

Disrupt Yourself Podcast

EPISODE 267: MARSHALL GOLDSMITH

Welcome back to the Disrupt Yourself podcast, where we provide strategies and advice on how to climb the S Curve of learning in your professional and personal life, disrupting who you are now to slingshot into who you want to be. I'm your host, Whitney Johnson, reminding you before we get started that leaving a review of this show in your favorite podcast app helps it grow, allowing us to continue to bring in diverse and interesting guests for you, like Marshall Goldsmith, who I am sitting down with today, he is one of the most recognized thinkers and writers on the topic of leadership. He's authored many bestselling books, including *Triggers* about building great leadership habits, and he co-wrote a book with one of our other recent guests, Sally Helgesen. It's called *How Women Rise*, about the challenges women still face in the workplace. And personally, he's been a wonderful sponsor to me. But his latest work, titled *The Earned Life*, perhaps tackles the most meta topic yet the meaning of achievement itself.

Whitney Johnson: Marshall, tell us about a formative experience for you.

Marshall Goldsmith: Well, one thing that happened to me as a very young man is I got a D in math and my math teacher was named Mr. Newton, an excellent, excellent teacher. And he talked to me and talked to my parents is that this is just really terrible. He said, Marshall is a very smart guy. He shouldn't get a D in math. He hasn't been trying. And it's just a complete waste. He could be much more than he has been. That kind of inspired me. I ended up getting an A in math and I got a perfect score on the SAT math achievement test after that.

Whitney Johnson: I want to jump from there to your latest book. You're a *New York Times* bestseller, best-selling author, several times over. But your latest book is *The Earned Life*. And one of the key elements that you talk about in terms of earning your life is to put out maximum effort. And I'd love for us to take this idea of you can be more than Mr. Newton started with and share two or three stories in your life where you had these pivot points of people say, Marshall, you can be more.

Marshall Goldsmith: Well, you know, the Mr. Newton case study was a case study where my performance was very poor. Some of the other case studies though were where my performance was not actually poor where I was doing well. And I got the same message. So, what occurred with Paul Hersey? Paul Hersey was the most highly paid consultant in our field at the time, and I met him as a young man. I was a professor. I got to follow him around and

I knew I wasn't him and I wanted to be like him when I grew up. So, what happened is one day he became double booked. He said, well, can you do what I do? I said, I don't know. He said, I think you can do it. I said, I'm not sure. He said, I'll pay you \$1,000 for a day. I was making 15,000 for a year. You know what I said? Sign me up, coach. Well, I did a program for the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company in New York. They were incredibly angry when I showed up, but I was the highest rated of all the speakers. So, then they became happy. They called him back and said, Can Marshall do this again? Well, he calls me up, says, you know, do you want to do it again? Yeah, I'll do it again. That's how I got into leadership development. Then two years later or so, he called me in the office, and he said, you know, you're making too much money. You're running around like a chicken with your head cut off. Your clients are very happy. You're doing a good job and you're never going to be who you could be. You're not thinking, you're not writing, you're not working on your long-term development. You could be more. And that really was a pivotal moment in my life. Got me inspired to think about writing and working with people like Peter Drucker and publishing, and articles. And so, if I look at my life, the people that have really inspired me or the people who just said, you know, you can be more.

Whitney Johnson: Let's go back to Mr. Newton for just a half-second. Do you remember how you felt when he said, this is inexcusable, a D is inexcusable? What was your first thought when he said that to you?

Marshall Goldsmith: That he was telling the truth? I knew I wasn't trying, and it kind of made me embarrassed. And I thought, you know, he's right.

Whitney Johnson: An important truth-teller. So, are there any other stories that you would like to share about-you can be more?

Marshall Goldsmith: The eye-shaper cell moment where she said, who are your heroes? And I said, well, my heroes were people like Paul Hersey and Alan Mulally and Francis Heseltine and these great teachers. And she said, why don't you be more like them? That conversation led to our 100 Coaches program, which I'm proud to say you are a part of. And again, totally changed my life. But it was another message. You could be like them. That really inspired me. And I will say did not have a mild but had a huge impact on my life.

