



Guest

Marshall Goldsmith helps successful people achieve positive, lasting change in behaviour; for themselves, their people, and their teams. He has four decades of experience of helping top CEOs and executives overcome limiting beliefs and behaviours to achieve greater success. He has received several accolades over the years. Thinkers 50 ranked him as World's most influential leadership thinker (2015 and 2011), top ten business thinker, and top rated executive coach (2015, 2013, and 2011). In our conversation, we spoke about staying relevant over the long term, ROI in Coaching, the path to excellence, getting behaviours to stick, the art of asking good questions that open up new possibilities and what matters in the end given his work with several leaders. This had a slightly different tonality from a typical podcast conversation. Very often Marshall would slip into a Coaching mode and get me to reflect on several key questions. I hope that you find it as purposeful as I did.

Context to the conversation

Welcome to the 64th conversation at the Play to Potential Podcast. I am your host Deepak Jayaraman and I work with leaders as an Executive Coach, Sounding Board or as a Transition Advisor as they navigate their journeys. The two questions I try and help leaders with are “Where to go” and “how to grow”. I find that these two questions are quite parallel to the two questions businesses need to ask in the context of their strategy – where to play and how to win. In this podcast series, we feature conversations from leaders from different walks of life on three themes - leadership, transitions and careers.

My guest this time is Marshall Goldsmith. Just like we have Roger Federer as the Greatest of All Time in Tennis and Sachin Tendulkar as the Greatest of all time in Cricket, if ever there were a poll of the greatest Coach of all time, he will probably be in the top of that pile and that too by a mile.

You might find that this conversation has a different tonality to the typical podcast conversation in the podcast. At various points in time, Marshall gets into a Coaching Mode and shows me the mirror and makes me see things that are in my blind spot.

Personally, it was a transformative conversation for me and got me thinking and acting on several dimensions. Hope you will find it purposeful too. If Marshall's pointers to me triggers any feedback you might have for me, please email them at deepak.jayaraman@transitioninsight.com; I am a work in progress and I will value any inputs you might have for me.

Without further ado, let us get to my conversation with Marshall Goldsmith.

Transcription

Deepak Jayaraman (DJ): Marshall, it's a privilege and an honour to host you at the Play to Potential podcast. Thank you.

Marshal Goldsmith (MG): Very, very happy to be here, thank you so much for inviting me.

DJ: And this podcast we talk about three themes Marshall, leadership, transitions and careers and maybe a good place to start is just given your remarkably illustrious career over 4+ decades in coaching and leadership development. May be a good place to start is just, you know, if you sort of took stock of this journey from a, stepped away and looked at it from a distance, what are some of the themes in the way your journey has played out over the last 4+ decades Marshall? What would the chapters of the book be?

MG: Well, I am from a small town called Valley Station, Kentucky. My dad had a small gasoline station; we were brought up very poor. Very fortunately my mother was a teacher so I knew how to add, subtract, multiply and divide before I went to school. So, I had a lot of education at home. Then I went to undergraduate school, then a small engineering school and I decided I didn't want to be a math; my undergraduate degree is in math and economics. Then I went back, I did MBA, which I paid absolutely no attention to at all. So, they gave me a test, there was nothing there. Then I went back and got a PhD at UCLA in Organizational Behaviour. That's when I actually started becoming interested in the topic and then I was a college professor and Dean and met a very famous man who changed my life. Dr. Paul Hersey. He invented something called situational leadership and he used to work for McKinsey. Everyone at McKinsey has been trained in this. I trained people in this at McKinsey for years. So, I met him and he was a kind and generous man, and I followed him around. And one day he became double-booked and he said can you do what I do? I said, I don't know. He said I will pay you \$1,000 for one day and I was making at the time \$15,000 for one year. I said, I will try and that was 43 years ago, \$1,000 a day to a poor kid, 43 years ago, that was a lot of money. And it turned out luckily, I was very successful. I did a program for the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company and for some reason they loved me and they called him up and said look, we were angry when Marshall came because it wasn't you but send him again. He said, you want to do this again and I said, yeah, I will do it again. And, that's how I got into leadership development and then after that I initially developed something called customized 360 feedback; we did that for McKinsey for hundreds of people, developed that process. The head of training at McKinsey back in the day was a man named Harvey Golub, who later went on to be the CEO of American Express. And so, we worked with Harvey Golub back in McKinsey for years. Paul Hersey had big customers so I didn't start at the bottom. And then after that I started our own business, eventually evolved and met Frances Hesselbein and we did a book together called The Leader of the Future many years ago. On the cover was Peter Drucker, Frances Hesselbein, Richard Beckhard and me and basically, he was like nobody yet, I did six books with him and after a while became one of them. And then after that, after meeting Francis and Peter Drucker I was on the Peter Drucker Foundation for 10 years. I was doing leadership development and coaching. I did coaching before there was anything called coaching. So, I am pioneering the area of coaching and then that gradually evolved over time. So, I had been ranked number one coach forever and number one in leadership development in the world twice. And so, after that I just gradually evolved and then I met a famous person... I met a great woman named Ayse Birsal who is a designer and she said who your heroes are? Well, my heroes back to my story were these kind and generous people who are great teachers, Paul Hersey, Peter Drucker and Frances herself and Alan Mulally and all those iconic people. And she said why don't you be like them and I said that's a nice idea. I decided to adopt 15 people and teach them all I know for free and the only price is when they get old, they had to do the same thing. So, I made a

little selfie video and put it on LinkedIn. So, I had 1.3 million followers on LinkedIn and I thought a 100 people would apply, I'd adopt 50 young people, they would follow me around and I would tell stupid jokes, they would laugh, make me feel good and then they would get old and do the same thing, you know, cycle of life. I was wrong, over 18,000 people applied and over 280 have been adopted. And so, now this program kind of changed my life. So, a lot of what I do now or most of what I do is just give back legacy kind of stuff and, you know, so you have met some of these people? So, what have you heard about our little program?

