you can undo the perception or reality of withholding information.

## Behavior Aid - Avoid Suck-Ups

Here are some guidelines on how to avoid playing favorites and encouraging suck-ups.

First, rank your direct reports, in order, in each of the following categories:

**Number One:** How much do they like me? You don't know how much they like you. What's important isn't what you know; it's what you think. We all say we hate suck-ups. What we really hate are blatant suck-ups, obvious suck-ups, and embarrassing suck-ups. We hate bad suck-ups. We like those good suck-ups that don't really look like they're sucking up.

**Number Two:** How much are they like me? How much do they remind me of that ever-so-special me? It sounds like this: "Ah, he's a jerk, but he's an engineer." Or to put it another way, "Fine person, but he's not an engineer." What's the message? If you're not an engineer, you don't have a brain.

**Number Three:** What is their contribution to our company and our customers?

**Number Four:** How much positive personal recognition do I give them?



## Behavior Aid - Giving Proper Credit

**Instructions:** Take the names of the top ten people you want to make sure you are giving proper credit. Then answer these three questions about each person.

**Number One:** What is this person's contribution to my success?

**Number Two:** What is this person's contribution to the company's success?

**Number Three:** What is this person's contribution to our customers?



## Notes Page

Behavior to improve:

Suggestions for implementation:

What do I think of my own progress?

What more do I want from this behavior change?



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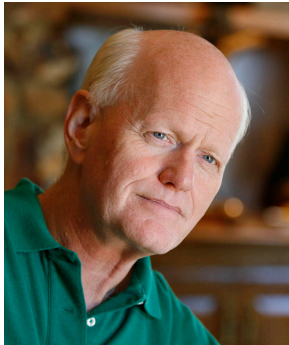
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All articles can be found at [www.marshallgoldsmithlibrary.com](http://www.marshallgoldsmithlibrary.com)

## About the Author



### Marshall Goldsmith

**Recognized as world's top ranked executive coach, the # 1 leadership thinker and the # 7 business thinker in the world by Harvard Business Review and Thinkers 50.**

Dr. Goldsmith's Ph.D. is from UCLA's Anderson School of Management where he was recognized as one of 100 distinguished graduates in the 75 year history of the School (in 2010). He teaches executive education at Dartmouth's Tuck School of Business and frequently speaks at other leading business schools around the world. He also served on the Board of the Peter Drucker Foundation for ten years.

Marshall has coached more than 150 CEOs and other top executives of Fortune companies to measurably improve their leadership effectiveness and that of their executive teams. Marshall has also worked with the highest level leaders in government and NGOs as he worked with US Army Generals, Navy Admirals, Girl Scout executives, International and American Red Cross leaders, where he became a National Volunteer of the Year.

### Professional / Coaching Awards and Recognition

His work has been recognized by almost every professional organization in his field. Marshall's acknowledgments include:

- Institute for Management Studies – Lifetime Achievement Award (one of only two ever awarded)
- American Management Association - 50 great thinkers and leaders who have influenced the field of management over the past 80 years
- Business Week – 50 great leaders in America
- Wall Street Journal – top ten executive educators
- Forbes – five most-respected executive coaches
- Leadership Excellence – top five thinkers on leadership
- Economic Times (India) – top CEO coaches of America
- Economist (UK) – most credible executive advisors in the new era of business
- National Academy of Human Resources – Fellow of the Academy (America's top HR award)
- World HRD Congress – 2011 global leader in HR thinking
- Tata Award (India) – 2011 Global HR Excellence
- Fast Company – America's preeminent executive coach
- Leader to Leader Institute – 2010 Leader of the Future Award

### Publications & Media

He is the million-selling author or editor of 33 books, including:

- Triggers: Creating Behavior That Lasts--Becoming the Person You Want to Be
- MOJO - New York Times and Wall Street Journal bestseller
- What Got You Here Won't Get You There – WSJ # 1 business book and winner of the Harold Longman Award for Business Book of the Year
- Succession: Are You Ready? – WSJ bestseller
- The Leader of the Future - Business Week bestseller
- The AMA Handbook of Leadership, The Organization of the Future and The Leadership Investment are all American Library Association Choice award winners for academic business books of the year

His books have been translated into 28 languages and became bestsellers in eight countries.

"We were a very successful team who took our performance to the next level. With Marshall's help we identified our two areas and went to work. We used everyone's help and support, exceeded our improvement expectations and had fun! A team's dedication to continuous improvement combined with Marshall's proveprocess ROCKS!"

**Alan Mulally - CEO Ford Motor Company, #3 on Fortune Magazine's best leaders in the world in 2014**