Whitney Johnson: There's one other example I would love for you to share because I think this is really powerful. A gentleman by the name of Kent Kresa. I'm not sure. So, tell us, because this led to your stakeholder-centered coaching, right?

Marshall Goldsmith: Right. Well, Kent Kresa had challenged me, and we were doing programs for the Northrop Grumman Company. And, you know, the programs are very successful, at least from a teaching point of view. People always give me high ratings. I'm funny and nice and they like me. They give me high scores. Kent said though, are people really changing? Is this making any difference? Do people really change? And no one had challenged me that way before. And I said, well, you know, I think they do, but I don't have any research to prove it. Good question. Next year, I just focused on answering that question and I found out that the people who actually did all this work and followed up and made the effort invariably got better. And the people, shockingly, that didn't do anything didn't get better. And I went back, and I shared that research with him. I said, thank you very much, Mr. Kresa You just changed my life. You made my career, and that was really a life changer. And I wouldn't have done it if he hadn't have pushed me into it.

Whitney Johnson: So, this is another you could be more moment.

Marshall Goldsmith: It was. And it's also now that I think of it, a lot of these are issues where I'm comfortable. I mean, I'm a good teacher. I get 4.8 out of five over and over and over again. And nobody was complaining. Yet, he's the one who said, prove to me this really matters, that this isn't just entertainment, that people are actually going to get different. That led to eventually stakeholder-centered coaching.

Whitney Johnson: So, one of the things your research and I'm going to say it, and then you can correct me if I'm incorrect. Is that when you get feedback, of here, here are some things you could do to be more. If you get that information and you do nothing with it or you don't follow up and see how I'm doing, there's a 50% chance that you either will stay the same or get worse.

Marshall Goldsmith: I won't say you probably get worse. There's a 50% chance you'll probably stay the same. You might get worse because randomly you might get worse, or randomly you might get better if you look at it from a probability curve point of view though, the results are random chance.

Whitney Johnson: Okay, but what happens if you follow up at a regular cadence? Give us the numbers there.

Marshall Goldsmith: The more you follow up, the better you get. And then our research shows if you do a consistent or periodic follow-up, you get massive improvement in terms of long-term behavior, not as judged by you, as judged by everyone around you. And we've done this with thousands and thousands and thousands of people. This invariably works. Another reason it works is not just changing behavior but changing perception. And I give you a very simple example. Let's assume that my problem is I make too many destructive comments about other people, and I pick that example because it seems so simple. Just quit doing it. Well, I get the feedback. I don't talk to anyone; I don't follow up. I religiously try not to make bad comments and I go seven months and never make one bad comment about anyone. I'm still human. Seven months later I say those idiots in finance, stupid bean counters. How do we get anything done in this company? It's run by a bunch of idiots. You hear me. Your immediate reaction is, that he never changed. That one comment will trigger your previous stereotype. Marshall never changed. Case study number two, I talk to you.

Marshall Goldsmith: I say, you know, Whitney, I've got this feedback. I want to do a great job of not making destructive comments, being a good team player. Please help me. Give me ideas. Will you talk to me? Give me ideas. You don't really believe I'm going to change. You think this is a temporary religious experience. It probably won't last. Yet at least I've, at least I talked to you. What happens, though, when I come back two months later and say, Whitney, it's been two months. I said, I want to be a great team player, not make bad comments, give me ideas. Now you say, now you think about it. You say you're doing a good job. Keep it up. Four months-good job. Six months-good job. Seven months, "idiots in finance". You say, you know, Marshall, you didn't do that for seven months. You made a mistake. I said, you're right, I'm going to apologize. Situation A, did my behavior change? Yes. Did your perception change? No. Situation B, did my behavior change? Yes. Did your perception change? Yes. Well, in leadership, it does not matter what I think I say, all that matters is what you hear.

Whitney Johnson: Thank you. Kent Kresa because of that question that he asked you that led to all of this research. And I think this is so powerful of knowing that fortune favors follow up and that ability to say, if you will follow up, you not only will change, but also people will have the perception that you change. It's just yet another piece of gold from Marshall Goldsmith. All right. So, something that you've said that I really love is that you can be more speech is one of the purest forms of generosity we have in life.

