

Bad Behavior

by Marshall Goldsmith

Peter Drucker once said, "Most leaders don't need to learn what to do. They need to learn what to stop."

How true. Can you imagine your boss admitting a personal failing and outlining his efforts to stop doing it?

Probably not. There are good reasons for this. Leaders try to maintain a positive tone and commitment to positive action. Recognition and reward systems acknowledge the doing of something. Leaders get credit for doing good things - rarely for ceasing to do bad things.

What's Wrong With Us?

I find that the 20 flaws that hold most people back are rarely flaws of skill, intelligence, or personality. They are challenges in interpersonal behavior, often leadership behavior. They are the egregious everyday annoyances that make your workplace noxious. They are transactional flaws performed by one person against others.

1. Winning too much:

The need to win at all costs and in all situations - when it matters, when it doesn't, and when it's totally beside the point.

2. Adding too much value:

The desire to add our two cents to every discussion.

3. Passing judgment:

The need to rate others and impose our standards on them.

4. Making destructive comments:

The needless sarcasms and cutting remarks that we think make us sound witty.

5. Starting with "No," "But," or "However":

The overuse of these negative qualifiers which secretly say to everyone, "I'm right. You're wrong."

6. Telling the world how smart we are:

The need to show people we're smarter than they think we are.

7. Speaking when angry:

Using emotional volatility as a management tool.

8. Negativity, or "Let me explain why that won't work":

The need to share our negative thoughts, even when we aren't asked.

9. Withholding information:

The refusal to share information to gain or maintain an advantage over others.

10. Failing to give proper recognition:

The inability to praise and reward.

11. Claiming credit that we don't deserve:

The most annoying way to overestimate our contribution to any success.

12. Making excuses:

The need to reposition our annoying behavior as a permanent fixture so people excuse us for it.

13. Clinging to the past:

The need to deflect blame away from ourselves and onto events and people from our past; a subset of blaming everyone else.

14. Playing favorites:

Failing to see that we are treating someone unfairly.

15. Refusing to express regret:

The inability to take responsibility for our actions, admit we're wrong, or recognize how our actions affect others.

16. Not listening:

The most passive-aggressive form of disrespect.

17. Failing to express gratitude:

The most basic form of bad manners.

18. Punishing the messenger:

The misguided need to attack the innocents who are only trying to help us.

19. Passing the buck:

The need to blame everyone but ourselves.

20. An excessive need to be "me":

Exalting our faults as virtues simply because they're who we are.

Admittedly, this is a scary pantheon of bad behavior, and together they sound like a chamber of horrors. Who would want to work in a culture where colleagues are guilty of these sins? And yet we do every day. The good news is that these failings rarely show up in bunches. You may know one person guilty of one or two of them. But it's hard to find successful people who embody many of them.

There's more good news. These faults are simple to correct. The fix is in the skill set of every person. For example, the cure for not thanking enough is remembering to say, "Thank you." The cure for not apologizing is learning to say, "I'm sorry. I'll do better in the future." For not listening, it's keeping your mouth shut and ears open. And so on. Although this stuff is simple, it's not easy. We already know what to do - we just lose sight of the many daily opportunities to employ them.

Check yourself against the list. It's likely that you're guilty of a few of these annoying habits. Some are more serious issues than others. Whittle the list down to the one or two vital issues, and you'll know where to start. LE

In November 2015 Dr. Marshall Goldsmith was recognized as the #1 Leadership Thinker in the World and the top 5 Management Thinker at the Thinkers50 Award Ceremony in London. He was also selected as the #1 Executive Coach in the World by GlobalGurus.org, and one of the 10 Most Influential Management Thinkers in the World by Thinkers50 in both 2011 and 2013. In 2011 he was chosen as the World's Most Influential Leadership Thinker. Marshall was the highest rated executive coach on the Thinkers50 List in both 2011 and 2013. What Got You Here Won't Get You There was listed as a top ten business bestseller for 2013 by INC Magazine / 800 CEO Read (for the seventh consecutive year). Marshall's exciting new research on engagement is published in his newest book Triggers (Crown, 2015).