DJ: Absolutely, I think number one the quality of the people it seems like exceptionally well curated for most, you know, the best minds and the best and also it sort of seems like a diverse pool of people some from the thinking world, some from the business world, and some from the social impact world. So, clearly, it's a fascinating way of cascading paying it forward, right? So, tremendous respect for just the way the discipline with which you have sort of gone about the whole thing so.

MG: Well, you know, I am working on a new project right now and one of the people in our group is named Nankhonde. Now Nankhonde is from Zambia and she, I said, I give away all my material anyway, you know, last time I checked we are all going to be equally dead so might as well do some good. And so, Nankhonde said I really want to help develop high potential leaders across Africa. I said, well you can use my material any way you want, you know, whatever translated. She said yeah, but then there's all this cultural stuff and I came with an idea. I said, look, put your name on it, put your name on it and modify it in a way you want to. She got all excited; it was great. Well, we now have a new project called Knowledge Philanthropy and the idea is I am giving away everything to everybody but put your name on it, use it for young people, use it for people I am never going to talk to, translate it, I don't care. I am a Buddhist and you know last time... a Buddhist can only do what I teach if it will work for you and last time, I checked Buddha didn't have a copyright on any of his intellectual property, I think he gave it all away. So, I am trying to give everything away as much as I can and it's been an amazing project. I was really excited and I call it reverse franchising. Franchise model is you have to use my material but you have to use it as I tell you and you pay me money and then I sue you if you don't do what I say, that's the franchise model. My model is, I give you everything, you put your name on it if you want to, use it anywhere you want, for non-profit business, I don't care and if you want to pay for it, I have got a non-profit, just send me a check and any amount you want or none it doesn't matter, it really does not. Do whatever you want.

DJ: A related question Marshall, one of the things that comes up, you know, one of the people I spoke to us was Lynda Gratton, who has written a book 100-year Life and given that we are going to be working into our 70s and 80s and we are going to be living much longer, one of the questions that leaders come up with or grapple with is how do I stay relevant, you know, whether I am 40 or a 50 or a 60? You have been relevant over four decades. If you had to sort of distil some wisdom around staying relevant, what are some of the things maybe even you are a great role model in terms of staying relevant and the world has changed in terms of what the world was in terms of the industry is the leadership paradigm to what it is now. So, any insights there Marshall?

MG: Yeah, assuming I am relevant right now, I made it to my 70s at least. Now, let me give you a way to look at life to answer that question. How do I stay relevant, I am going to use you as an example because I like to talk to real people rather than abstractions? Are you ready?

DJ: Yeah, please.

MG: Deepak, okay, take a deep breath, take a deeper breath. Now, a good Buddhist principle is this, every time I take a deep breath it's a new me, it's a new me. And everything in your life is done by an infinite set of people. Their names were the previous Deepak's, the previous you. Close your eyes. I

want you to think of all the previous Deepak's, think of all the gifts they have given you just listening to me talk right now. Think about how hard those people tried; think about all they did to help other people. Open your eyes. Now if any group of people did that many nice things what should you say to those nice people?

DJ: Thank you.

MG: Doing it, thank you, and thank you. Now, did they make a little mistake or two over the years? Let go, let go. Now back to your question, moving forward. The Deepak I am talking to I am writing a new book called the Earned Life, the Deepak I am talking to right now, you haven't earned one thing, and you have earned nothing. Almost everything you have has been inherited; it's a gift from the previous Deepak's. You didn't earn a thing, they did. The guy I am talking to, you haven't earned anything. Now you have to ask yourself what this person is going to earn. What is this person going to earn moving forward? And yesterday, I could tell you, I am a Buddhist, I really had the ultimate example of the importance of Buddhism yesterday. I talked to one of the most famous people in the world, glamorous, good-looking, mega-rich, famous and I said on a 1 to 10 scale how would you score this test on an average day I did my best to be happy, you know what he said, 4. It's not out there, it's in here. And you also need to think it in another way of life. The previous Deepak's were like your parents, almost everything you have today was created by those people, then through your parents. The future Deepak's are your children. What do you want to give to your children? What do you want to give to your children? And the most moving case study of this was my friend Dr. Jim Kim. He's one of my hundred coaches, he was President, World Bank, he was Head of Partners in Health and in his life, and he has probably saved literally tens of millions of lives. If anybody in the world could say I can coast, it's him. I told him the story you know what he said "I hope I can make mommy and daddy proud". I hope I can make mommy and daddy proud, very touching. Well to me, every time you take a breath it's a new you. You can't live in the past. The person I talked to if you could be happy because what you have achieved you would be the happiest person in the world. The other thing is there are literally millions of people who would kill to be this person for what? For what? To get millions of dollars and fame and so what... so what and you work in the area of transition, I have worked with a lot of CEOs and you can't just play bad golf with the old man at the Country Club and eat chicken sandwiches all day. You have got to earn respect every day and not only earn the respect of other people you need to earn respect of the person you see in the mirror. And when you stop doing that you live in the past. And if you look at ex-athletes in the U.S. football, basketball terrible. Depression, suicide, divorce, bankruptcy, they just collapse. Michael Phelps, the great Olympic champion did a movie, I don't know if you saw it called the Weight of Gold.