Marshall Goldsmith: I think it's a very positive thing because what you're doing is you're trying to help another person get better. You don't have to do it, and it doesn't instinctively mean they're doing something wrong. What you're saying is, I believe in you. I believe you are better than what I see now, or I believe you can be better than what I see now. Not that there's anything inherently wrong with you. I believe you can be better yet. Which is to me, just a wonderful message to give people.

Whitney Johnson: Let's talk about Twyla Tharp for a moment. She's an expert on transitions. You tell this great story about her and it's almost toward the end of the book. But it's just it's so, so interesting. You say she earns her next beginning. So, tell us more about who she is and what you mean when you say that.

Marshall Goldsmith: Well, Twyla Tharp is the world's greatest and best-known choreographer. She's won many Tony Awards. I think she's won Academy Awards. And just an amazing person. And also, just as an aside, she's had the same personal trainer for about 30 years. And she's wise enough to know she needs help and gets help. So, she has a trainer of 30 years. That's why she looks great at age 80. She's an amazing woman. Well, you know, Twyla Tharp always looked at life as she's going through cycles and a dance is a cycle for her. It takes a long time. She's not casually throwing this stuff out. I mean, this is a world quality. And then when it's over, it's over. And what she says is, all I've learned is I've earned a new beginning. And my new beginning hopefully is going to build on everything I've learned in the past. And now I'm starting over. And literally, in her case, she is starting over. Well, that's a key

theme of the book. A key theme of the book is a Buddhist theme of starting over. Every time I take a breath, it's a new me. Well, in life, we're always starting over. And the idea is all I'm earning is my new beginning.

Whitney Johnson: I'm going to come back to this. As you can tell, I'm entranced by this statement that you made. So you said, people are my markers for the big turning points in my life, especially people who offered some variation of you can be more. One other person that I think is interesting and I don't know that he said this to you, but he has been a peer and a colleague and Sandy Ogg who has done research and gone to this idea of you have people in your organization who could be more, and you don't even see it. Do you want to talk about that for a minute?

Marshall Goldsmith: What Sandy does is amazing. It's called, you know, the idea of talent, of value. And it's an amazing, amazing process. I talk about him quite a bit in the book. He's an old friend of mine. He worked for Paul Hershey after I quit working for Paul Hersey. So, we've known each other for many, many, many, many, many years. Well, basically, Sandy says we're really undervaluing many people in the organization. And not only can they be more, they should be more, and they should be treated as if they are more, and they aren't. And he is all kinds of case studies with people who do not recognize employees, who are basically making huge contributions to the company and over recognize employees whose contributions are pretty much negligible.

Whitney Johnson: So how did he figure that out?

Marshall Goldsmith: Well, Sandy's got a whole methodology where he looks at basically what. He is, is much more financially driven. He looks at the dollars in the company and says, all right, where are they coming from? Who can who is lead to the savings? Who's leading the revenue generation? Who's the ones making a difference? Is it a salesperson? Is it the technical designer, perhaps? It depends on the company, but who is it? And then once he kind of figures that out, then he starts saying, all right, are they being treated that way? And the answer is often, no. It's often no. He uses examples of people who are hugely important to the company, and the CEO doesn't even know their names. They don't even know their names, and they're just shunted aside, whereas other people are far less significant and are treated much better. Also, our assumption is the higher up you go, the more important you are. Well, not necessarily. He points out that in any corporation it's not just a function of rank. Many times, the most valuable people in the company are not necessarily the CEO or don't report to the CEO.

Whitney Johnson: One of the things I find myself thinking is about S Curves and how each of these you can be more conversations are really an invitation to jump to a new S Curve to, to breathe a new breath. What are your thoughts about that? I'd love to hear your reflections.

