

“What Got You Here Won't Get You There”

Mark Reiter

Kindle Notes by Dave Kraft

Like many creative people, he is also hyperactive, with the metabolism and attention span of a hummingbird. He has a bad habit of verbalizing any and every internal monologue in his head. They think they have all the answers, but others see it as arrogance. I teach them the miracle of feedforward, which is my “special sauce” methodology for eliciting advice from people on what they can do to get better in the future.

Successful people tend to be extremely busy and face the danger of over-commitment. Opportunities are thrust at you at a pace that you have never seen before. You are not experienced or disciplined enough to say no to some of them. If you're not careful, you'll be overwhelmed in due course—and that which made you rise will bring about your fall. This “we will succeed” attitude leads to staff burnout, high turnover, and a weaker team than the one you started with. His biggest challenge as a leader was avoiding over-commitment.

Successful people have a unique distaste for feeling controlled or manipulated. These four success beliefs—that we have the skills, the confidence, the motivation, and the free choice to succeed—make us superstitious. People will do something—including changing their behavior—only if it can be demonstrated that doing so is in their own best interests as defined by their own values. Then there's the protective shell that successful people develop over time which whispers to them, “You are right. Everyone else is wrong.”

If you press people to identify the motives behind their self-interest it usually boils down to four items: money, power, status, and popularity. These are the standard payoffs for success. It's why we will claw and scratch for a raise (money), for a promotion (power), for a bigger title and office (status). It's why so many of us have a burning need to be liked by everyone (popularity). The hot button is different for in my experience, people only change their ways when what they truly value is threatened. Peter Drucker says, the wisest was, “We spend a lot of time teaching leaders what to do. We don't spend enough time teaching leaders what to stop. Half the leaders I have met don't need to learn what to do. They need to learn what to stop doing.”

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 overwhelming 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 sharp and 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 weren’t asked.
9. Withholding information: The refusal to share information in order to 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 for colleagues.
17. Failing to express gratitude: The most basic form of bad manners.
18. Punishing the messenger: The misguided need to attack the innocent who are usually 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.

There’s a reason I devote so much energy to identifying interpersonal challenges in successful people. It’s because the higher you go, the more your problems are behavioral.

Winning too much. Winning too much is the #1 challenge because it underlies nearly every other behavioral problem the urge to win trumps our common sense. We do the wrong thing even when we know what we should do. “Good idea, but it’d be better if you tried it this way.”

The problem is, you may have improved the content of my idea by 5 percent, but you've reduced my commitment to executing it by 50 percent, because you've taken away my ownership of the idea. The higher up you go in the organization, the more you need to make other people winners and not make it about winning yourself.

Passing judgment. Making destructive comments The question is not, "Is it true?" but rather, "Is it worth it?"

Starting with "No," "But," or "However" When you start a sentence with "no," "but," "however," or any variation thereof, no matter how friendly your tone or how many cute mollifying phrases you throw in to acknowledge the other person's feelings, the message to the other person is You are wrong.

Telling the world how smart we are. Being smart turns people on. Announcing how smart you are turns them off. Our excessive need to tell people how smart we are.

Speaking when angry. Emotional volatility is not the most reliable leadership tool.

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

Withholding information. In order to have power, you need to inspire loyalty rather than fear and suspicion. Withholding information is nothing more than a misplaced need to win.

Failing to give proper recognition. In training programs, when I ask participants, "How many of you think you need to do a better job of recognizing others for their great work?" without fail eight out of ten people raise their hands. Successful people become great leaders when they learn to shift the focus from themselves to others.

Claiming credit that we don't deserve

Clinging to the past

Playing favorites

Refusing to express regret successful people have a practically irrational need to win at everything). I'm sure this is what Benjamin Franklin believed when he said, "To gain a friend, let him do you a favor."

Not listening

Failing to express gratitude. Gratitude is a skill that we can never display too often. And yet for some reason, we are cheap and chary with gratitude—as if it were rare Bordeaux wine that we can serve only on special occasions.

Punishing the messenger

Passing the buck. In the workplace. How well you own up to your mistakes makes a bigger impression than how you revel in your successes.

An excessive need to be "me"

Goal Obsession. When I dug a little deeper, the universal complaint about Candace was that she always had to be front and center in every success. She hogged Goal obsession had turned Candace into someone who claimed credit for everything, even when she didn't deserve it. Until something better comes along, confidential 360-degree feedback is the best way for successful people to identify what they need to improve in their relationships at work. Stop doing that. Treat every piece of advice as a gift or a compliment and simply say, "Thank you." No one expects The questions are simple.

Does the executive in question:

- Clearly communicate a vision.
- Treat people with respect.
- Solicit contrary opinions.
- Encourage other people's ideas.
- Listen to other people in meetings.

It's my contention—and it's the bedrock thesis of this book—that interpersonal behavior is the difference-maker between being great and near-great, between getting the gold and settling for the bronze. (The higher you go, the more your "issues" are behavioral.)

Basically, feedback comes to us in three forms: Solicited, unsolicited, and observation.