DJ: I heard about his depression some time back.

MG: About ex-Olympians, depression, suicide, why? They may think that if I win and get the gold medal, that's it. No, you won the Olympic gold medal and billions of people cheered. What happens tomorrow? If you are not careful your entire identity becomes as my father said 'used to be'. Michael Phelps used to be and Olympic champion. Your whole life used to be. So I think the great way to look at life is we are starting over here and those people from the past have done some great things, that wasn't you. The football player, sitting there drunk and talking about what he did 40 years ago. That guy didn't win the super bowl; some young kid won the super bowl. That old man was talking about the one winning the super bowl. Living in the past doesn't work.

DJ: And just picking up on that Marshall, clearly one is about living each moment, each new moment as a new you, but we also live in a world of abundance and...

MG: Ah, ah, ah, ah, ah, ah... in my book what Got You Here Won't Get You There, have you ever seen that book? What Got You Here Won't Get You There, a really good book, yeah. One of the things in the book is when people say things to you, you never say yes but, but what you just did, and all my clients who do that have to donate \$20 to charity. Now keep going, but leave out the but.

DJ: Sure, I was saying, in a world where there are abundant choices, I come across a lot of people who feel paralyzed, you know, they have achieved success in a certain domain like you said, it could be a sports person or it could be a business CEO, but then you know that you have another 20-30 years ahead. How do you make choices and what has been your observation around people who are thoughtful about these transitions when they transition effectively from one sort of innings if you will to another?

MG: Yeah, the people I work with for example in a way they have abundant choices, in a way they have very few choices. Here's the problem that could they get a job? Yes, they don't have to work anyway. Guy who I talked to yesterday was worth tens of millions of dollars, they don't have to work. Could they get a job? Of course, you might say there are abundant choices, in terms of a job, there are not abundant choices, and there are also no choices, why? You can get a job; it's you can't get a great job. Yeah, you can get a job, if you can't get a great job, you can get some boring job, some job you don't want to do. To get a great job is not easy. And the people I work with I say look, you don't want to have a mediocre life. Yeah, there are a million choices where you can have a mediocre life; there are not a million choices where you are going to have a great life. And what you really want to say is how I can have a great life and there aren't a million choices for that and you've got to start over and pretend you are in sales, you are like a kid, going out there in the job market. Now, you might say well, I am a big CEO. Yeah, you are, but guess what? Everyone else applying for that job has been CEO just like you are. Yeah, and they are all big deals. And so, you are just starting over. It's much healthier because when our egos get in the way then we have this thing well, I don't, and you say things like I don't need this. Well, nobody applying for this job needs it. Now, any job you want all the applicants don't need it. So, make me... you don't need a big deal, don't say that, it's not impressive, yeah, you do need it.

DJ: Just moving to a different theme Marshall, you have done a lot of thinking around value-based coaching or pricing the coaching based on value if I may call it that. And in my conversations one of the questions that often comes up is how do I measure the ROI?

MG: No, very simple. I can answer that question. I don't measure it all, my clients measure it. So, let's say that you are the potential CEO, now describe it... now, I either coach the CEO or the potential CEO. Now, let's imagine you are the potential CEO of a huge company. The first thing is I don't get paid if you don't get better. I get paid nothing during the entire coaching assignment, nothing. Have you ever met anyone beside me who works for a year for nothing and get paid if they get better? Did you ever meet anybody else, no?

DJ: No.

MG: You know what? They don't really believe in what you are doing. They don't have confidence. See, there's one way to test if someone really believes what you are saying. You can ask a person one question and instantly determine their level of belief. You know what that question is? Do you want to bet on it? Do you want to bet on it? You know, if they say believe it, but I wouldn't bet on it, they don't believe it, they don't believe it. Well, I will bet on it every time. When you get paid for results you learn humility. The client I coach that I spent the least amount of time with improves the most; the client I spend the most amount of time with didn't improve at all. So, I made a chart. On one dimension time spent with Coach Marshall Goldsmith and the other dimension is called

