

#1 Winning Too Much

by **Marshall Goldsmith**

As a 10-year board member of the Peter Drucker Foundation, I had many opportunities to listen to Peter Drucker, the world's authority on management. During this time, Peter taught me some very important lessons about life and leadership.

One of the greatest lessons he taught me is this: "We spend a lot of time helping leaders learn what to do. We do not spend enough time teaching leaders what to stop. Half of the leaders I have met don't need to learn what to do. They need to learn what to stop."

There are a lot of good reasons for this. Probably most prominent is the fact that leaders and organizations focus on demonstrating commitment to positive action to maintain forward momentum. For instance, using the phrase, "We must begin to listen more attentively" rather than focusing on what we can stop, "Playing with our iPhones while others are talking." Likewise, the recognition and reward systems in most organizations are geared to acknowledge doing something. For instance, we get credit for doing something good. We rarely get credit for ceasing to do something bad.

How do you use "What to Stop" in coaching and leadership development?

The first step is to identify what behavior to stop. In my book *What Got You Here Won't Get You There*, I discuss the 20 bad habits of leaders. Everyone I have met has exhibited one or more of these behaviors, including me! Review the list. Do you identify with any of these bad habits? If you are like the majority of people, the answer is yes, and you are ready to start

using "What to Stop."

1. **Winning too much:** The need to win at all costs and in all situations.
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 sarcasm and cutting remarks that we think make us witty.
5. **Starting with "No," "But," or "However":** The overuse of these negative qualifiers which secretly say to everyone "I'm right and 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 give praise and reward.
11. **Claiming credit that that we don't deserve:** The most annoying way to overestimate our contributions 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.

After reviewing this list, for those of you who still aren't sure what to stop, there is one habit that I've seen take precedence over all of the others. You may be part of the majority of people who partake of this bad habit. What is the number one problem of the successful executives I've coached over the years? It is Winning Too Much.

Winning Too Much

Winning too much is the #1 challenge for most people, because it underlies nearly every other behavioral problem. If we argue too much, it's because we want our view to prevail (in other words we want to win). If we put other people down, it's our way to position them beneath us (again, winning). If we withhold information, it's to gain an edge over others. If we play favorites, it's to gain allies so "our side" has an advantage.

Our obsession with winning crosses the spectrum of our lives. It's not just an issue in our professional lives, it works its way into our personal lives as well. Winners love winning. So, if it's:

- Important, we want to win.
- Meaningful, we want to win.
- Critical, we want to win.
- Trivial, we want to win.
- Not worth it? We want to win anyway!

It is incredibly difficult for smart, successful people not to constantly win. Here's a short challenge to see if you have the habit of Winning Too Much. Most people fail this test (they have the habit!). When faced with this case study, most people realize they do the exact opposite of what they know they should have

done.

Case Study #1

You want to go to dinner at Restaurant X. Your husband, wife, friend, or partner wants to go to dinner at Restaurant Y. You have a heated argument. You go to Restaurant Y. This is not your choice. The food is awful; the service worse!

Your options:

- 1) Critique the food. Point out that your partner is wrong and this mistake could have been avoided if only he/she had listened to you.
- 2) Shut up, eat the food, and try to enjoy the evening.

This is a classic case of, 'What would I do/what should I do?' What would you do? Critique the food. What should you do? Shut up!

Here is another example of what it looks like to win too much that is much worse!

Case Study # 2

You have a hard day at work. You go home. Your husband, wife, friend, or partner is there. The other person says, "I had such a hard day today..." You don't let them finish. You interrupt, "You had a hard day! Do you have any idea what I had to put up with today?" We are so competitive we want to win at being more miserable than the people we live with!

Recently, a young man who attended one of my classes emailed me. He wrote that his wife had called him the previous day and told him she had a hard day. He wanted to interrupt her and tell her how her problems paled in significance to his. Instead,

remembering the example, he stopped, breathed, listened to his wife, and said, "I love you. Thank you for the sacrifices you make for our family." On the way home, he bought her a \$25 bouquet of flowers. When he got home he gave them to her and told her he loved her. "That was the best \$25 I've ever spent. Thank you!" he wrote.

The next time you start trying to win and prove you're right, take a deep breath and ask yourself: Exactly what am I winning? Is this really something I want to win or need to win? Is this even worth the effort? We can become more successful if we appreciate this "flaw" and work to suppress it in all of our interpersonal relations.

Dr. Marshall Goldsmith was 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. He was also selected as the World's Most Influential Leadership Thinker in 2011. 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).

Please order at Triggersthebook.com!