

# #5 Making Destructive Comments

**This is one of the hardest habits for you to diagnose yourself – listen to those around you to gauge your guilt.**

by **Marshall Goldsmith**

I'm a little skeptical of self-diagnosis. Most people tend to overestimate their strengths and overrate their weaknesses. They might think that they are really bad at something at which they're really only mediocre or "kind of" bad. Where they see cancer, the doctor diagnoses a muscle pull. My hope is that you are not too hard on yourself, but that you do change. If you are guilty of Making Destructive Comments, however, this one you'll want to stop. Immediately.

Destructive comments are the cutting, sarcastic comments we let fly with or without intention. They serve no other purpose than to put people down, hurt them, or assert ourselves as "superior." They are different from comments that add too much value. This type of comment adds nothing but pain.

See if any of these ring a bell. "Nice tie" (smirk). "Good move," (as someone stumbles on the carpet). Those are the quick quips. There are also the extended critiques of your co-worker's past performance. Something that everyone but you has forgotten. ("Do you remember the time you totally missed that really important deadline and the whole company almost went under?")

The thing about Making Destructive Comments is that if you press someone to list the ones they've made in the last 24 hours, they will draw a blank. Most of us make these cutting remarks without thinking, so we don't remember them. But the recipients of these remarks remember. The feedback that I've collected says that "avoids destructive comments" is one of the

two items with the lowest correlation between how we see ourselves and how others see us. In other words, we don't think we make destructive comments, but the people who know us disagree.

Destructive comments are an easy habit to fall into, especially among people who habitually rely on candor as a management tool. The problem is that candor can become a weapon if people permit themselves to issue destructive comments under the guise that "they are true." Before you make a destructive comment, ask yourself, not "Is it true?" but, "Is it worth it?"

We all spend a lot of time filtering our "truth-telling" throughout the day. Little white lies abound like, "I like your haircut." When what you really want to say is that it looks ridiculous! We know the difference between honesty and full disclosure – this is a basic survival instinct! We may think our boss is lame, but we are under no moral or ethical obligation to express that to the boss, or to anyone else for that matter. Extend this survival instinct throughout the organization, with your peers, managers, direct reports. You might even find it benefits your personal relationships!

Here's a simple test you can use to help you avoid destructive comments. Before speaking, ask yourself:

1. Will this comment help our customers?
2. Will this comment help our company?
3. Will this comment help the person I'm talking to?
4. Will this comment help the person I'm talking about?

If the answer is no, the correct strategy is to say no!

***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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