improvement. There seem to be a clear negative correlation between spending time with me and getting better and I thought that this is kind of a humbling chart. I go and talk to my client who I spend the least amount of time with who had improved the most, Alan Mulally. Alan was CEO here in the United States. Unbelievable, probably the best leader in the world in the last 20 years, at least corporate leader. So, I said Alan, of all the people I coached, you improved the most, I spent the least amount of time with you. I showed Alan my chart. I said, Alan, how this chart looks, you never met me, you have really been good. So, I said Alan, what should I learn about coaching? He said Marshall you got one challenge customer selection. You pick the right customer, you always win, pick the wrong customer, you are never going to win. And he said don't make coaching about yourself and your own ego and how smart you think you are, think about the great people you work with and how proud you are of them and he said the CFO in my job wouldn't act different, I don't design cars or build cars or sell cars. I meet great people and every day I tell myself leadership is not about me, it's about them. Well, back to your question, you are the future CEO, you will get confidential feedback from everyone around you, you will pick important areas to improve, you will follow up on a regular basis, you will apologize for your mistakes, you will involve me on a regular basis and you will get measured twice. Now Deepak what if you said I don't want to do that? You know what I would say? Goodbye, I don't judge you, I don't care, you don't want to do it, don't, I am just not going to work with you. Option A you do what I say or option B, I don't work with you; there are two choices. Well, if you say yes, then I go to your chairman and I say, you know, Mr Chairman, this guy Deepak can get better at this stuff is judged by these people over this time frame, is it worth this money, yes or no? And by the way if he answers no, don't hire me. If the answer is yes, you can't lose. If he gets better pay me if he doesn't get better, it's all free. Well, I don't make the business case for my clients at all. They make the business case for me and if they don't have a business case, I don't work with them.

DJ: Absolutely Marshall, it's so refreshing to see you backing yourself, I mean, I hear you, it's about backing yourself and having belief in what you say and sort of be willing to sort of as they say put money where your mouth is.

MG: Let me tell you what inspired that. Years ago, I was 14 years old back in Kentucky, we were very poor and the roof started leaking and you know we had to get a new roof or the house gets trashed and to help save money my dad had me work with a roofer to help him put on the roof. His name was Dennis Mug. So, it's hard to put on a roof, very hard work and he was very serious and he tried to do such a good and made the roof and we got all done and Dennis Mug was very poor. And he looked at my dad and his name is Bill and he said, Bill, I want you to inspect that roof. If this roof is high quality, I want you to pay me. If it's not of high quality, it's all free. I looked at Dennis Mug. You know what I thought? This guy is poor, but he is not cheap. This man has character and dignity. I want to be Dennis Mug when I grow up. I have never shown the character he has what? If I don't get paid look at that picture that's my view from my house. If I don't get paid, I am not going to starve to death. Dennis Mug needed the money. He doesn't get paid, he doesn't eat, and that's character.

DJ: Wow, wow. Back to the fine selection point you spoke about Marshall. You spoke about talking to the CEO if he or she is open to running with a process that you spoke about and the chairman, but are there other characteristics you look for in terms of coachability before you take on somebody?

MG: Three. One, they have to have the courage to look in the mirror. Two, they have to have the humility to admit they can improve because you see I find it I am very incapable of helping perfect people improve. If they are perfect, they don't need me and then four, they have to have the three, and they have to have the discipline to do the hard work. It's hard work. Nobody is better because I am their coach. And by the way, why do I always get ranked the best coach in the world? Nobody ever watched me coach anybody? Why do I get ranked the best coach in the world, I have the best

clients? My clients are wonderful, that's it. I have got great clients. And by the way, I can publicly talk about who they are. They write their names in my books. I have got the best clients. Nobody's got clients as good as me, not even close. Well, I am not a great coach because I am a great coach; I am a great coach because I have great clients. That's what Alan told me. It's like a basketball coach. Imagine one basketball coach has the All Stars of all time; another basketball coach has very mediocre players. The basketball coach who is coaching the greatest people of all time looks good, always wins, wonder why, I always win, wonder why. I get the best team.

DJ: But having said that Marshall...

MG: Ah, ah, ah, ah... but having said that... oh, that's 40 now.

DJ: One thing I realized is coaching is a lonely profession and sometimes you don't have the privilege of getting feedback on how you are doing. So, this is truly valuable. So genuinely, thank you.

MG: Thank you.

DJ: What I was trying to understand Marshall was you spoke about picking the right team, you know, and if you pick the right team the odds are stacked in your favour. If someone like me who's starting this journey, you know often you don't have the opportunity to be eligible to work with the best team and I need to work my way there. And as you look at your journey...

MG: Let me give you some advice, you want some free coaching? Meet a great non-profit leader who has a spectacular board and do it for free? You are doing good for the world and you are establishing a very upscale client base. I have done tons of free work. I was the coach of the President, World Bank for free. I was a coach of the Head of the Rockefeller Foundation for free, the Head of the Mayo Clinic they had on the St. Jude's Children's Hospital, The International Red Cross, The American Red Cross, and The Girl Scouts, do that.

DJ: Sure. Thank you. Marshall, the other piece I wanted to understand was the boundaries of coaching. You know, I read one of... you have authored thousands of articles across different journals. One of them you talk about the harm that one could do by coaching if we don't realize where the boundaries end with therapy and with some of the other things which are around the adjacencies of coaching? Can you talk a little bit about what are some of the boundaries we need to be aware?

MG: Yeah. I think for me the boundaries are largely my own self-limitations because see I am the world's authority in helping successful leaders achieve positive change in behaviour. I am not an expert on strategy or marketing or I am not an expert on the business side of the business at all. The key is I don't pretend to be. You see, I don't really understand my clients' businesses at all. I can't be an expert on The International Red Cross and The Girl Scouts and Ford and Pfizer. I cannot be an expert on all these companies. I make no effort to do that nor do not claim to do that. So, I have a very limited knowledge base and I do work that is in that knowledge base. Rita McGrath is world's expert on strategy, she's one of our people, and I am not. Well, she does start... David Allen is one of my adoptees; he's a world expert on getting organized. So, where coaches get in trouble is they try to do everything to everyone. Now what I tell coaching customers is this, the best way to hire a coach is don't tell the coach what you need, ask the coach what are you best at and if what they are best at is not what you need get another coach.