Marshall Goldsmith: I totally think this is complementary to the work done by a brilliant woman named Whitney. And I love what you've written about this, and I completely agree with it, because what happens is, as you've pointed out, you go up that curve of learning, you hit a certain point and you start plateauing or leveling out, or you could get worse. Well, this you could be more speech is when you get near that top of that curve and someone saying you can be more, which means go to another curve, start over. In my case, it's don't just give speeches, work on writing books, work on developing content, or don't just do training programs, do so. Do follow up, measure do people improve. Or don't just admire Peter Drucker, be more like Peter Drucker. So, these are all messages I think are completely parallel to you. And each of them did involve, for me, a restart in life. As Twyla Tharp said, you know, you earn your new beginning, each of these led to, to me, important new beginnings in my life.

Whitney Johnson: As I hear you talk and I was reading your book, it seems to me that as a coach, this is what you do. You give people that you can be more speech. And I'm wondering, are there a couple of people that you would like to highlight?

Marshall Goldsmith: Oh, yeah, I've got many of those. But one of them is a woman who I don't know if you know her, Gail Miller, who are just love. Gail Miller's husband died and Gail Miller's business experience, she worked with him on the business, but she had no formal role. And now she went from being a housewife to being a CEO of this multibillion-dollar company. And, you know, she was very insecure. And the first meeting I did with her there was her, Alan Mulally was there, who was the CEO of Ford at the time. Jim Kim was president of the World Bank. Liz Smith was head of the Bloomin Brands. I mean, a lot of very high-end people were there. And she's got a message from the whole group of Gail, you're a wonderful person. You can do this. You've got it in you. You can do

it. Don't be intimidated. Do what you think is right. And she went on to be a huge success. The company quadrupled in value and just a huge success and just a wonderful person. And the one area I helped her with is not so much the business side. What I helped her with was more being happy because she was so hard on herself. And the message I gave her is you can be a lot happier. It's not that she's, you know, she's already multibillionaire. That's not a secret. But you could be happier. You could be happier with life, make peace with who you are. And she got so much better at that, which we have so proud of.

Whitney Johnson: So, that you can be more I think we can sometimes think, oh, it's more in terms of career aspirations. And you're saying, no, you can be more might be, you can be happier.

Marshall Goldsmith: Well, you know, the people I work with back to this career thing are already ridiculously successful. One of the recent people I'm coaching, he's already worth \$4 billion. So, what did I say? What am I supposed to do? Help you get up to \$4.1 billion? I mean, and who cares? He said, You're right. It's irrelevant. I just want to be happier. And then one thing I talk about in the book that came from Safi Bahcall. Safi is a scientist, brilliant, brilliant guy. He has a PhD from physics, from Stanford. He's poured tens of millions of dollars. He started businesses. He wrote a bestselling book called *Loonshots*. He's consultant to presidents, yada, yada, yada. Well, Safi finally said, and he talks like a scientist. I used to think that happiness was a dependent variable upon achievement, and if I achieve, I will be happy. He said, I finally realized that happiness and achievement are independent variables. You can achieve a whole lot and be happy. You can achieve a whole lot and be miserable. You can achieve nothing and be happy. You can achieve nothing and be miserable. And he kept looking for happiness. Once I achieve this, it's all going to be okay. Well, the people that I coach have already achieved such a ridiculous amount anyway. The concept I'm going to be better off because I achieve more is kind of a silly concept. It's not going to matter. You've already achieved more than almost all humans that ever lived. You really think you're going to find happiness or achieving something else? Another goal? No, that's not going to happen.

Whitney Johnson: So, this idea of the earned life. I think this is a really good time to talk about what's the definition of an earned life. Because it seems to me that this, this idea has bubbled up over the past couple of years. You're thinking about legacy. You're, you're coaching people who, as you say, it's not about achievement anymore. Tie all those pieces together for you, how, how this came about.

