

Leadership Success and Feedback: How Open Are We? (Part 1)

Being open to feedback is critical to our long-term survival in leadership. Many of us think we are open to feedback but in reality, we may not be. In fact, there seems to be a negative correlation between leadership success and openness to feedback. The more we perceive ourselves to be successful, the less we are receptive to change. In an ongoing researchⁱ by Marshall Goldsmith, regarded as one of the world's most effective executive coaches, he has found these characteristics about successful people.

- **Successful people consistently overrate their performance relative to their professional peers.**

When asked how professionals rated themselves relative to their professional peers, 80% - 85% of all successful professionals rate themselves among the “top 20%” of their peer group.”

Over half rate themselves as among the “top 10%.” Statistically, this is impossible.

The fact is that we all tend to overrate ourselves.

There may be some semblance of truth even among successful chief executives in an achievement-oriented society like Singapore, where success is highly valued.

- **Successful people tend to attribute success primarily to themselves.**

Marshall Goldsmith writes, “One of the most mistaken assumptions of successful people is, ‘I am successful. I behave this way. Therefore I must be successful *because* I behave this way.’ Successful people tend to believe that they are successful because of themselves. They feel that they have done many things right or think that they do many things right.

In his own experience, Marshall Goldsmith has also found that successful people have these four underlying beliefs:

1. I choose to succeed
2. I can succeed
3. I will succeed
4. I have succeeded

There is a tendency to overrate their success, attributing it to themselves and their achievements. Successful people are often delusional.

The truth is that they are successful in spite of some behavior that needs to change. Jack Trout, one of the most famous names in the world of marketing strategies, sums it wellⁱⁱ, “You don’t find success inside yourself. You find success outside yourself.”

For us, there must be a constant recognition that our success or effectiveness in business is due to events beyond our control and to people whose shoulders we stand on. Even Trout acknowledges that success is because of the ‘other-person’ in our lives, a boss, friend, peer or family member.

▪ **Successful people are less likely to be open to feedback**

Marshall states, ‘Over-rating their own performance (relative to their peers) can lead to a decrease in their desire to change...The challenge is to help successful people realize that less successful people can still have valid opinions.’

One Fortune 100 CEO observed, “Success can lead to arrogance. When we are arrogant, we quit listening. When we quit listening, we stop changing. In today’s rapidly moving world, if we quit changing, we will ultimately fail.”

The point is that most leaders find it difficult to accept feedback, especially negative feedback. When we are not open to feedback, we build up a large blind spot – most people know our weaknesses except ourselves.

It is therefore, important that we find within our leadership team co-leaders who are willing to be honest with us, point out our errors and correct us. But first, we must be humble enough to create the climate of honest exchange.

Let’s not kid ourselves. Be open to feedback. Make feedback part of our leadership learning process.

Watch out for Part 2: How to Turn Bad News Into Opportunity?

John Ng, *Ph.D*

President

Meta

Tel: (65) 6419 5255

Fax: (65) 6227 7170

Email: john@meta.com.sg

Copyright © Meta Pte Ltd

For past articles on MetaTrends, please log in www.meta.com.sg

The Leaders’ Role in Engagement. Find out to reengage and motivate your staff.

How to find meaning in work? Discover it in ***Improving Your Personal Engagement***

What contributes to disengagement among workers? Find out in ***Disengagement Factors***

What happens when trust is broken? Learn 10 principles in ***Rebuilding Trust***

ⁱ Goldsmith, M. [The Challenge of Success. Leadership Development Conference Program Resource Guide. 2001](#)

ⁱⁱ [Trout, J. The Power of Simplicity. McGraw-Hill. 1999.](#)