DJ: Got it, and on the line between coaching and therapy Marshall, maybe just picking that specific instance. Any guidance for people where they should tread the line carefully and not... and possibly...

MG: Yeah, know what your background is and know what you do. I don't do therapy; I don't do therapy at all, anything. My work is the opposite of therapy. Therapy is focused on the past. With my clients I spend zero time focusing on why they have their issues, zero. I just focus on helping get better in the future. My clients are mostly rich people who are over 50 years old and you know, I tell them if you are over 50 and you are still blaming mommy and daddy, it's not impressive, get over it. You are above 50, your parents are dead, you know, just let mommy and daddy go. Let's start taking a little responsibility here for your own life. So, I am very underwhelmed with people who whine about their parents after they are 40 or 50 years old. Grow up.

DJ: I guess the past versus the future is a good distinction for us to bear in terms of where we spend our time and attention.

MG: Yeah, exactly. Yeah, and by the way, that's... you know, just do what you can do, just know what that is and also know that most of the things in life you can't do, you are not qualified to do, and it's okay. I am not a therapist, no, I don't claim to be, I am not an expert on strategy, don't claim to be, I am not an expert on getting organized or giving speeches, it's okay. Here's my theory. If I wrote the book, I am more than happy to express my opinion, if I read the book ask the other guy that wrote the book.

DJ: Point well taken Marshall. You spoke about the MG100 program and you have worked with the best, you yourself have been at the top of the coaching profession for several years, several decades and you have worked with the best of the best. For somebody like me who is embarking on this journey I am curious about your take on what excellence looks like in the world of coaching? When you look at the stratosphere of people that stand out including yourself?

MG: I will answer your question, answer this question. I Deepak, I am the world's expert at, what do you want to be the world's expert at, you tell me?

DJ: I am trying to stay focused on transitions and trying to understand....

MG: Let's use you as a case study. Have you read the book Transitions?

DJ: By Bridges right, William Bridges?

MG: Yeah. He's a good friend of mine. I knew him for years before he died. I met with him, every year we had a meeting for 25 years, so I know him very well. Read the book, study all of his materials, study all the experts in the field, there aren't that many and really get to know them like a guy named Michael Watkins who wrote The First 90 Days. Well, it's not exactly about transitions, but it's kind of related. So, get to know. I am a good person; get to know people who are what I call parallel experts. They are experts on topics that are related to what you are doing and then you integrate their work into your own. I am not Peter Drucker, but I learned a lot from Peter Drucker. I am not Buddha but I learnt a lot from Buddha. Again, I am not Alan Mulally, but I learned a lot from Alan Mulally. So, you can learn a lot from me or Bill Bridges or any of these people. And then you develop your own work. Now, okay, you take everything I teach, I will give you a challenge. You take everything I teach; you modify it anyway you want to, use it in any writing or book that you want to and I will support you.

DJ: Wow, thank you. Thank you. Absolutely. I think I have been wandering about how I could sort of develop my capability in transitions. It's happening slowly and I know it takes time but I have been... and in the podcast series I have had the opportunity to talk to Michael Watkins in the past and a lady Herminia Ibarra who has also done quite a bit of work on transitions.

MG: Good.

DJ: Point well taken.

MG: Yeah, you would write your... but you got to write your own book. Get your own voice.

DJ: Marshall, one of the themes I want to talk about, you know, as you speak about your mission statement, you speak about wanting to help successful people achieve positive lasting change in behaviour for themselves, the themes. I am curious about how we get behaviours to stick, changed behaviours to stick. What can we learn from your wisdom on ensuring that it's not a one-off but...?

MG: Follow up, you have to follow up over and over and over again. You have to get measured and basically do it the rest of your life. Yeah, by the way, Twyla Tharp, let me ask you this question. I am going to give you a technique now that takes three minutes a day, it costs you nothing, it will help you get better on almost anything and will stick if you do it. Now, some people would think, three minutes a day, cost nothing, help me get better at almost anything, it sounds ridiculous too good to be true. Half the people start doing this quit in two weeks. We'll see how you do. Two weeks people quit. It's called a daily question process. Okay, get together a spread sheet, on one column write down a series of questions that represent anything in your life you want to get better at friends, family, health, and work, whatever. Now every question's answer yes, no or a number. You fill it out every day, at the end of the week you get a report card. Now, let me warn your listeners in advance that report card thing the week may not be as beautiful as corporate values like you see up on a wall. See in my glowing introduction you mentioned a lot of good things about me. One thing you left out, I have an incredible skill, you left out, that's the ability to screw something up almost every day, you can't screw something up almost every day. When you do this process every day you get to look at it. Now, I have someone call me on the phone every day to make sure I do this, every day. Somebody asked me why you have someone calling on the phone, don't you know the theory about how to change behaviour. I wrote that theory about how to change behaviour. That's why I have someone call me on the phone. My name is Marshall Goldsmith; I got ranked number one coach and leadership thinker in the world for years. I have someone call me on the phone every day just to listen to me read questions I wrote, provide answers I wrote every day, why? My name is Marshall Goldsmith, I am too cowardly and too undisciplined to do any of those stuff by myself, and I need help. And you know what, its okay, its okay. We all need help. You do what I just told you, you can get better at almost most anything, any case, I mean; you don't have the guts to do this. You probably are too cowardly and undisciplined as me. You know why we don't do this it's hard to do; it's incredibly hard to do. It takes a lot of courage; it takes a lot of humility and takes discipline. It's humbling to look in the mirror every day. Yeah, it's humbling. It's not humbling to talk about values and change and transition and blah, blah, blah, talk, talk, talk. That's not humbling. What's humbling is when some guy ask you what you are the world's expert at but you can't even give him an answer. That's humbly. That's not talk. You see there's a big gap between talk and live. Talk is easy, live is hard. Almost all leadership development is talk, buzzwords, as if somehow better buzzwords are going to help people change. Nobody gets better because of buzzwords; you actually have to work. And it's hard, if that were easy, I would not have someone call me on the phone every day. Now, there's a great book called The Checklist Manifesto published by Dr. Atul Gawande from Harvard Medical School. If the nurse asks the doctor a series of questions before the surgery the odds on unneeded infection plummet and the death rate is cut by two-thirds. A majority of hospitals in the world do not allow the nurse to ask the doctor the questions, and what's the first question, did you wash your hands. Why - ego? Why won't the doctor have the nurse ask the question? Ego, they're ashamed, they are ashamed to admit they need help; they are embarrassed to admit they need help. Yet, how to get people stick with it? It's hard, it's not easy. They have to work. They have to work over and over and by the way, it's like getting in shape. You'll say well, why don't they stay in