Marshall Goldsmith: Well, you know, what happened is, again, the people I coach are such ridiculously high achievers. And this is the part of the book that has struck the biggest chord with my clients. Is a connection of an earned life, is when you do three things at once. One, you have a higher aspiration or purpose. Why am I doing this? I mean, one woman in our LPR group, which we're going to discuss later, she said, why am I doing this? I'm working 80 hours a week. Why? Well, you need some sense of higher aspiration. Why am I doing this? Then that needs to be connected with your ambition, which is achievement and your achievement of goals. And that needs to be connected with your actions, which are your day-to-day process of life. Well, most humans in the history of the world have been focused on the action phase. They just kind of stumbled through life. They do what's in front of them. They live. They're not bad people. This is 99% of everybody didn't have a lot of freedom. They did what they were told, and they followed their path. Some people are lost in their heads. These are sometimes thinkers or professors or people who do a great job of coming up with concepts and ideas, but they don't really achieve a whole lot.

Marshall Goldsmith: The people I coach often are addicted to achievement. These are people who set goals and achieve goals. And the one thing I teach a lot now is that never become ego attached to results. Never become emotionally attached to results for a couple of reasons. One, you do not control the results. There are many factors outside of you are going to impact the results. And then number two, if you're emotionally attached to results, what happens after you achieve the results? Okay. That's fun for a week, maybe. Then what? We need more, more, more. One of the people that endorsed the book is Albert Bourla. Albert is the CEO of Pfizer. So, I talked to Albert. I said, Albert, you know, how's it going last year? Well, I'm pretty good. You know, I came up with this vaccine, saved a billion lives or so and got a new pill coming out. And stock is an all-time high and CEO of the year and employee engagement on and on. I said, What's your problem? He said, I have a huge problem. Two words next year. If his definition of success in life, is I have to be better than last year, he's never going to top last year. They can't find happiness without somehow trying to achieve more than I did last year.

Marshall Goldsmith: It's kind of a hopeless project. And the one story I like in the book that's the best is the marshmallow story. The kid is given a marshmallow. And the message is it, kid, if you eat one marshmallow, you get one. But if you wait. Oh two. Well, then they did this alleged longitudinal research and the kids that ate one marshmallow become drug addicts. And the kids are waited for two, all have PHDs from Harvard. It seemed a little exaggerated, but the point is pretty good. Delayed gratification is good. 95% of all self-help books. Delayed gratification is good. Delayed gratification is good. What they didn't do, though, in the research is take the kid with two marshmallows and say, kid, wait a little bit more. Three. Wait some more four, five, ten, a thousand. And what's the end of the story? An old man sitting in a room. Looking to die, surrounded by thousands of uneaten marshmallows. Sometimes you just have to eat the marshmallow. Well, the people that I coach, they have no problems with delayed gratification. They're real good on the delayed part. They need to work on the gratification part. Another story is Jack Welch, famous CEO, of GE. He almost died, he had triple bypass. And my friend Mark Ryder was his agent. And he asked him, what did you learn about life when you almost died? He said, why am I drinking the damned cheap wine every night? He literally, he has a wine cellar filled with spectacular wine.

Marshall Goldsmith: He's not drinking. He wants it to appreciate in value. Jack Welch, appreciate the wine. What does it matter to him? So, he's delaying so that the wine appreciates. This is insane. Of course, it's insane. It's very hard for people not to become addicted to achievement. Now, I'm not saying you shouldn't achieve. Achievement is good for achievement. Achievement is not good for happiness, though. The ultimate goal should be, I have a higher aspiration. What I'm doing to achieve is connected to this higher aspiration. I'm not just achieving to get a result or make a dollar. There's a reason I'm doing this. And number three, though. I'm engaged in the process, and I like the process of doing it. So, if you love what you're doing, you're achieving something meaningful that is connected to a higher aspiration you've just won the game of life. Assuming you're healthy, and you have good relationships with people you love that's all there is. You need to have a higher purpose number one. You need to be achieving something meaningful for you, which only you can define, number two. And you need to love what you're doing.

Whitney Johnson: You make it sound so simple?

Marshall Goldsmith: Well, two words are not the same. Simple and easy.

Whitney Johnson: That's right.

Marshall Goldsmith: Everything I teach is simple. None of it is easy.

