

#2 Adding Too Much Value

by **Marshall Goldsmith**

A classic problem of smart, successful people is Adding Too Much Value. This bad habit can be defined as the overwhelming desire to add our two cents to every discussion. A slight variation on Winning Too Much, Adding Too Much Value is common among leaders who are used to running the show. It is extremely difficult for successful people to listen to other people tell them something that they already know without communicating somehow that (a) they already knew it and (b) they know a better way.

What is the problem with adding too much value?

It would seem like it would be better for all concerned if our ideas were always improved upon. It's not. Imagine an energetic, enthusiastic employee comes into your office with an idea. She excitedly shares the idea with you. You think it's a great idea. Instead of saying, "Great idea," you say, "That's a nice idea. Why don't you add this to it?" What does this do? It deflates her enthusiasm; it dampers her commitment. While the quality of the idea may go up 5 percent, her commitment to execute it may go down 50 percent. That's because it's no longer her idea, it's now your idea.

**Effectiveness of Execution = a) Quality of the idea X b)
My commitment to make it work.**

Effectiveness of execution is a function of a) What is the quality of the idea? times b) What is my commitment to make it work? Oftentimes, we get so wrapped up in trying to improve the quality of an idea a little that we damage their commitment to execute it a lot. As a leader, it's important to recognize that the higher you go in the organization, the more you need to make

other people winners and not make it about winning yourself.

I asked my coaching client J.P. Garnier, former CEO of the large pharmaceutical company GlaxoSmith Kline, "What did you learn from me when I was your executive coach that helped you the most as a leader?" He said, "You taught me one lesson that helped me to become a better leader and live a happier life. You taught me that before I speak I should stop, breathe, and ask myself, 'Is it worth it?'" He said that when he got into the habit of taking a breath before he talked, he realized that at least half of what he was going to say wasn't worth saying. Even though he believed he could add value, he realized he had more to gain by not saying anything.

The flipside to this concept is that people often take leaders' suggestions as orders. I asked J.P, "What did you learn about leadership as the CEO?" He said, "I learned a very hard lesson. My suggestions become orders. If they're smart, they're orders. If they're stupid, they're orders. If I want them to be orders, they are orders. And, if I don't want them to be orders, they are orders anyway."

For many years, I taught this to the students at the new admirals' school of the US Navy. The first thing I taught them was that as soon as they get their stars, their suggestions become orders. Admirals don't make suggestions. If an admiral makes a suggestion, what is the response? "Sir, yes sir." Their suggestions become orders.

What does this mean for leaders? It means closely monitoring how you hand out encouragement and suggestions. If you find yourself saying, "Great idea," and following it with "But," or "However," try cutting your response off at "idea." Even better, before you speak, take a breath and ask yourself if what you're about to say is worth it. You may realize that you have more to gain by not winning (adding value)!

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).

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