shape after they get in shape? It's like once I get in shape I can quit now and I will be in shape for eternity. That's not the way it happens, no. You have to keep doing it for life.

DJ: And is there a point where it moves from getting help from a coach to then sort of doing it themselves. Is there a...

MG: Well, Twyla Tharp's world's greatest choreographer has had the same personal trainer for 27 years. The trainer doesn't teach you anything new. Now, I have had somebody call me on the phone every day for probably 30 years. Now, you know Deepak maybe there is a time when I can get this all by myself and do it on my own but you know what? I am 71; I haven't quite made it yet. Maybe in the future, that I will and I won't need help in the future, but I am 71 and you know what I wouldn't bet on it, yeah, right. Well, isn't there time when Deepak won't need any help and he can do everything on his own? If so, you are a way better man than I am.

DJ: Thank you, Marshall, I hear you. Marshall, a related question...

MG: By the way Deepak, I have had a question. How many in the top 10 tennis players have a coach?

DJ: All of them, I am guessing.

MG: Why? Why can't they do it on their own? They are number one in the world, you know, why can't you do it on your own? Why do you need a coach? Pau Gasol is one of the people I have adopted, he is a basketball player. He has a personal trainer live in his house. So, he works out every day while he's trying to get back in shape for the Olympics, why? He knows the theory. If he thinks he doesn't know the theory after all these years, he's 40 years old, he knows the theory. He is not going to do it by himself. I am not going to do it by myself. But you may be able to do it by yourself. I am not and I cannot, I need help, I need help, by the way, all those people I coach they need help. Before I even coached them, people were ashamed to have a coach. Today, I am proud of my book Triggers, 27 major CEOs. I am CEO here in the United States; I need help. I am No. 2 CEO here in the United States, I need help; I am the President, World Bank, I need help; I am the CEO of Pfizer, I need help. Yeah, I won the Presidential Medal of Freedom, I need help. Who are we kidding? We all need help. Isn't there going to be a time where you don't need help anymore, maybe? I say I am 71, maybe when I am 81, I will figure it all out.

DJ: Point well taken Marshall. One of the pieces I was curious about Marshall was the art of asking good questions. You speak about having some go-to questions, which really provoke reflection of the coachee. In your experience, what wisdom would you have for people or coaches who are...?

MG: I am going to give everybody my first six questions that I challenge myself with every day. If you just do nothing, but ask these questions every day and fill out the form you will get better. Let me ask thousands of people than research you will get better. One question is did I do my best to set clear goals today. Now I have a program I am doing called the LPR 50, these are amazing people. I mean, let's see who's in our group. We have got the Head of the US Olympic Committee, we have got NBA All Star, National Football League All Star, Academy Award winner, and we have got President, Rockefeller Foundation. I mean on and on CEO of all these big companies. We do, we go through this every week, they evaluate themselves every day and then once a week, we have a dialogue about this and in meeting groups of say 6 to 10, 50 people meeting in groups of 6 or 10, I spend seven hours every weekend on this. It's amazing, they love it too. The first question is did you do your best to set clear goals? Do you think they all are going to get a 10? No, some days I woke up, I did emails, I got on a phone call, and the day was over. Next did I do my best to make progress toward achieving my goals, some days I get distracted, I forgot what I was doing, right? Did I do my

best to find meaning? I have had a guy who has a heart surgeon who gave himself a 3 out of 10 on finding meaning. It's not what you do; it's how it relates to your life. Now the next term we are going to spend time on did I do my best to be happy? Yesterday I did this with a guy who for millions of people would be a god. Rich, good-looking, young, famous, critically acclaimed four. Okay Deepak, 1 to 10, 10 is high, 1 is low, what would be your score on the average day that I do my best to be happy? Did I do my best to be happy, 1 to 10, give me a number?

DJ: 6 or 7.