My only concern is that we cannot be sure that you will (a) ask the right people, (b) ask the right questions, (c) interpret the answers properly, or (d) accept them as accurate.

What people feel or think about you is not the key to getting better. In soliciting feedback for yourself, the only question that works—the only one!—must be phrased like this: "How can I do better? As human beings we almost always suffer from the disconnect between the self we think we are and the self that the rest of the world sees in us. We can then begin to make the real changes that are needed to close the gap between our stated values and our actual behavior. In meetings they saw that there was no tollbooth between Mike's brain and mouth.

Your flaws at work don't vanish when you walk through the front door at home. "It's a lot harder to change people's perception of your behavior than it is to change your behavior. It takes time and relentless persuasion for any idea to gain traction. Basically, there are three things that all good listeners do: They think before they speak; they listen with respect; and they're always gauging their response by asking themselves, "Is it worth it?"

The ability to make a person feel that, when you're with that person, he or she is the most important (and the only) person in the room is the skill that separates the great from the near-great. I've asked my clients point blank, "What interpersonal skill stands out in the most successful people you've met?"

In one form or another, they always cite this “make the other person feel singularly special” ability—usually This taught me a second lesson: There is an enormous disconnect between understanding and doing. Most leadership development revolves around one huge false assumption: If people understand, then they will do. That’s not true. In hindsight, it makes perfect sense—and echoes the Peter Drucker prediction that “the leader of the future will be a person who knows how to ask.”

HERE’S WHERE WE ARE. You’ve identified the interpersonal habit that’s holding you back. You’ve apologized for whatever errant behavior has annoyed the people who matter to you at work or at home. You’ve said, “I’m sorry. I’ll try to do better.” And they’ve accepted that. You’ve continued to advertise your intention to change your ways. You’ve remained in steady contact with the people who matter, regularly reminding them that you’re trying to do better. You do this by bringing up your objectives and asking point-blank, “How am I doing?”

You have also mastered the essential skills of listening and thanking. You can now listen to people’s answers to your questions without judging, interrupting, disputing, or denying them. You do this by keeping your mouth shut except to say, “Thank you.” You’ve also learned how to be more diligent about follow-up, seeing the process as part of an ongoing, never-ending advertising campaign to (a) find out from others if you are, in fact, getting better and (b) remind people that you’re still trying, still trying.

With these skills, now you’re ready for feedforward. As a concept, as something to do, feedforward is so simple I almost blush to dignify it with a name. Yet some of the simplest ideas are also the most effective. Since they’re so easy to do, you have no excuse not to try them. Feedforward asks you to do four simple steps:

1. Pick the one behavior that you would like to change which would make a significant, positive difference in your life. For example, I want to be a better listener.
2. Describe this objective in a one-on-one dialogue with anyone you know. It could be your wife, kids, boss, best friend, or coworker. It could even be a stranger. The person you choose is irrelevant. He or she doesn’t have to be an expert on the subject. For example, you say, I want to be a better listener. Almost anyone in an organization knows what this means. You don’t have to be an “expert” on listening to know what good listening means to you. Likewise, he or she doesn’t have to be an expert on you. If you’ve ever found yourself on a long flight seated next to a perfect stranger and proceeded to engage in an earnest, heartfelt, and honest discussion of your
3. Ask that person for two suggestions for the future that might help you achieve a positive change in your selected behavior—in this case,
4. Listen attentively to the suggestions. Take notes if you like. If feedback, both positive and negative, reports on how you functioned in the past, then feedforward comes in the form of ideas that you can put into practice in the future. If feedback is past tense, then feedforward is future perfect.

Unlike feedback, which often introduces a discussion of mistakes and shortfalls, feedforward focuses on solutions, not problems. Instead of rehashing a past that cannot be changed, feedforward encourages you to spend time creating a future by (a) asking for suggestions for the future, (b) listening to ideas, and (c) just saying thank you. Have you ever wondered why the most successful people at the top of your organization tend to have the best personal assistants? Simple answer: Successful executives know that a great assistant can shield them from dozens of daily annoyances that would otherwise distract them from doing their real job.

The following seven rules will help you get a better handle on the process of change. If you obey them, you'll be stacking the deck in your favor.

Rule 1. You Might Not Have a Disease That Behavioral Change Can Cure

That's not a behavioral problem. It's a skill problem. David needed a coach all right—a media coach. But he didn't need me.

Rule 2. Pick the Right Thing to Change

Rule 3. Don't Delude Yourself About What You Really Must Change

Rule 4. Don't Hide from the Truth You Need to heed

Rule 5. There Is No Ideal Behavior

Rule 6. If You Can Measure It, You Can Achieve It

Rule 7. Monetize the Result, Create a Solution

Rule 8. The Best Time to Change Is Now

Writing a memo to staff on "How to Handle Me" is not only an admirable exercise in self-examination, but a surefire method for stimulating dialogue with the troops. But be careful. Your memo has to be brutally honest. Your employees have to believe it is accurate. And most important, they must believe it matters. Paradoxically, she was losing control because she was in control. Most leadership development revolves around one huge false assumption—that if people understand then they will do. That's not true. Most of us understand, we just don't do.