

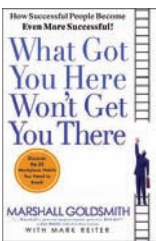
# Solve Anything with Dr. Mark

Career Advice  
for the  
Working Class

## Failure to communicate

**Q:** My interpersonal skills pale in comparison to my technical competence and that's preventing me from moving up at the law firm I am working at as an associate. I have already been told by our managing partner that unless I fix those, I am not going to progress as far as I'd like because there are just too many people starting to root against me.

**A:** I believe that progress will only happen when you take an honest look at yourself through other people's eyes and then commit, through actions vs. words, to change negative behaviors, usually one at a time, that other people say you are doing that gets in the way of their feeling good about working with you.



Here is a list of such behaviors taken from "What Got You Here Won't Get You There: How Successful People Become Even More Successful" (Hyperion, \$23.95), Marshall Goldsmith's best-selling book.

- 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 2 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, however*:** The overuse of these negative qualifiers which secretly say to everyone that 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.



Q&A

- 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.

## The way to use this list

- Select four stakeholders, including the managing partner, a partner, another associate, and a staff person, who want you to succeed, but who will be candid with you; then have them check off behaviors on the list that you are guilty of.
- Ask them to rank order from most problematic to least problematic, those behaviors that get in the way of their working productively with you.
- When two or more of your stakeholders agree on certain particularly egregious behaviors, commit to them that you will change one behavior at a time going forward and that you would like to check in with them periodically regarding your progress and for additional suggestions to improve upon. The proof that you have really changed only comes when your stakeholders agree that you have changed those behaviors and are sustaining those changes.

**Ask Mark** • Mark Goulston is a Santa Monica-based management adviser, executive coach and author of "Just Listen: Discover the Secret to Getting Through to Absolutely Anyone." Ask him questions at [mgoulston@markgoulston.com](mailto:mgoulston@markgoulston.com).