MG: 6? You will say 6.5. The average in the world is 5.5, yeah. I did this for three medical doctors: Jim Kim, Raj Shah, John Noseworthy and they are there in my book Triggers, three of the smartest people I ever met. You have World Bank, Mayo Clinic, Rockefeller Foundation and they are not dumb, right, all medical doctors. All three said it, never try to be happy. So, I said, well get it done or you are going to die. Figure that out, death. I said, yeah, yeah. In medical school they cover that topic, death, which we're going to die, yeah. Well I said you think it's a silly question. I forgot to ask I was too busy achieving things. I forgot to ask I was too busy achieving things. How old are you?

DJ: I am 44.

MG: I am 71 years. Here's 71, I mean, you look back on your life and say on the average day I got a 6.5 on trying to be happy, you know, what you think about Deepak? Dumbass, dumbass. You think the 71-year-old you would think that was impressive or not too much. Now Deepak, we are all going to be equally dead here. My advice is be happy. And by the way, if you think you are going to be happy when you write the book you achieve the status you get that success. The guy I talked to yesterday if there was a when, he was way beyond any when. The answer is not out there, the answer is in here. Now, I don't know if you ever heard of something called the Bhagavad Gita.

DJ: Of course.

MG: Yeah, the Bhagavad Gita, what does... it was Arjuna and Krishna. What does Krishna say? Look, don't get fixated on the outcomes, focus on the process, you do your best and you make peace. Deepak, have you ever got fixated on the outcomes?

DJ: Often.

MG: Yeah, re-read that little poem. Yeah, there's a reason that poem is still around after all those years. It is what it is. You are where you are, you make peace, you come up with a strategy, and you do your best, that's it. One of the happiest people I know is Harry Baxter who is the CEO of Baxter, Harry Kraemer, CEO of Baxter and just a good guy. Have you met Harry? He is a great guy. Anyway Harry, somebody said, how do you sleep at night because you have to fire people, you have got to lay people off, how do you sleep? He said, two questions, that I do my best, that I do what I thought was right. If I was right and did my best I would sleep at night, that's all you can do. It's only all of us can do.

DJ: Thank you, Marshall. Marshall, the...

MG: No, wait, the last two questions are did I do my best to be fully engaged and did I do my best to build positive relationships. Now, Deepak, single or married?

DJ: Married, with two kids.

MG: Married, oh very good and what's your wife's name?

DJ: Kamini.

MG: Very nice. Now, do you believe customer satisfaction is important in life, the customer satisfaction part and should we ask our customers for input about how we can improve? And should we listen and try to get better? Have you been asking your lovely wife what can Deepak do to be a better partner in this relationship?

DJ: No.

MG: Now Deepak, I am very confused, very confused. Now who is more important? Those customers that don't know your name and could care less if you died or your wife who seems to love you on occasion? Who's more important?

DJ: Clearly wife.

MG: Why haven't you asked your wife how you can be a better husband? That's a question.

DJ: Probably comes down to courage, not having the courage to...

MG: Just say, my name is Deepak.

DJ: My name is Deepak.

MG: I need help.

DJ: I need help.

MG: I am a coward.

DJ: I am a coward.

MG: You see, we are all cowards. Why don't we do this stuff because it's hard, it's embarrassing, it's humbling, and it's painful? You don't want to know the truth, it's hard. Why do I have someone kick my ass? I am a coward. Why does Pau Gasol have a trainer, I am a coward, Twyla Tharp, I am a coward. We all talk about will power, as if somehow we have all this willpower, nah. Willpower is grossly overrated. None of us have that much willpower, which we can?

DJ: Marshall, moving to a slightly different topic. I wanted to talk about longevity, you being in this for four decades, I am sort of embarking on this journey, and it's been a few years. What are some of the things to bear in mind to run this like a marathon and not get burnt out? What have you seen with people who have sort of had a career over decades in the kind of work you do?

MG: You start over every day, you can never coast, never coast. All that stuff in your past was a previous Deepak. And every day you start over and when you think well, I am a big deal, that lasts for about six months then you are used to be.

DJ: Got it.

MG: Yeah, three young guys came to my house, they were about 32 and they were all getting PhDs, and I lived at the time at Giant House in the suburbs of... I had published 35 books and lived in this mansion and this kid is 32 years old... we are going to be you when we graduate from college. So, what do you mean you would be me? Well, we are going to coach the big CEOs like you do when we

graduate. I tried to be polite and said so you are going to do what I do. At 32, you are just going to PhD and you are going to be me. And I am, you know, when I was 32, I had been a college Dean and had about two or three years of consulting experience and you are going to be me even while you started and I am thinking you know see this big mansion, and most people don't live here. And those 35 books and you didn't fly 11 million frequent flyer miles. You got to be me? Get to work, you put in your 11 million frequent flyer miles, you do the 35 books, and you know, you work with 150 CEOs you can be me. Tell me what it is like then. Get to work. Well, Deepak, get to work.

DJ: And I hear you Marshall.

MG: Yeah, there may be a shortcut and I am unaware of that shortcut, nobody showed me the shortcut.

MG: So, Deepak, let's wrap up. Now, I am going to tell you my best coaching advice but before I do that let me ask you a question. Give me a couple of things you learned in the last 90 minutes.

DJ: One is about knowing that it's a lot more... you need to work much harder on yourself than you expect the people you work with to work on themselves. The bar, you need to set the bar much higher for you for you to be relevant. So, I think that point is... that's one thing that sort of struck me. And second is, there is a big difference between you think you know something versus you really internalizing something. So, it was great, it's a privilege to have someone like you spend the time with me and to point out these things right when as they happened. So, clearly a humbling experience and clearly a lot of work to do. So, truly, truly from the bottom of my heart Marshall, thank you for being generous with your time.

MG: And you know Deepak, that's why I have someone call me every day. You ask me when do we ever get to this point where we don't need this anymore, we don't, I don't. Every day I need help. I am not... the only difference is I am not kidding myself. I have no pretence. I know I need help. I know I screw up every day. Yeah, and a lot of which is tough and part of that was me helping Deepak, part of it was Marshall acting smart and showing how damn profound he was, you know, who knows. So, we all can learn, we all can learn. So, we all can look in the mirror and you know I am no different than you and I am no better than you, we are just people. Yeah, final advice, take a breath, take a deep breath. Imagine you are 95 years old and you are just getting ready to die. What advice would the wise 95-year-old you who knows what mattered in life or what didn't and what was important and what wasn't. What advice would that person have for the you that's listening to me right now or you listeners, whatever you are thinking now do that, that is your performance appraisal, that's all that matters. That old person says you did the right thing, you did the right thing. That old person says you made a mistake, you made a mistake, and you don't have to impress anybody else. Some friends of mine interviewed old folks who were dying and they asked this question. What advice would you have? On the personal side, three things. Theme number one, three words, be happy now, not next week, not next month, not next year, be happy now. Now Deepak you say you are 44, is that correct? You probably look at me and say - Marshall, he has got millions of dollars, living in that big house, fancy view, all those books, he has got it all. You see Deepak you got something I don't have 24 years, was that worth, oh no, 27 years, was that worth? You wanted to the best-selling books and the money, give me 27 years, we have got a deal. You give me 27 years; you can have the book, how about the money? Take it all, you got all of it. You don't want to look at other people and say I want to be them, or maybe they want to be you. But number one, be happy now, don't wait till next week, number two friends and family. You went teaching everybody else and they ask for input and learn, your forgot to ask you wife how can you do better. Don't forget who matters in life. And number three, and you are doing a good job of this, so you have got a dream go for it, because you don't go for it at 44, you are not going to go for it when you

are 84. Number one, life is short, have fun. We probably could lighten up a little bit Deepak and a little too serious right. Of the two of us who is more serious, you or me? I think, Deepak, you, right. So right now, you didn't get a good smile or as a good smile little more. And then number two is do whatever you can to help people and the main result people is nothing to do with money your status is. The 95-year-old of you is going to be proud of you. And then finally, if you have got a dream, you go for it, you go for it. Old people, we don't regret the risks we took and failed, we regret the risks we fail to take. Thank you so much.

DJ: Marshall, real honour and a privilege to be speaking to you and to be coached by you live. I truly treat this as a blessing and a privilege. Thank you.

MG: Thank you so much.

Reflections from Deepak Jayaraman

DJ: Hope you found the conversation purposeful. I know I'm a work in progress and have a long way to go in my journey. If you might have any feedback for me regarding my conversation with Marshall please email me on deepak.jayaraman@transitioninsight.com. Just a few comments before we wind up.

- 1) I did contribute the equivalent of USD 100 to Akanksha Foundation, another Not for Profit that I am associated with. I worked with the CEO Saurabh Taneja when he came on board a few years back and I continue to do some work with them in the context of some of their leadership transitions.
- 2) I did initiate conversations with a Coach – J Rajagopal (an accomplished Executive Coach and a Mentor to me). We discussed that we would start weekly for him to ask me the 6 questions that Marshall speaks about (We didn't want to overcommit and wanted to pick something that felt realistic and something where we could follow through). The 6 questions Marshall lays out are"
 - a. 1) Did you do your best to set clear goals
 - b. 2) Did you do your best to make progress towards achieving your goals
 - c. 3) Did you do your best to find meaning
 - d. 4) Did you do your best to be happy
 - e. 5) Did you do your best to be fully engaged
 - f. 6) Did you do your best to build positive relationships
- 3) I did go to my wife and asked her if she had a few minutes to give me feedback; She said a few minutes may not suffice; She might need a day or two to get the message across; I will let you know how that goes.
- 4) I realize that I am a Work In Progress and have a long way to go in my journey; if my conversation with Marshall triggered any feedback that you might have for me, please email me at deepak.jayaraman@transitioninsight.com; I will truly value your candid feedback. If you want to leave anonymous feedback, please go to <http://bit.ly/DJFDBK>

Thank you for reading. Bye now.

End of transcription

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Marshal Goldsmith - Nuggets

- 64.00 Marshal Goldsmith - The Full Conversation
- 64.01 Marshal Goldsmith - Staying relevant over the long term
- 64.02 Marshal Goldsmith - Choosing Coachees and link with ROI
- 64.03 Marshal Goldsmith - The path to excellence
- 64.04 Marshal Goldsmith - Getting behaviours and habits to stick
- 64.05 Marshal Goldsmith - Art of asking good questions
- 64.06 Marshal Goldsmith - What matters in the end

About Deepak Jayaraman

Deepak seeks to unlock human potential of senior executive's / leadership teams by working with them as an Executive Coach / Sounding Board / Transition Advisor. You can know more about his work [here](#).

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