Whitney Johnson: You said something that actually really hit me. And I think it hit me because I realized that maybe I'm in denial around it. And so, it's, it's this sentence. Ask for help. You need it more than you know. And I think the reason that that hit me is that I think most people think they ask for help too much. And yet what you're saying is we don't ask for it too much or many of us do not. And then I'm wondering, maybe there's the right, maybe we're not asking for help on the on the, the right things. I would just love your thoughts on that.

Marshall Goldsmith: I think this is a huge part of the book, about asking for help. And to me, one thing I'm very proud of is, well, if you look at my book, *Triggers*, 27 major CEOs endorsed the book. And these are big, big, important people. Why I'm so proud, 30 years ago, no CEO would admit to having a coach. They would have been ashamed or embarrassed to have a coach. Well, today, these are very important people saying, you know, my name is, here's what I do, and I need help. I'm the CEO of the year. I need help. I'm CEO of Pfizer. I need help. I'm president World Bank. I need help. Who are we kidding? We all need help. As you know, I have someone called me on the phone every day to try to help me. I need lots of help. Why? I'm too cowardly and undisciplined to do any of this stuff I teach by myself. I need help. And it's okay.

Whitney Johnson: For the purposes of our listeners, what is it? What do they ask you every single day? So, they call you and you go through some questions. Can you tell people what that is?

Marshall Goldsmith: Every day I write down a series of questions that represent what's most important in my life. It's called the Daily Question Process, and six of them I talk about for everybody. Did I do my best to set clear goals, make progress, be happy, find meaning, build positive relationships, and be fully engaged, and then have others. Like how many times I try to prove I was right when it wasn't worth it are bad comments about people, just

comments. How much exercise, or all kinds of things about life. And every day I do this, and I fill out the form every day. I've been doing it 25 years. This is phenomenally difficult. By the way, this process will help you get better at almost anything, and it takes 4 minutes a day. It sounds too good to be true. Half the people started doing it. Quit in two weeks. This is hard to do. Have you ever tried this?

Whitney Johnson: Absolutely. In fact, I'm doing it right now. Well, not with the phone call, but I do, do the accountability. And yes, it is a challenge.

Marshall Goldsmith: It's hard, you know, it's embarrassing to look in the mirror every day. It's embarrassing. It can be painful. We're ashamed of ourselves. Why? All that talk about life is easy to talk. Life is hard to live. And when you do this every day, you don't just look at that talk values or talk values are very beautiful. Most of us have very beautiful talk values.

Whitney Johnson: Yes, we do.

Marshall Goldsmith: Our live values are seldom quite as lovely as our talk values.

Whitney Johnson: I could not agree more. In the acknowledgments, you thank the 100 Coaches who taught you what an earned life can be. So, talk to us about what 100 Coaches is and some of the lessons that you've learned.

Marshall Goldsmith: I was going to give away everything I knew to 15 people, and the only price is when they got old, they were going to give it to other people. That was it. And I made a little selfie video and put it on LinkedIn thinking 100 people would apply. And I did top 15. Oh, it turned out 18,000 people applied and now I've adopted about 370. And as you know, they're an incredible group of people and we just try to help each other. And the basic rules are there's no money, there's no guilt, there's no obligation. And if someone helps you, there's no expectation. You have to help them. There's no sense of reciprocity. There's only an expectation you help somebody else. And the idea of the group is people just try to help each other. I think it's just been a wonderful project. Well, you can speak to this because you're one of the first members.

Whitney Johnson: And I remember when you posted that, I thought, oh, I had someone tell me about it and I applied. And then you picked me to be one of the first 15 and it was life changing. And we'll talk more about that in a minute. So, the pandemic came, and you made a few comments about how the 100 Coaches and the life plan review and just that the process of being a part of this community really made a difference for you. You talk about reference groups and just talk to us a little bit about this experience and why it was so powerful to have this community during the past two years.

Marshall Goldsmith: The pandemic, I fortunately was not a good predictor. I thought we were headed for 1929 revisited. I just thought this has a potential to be a complete and total nightmare. And as you may recall, we had Zoom calls every day for a while there. Talking about just trying to be a support group for people. And we had people calling in from all around the world and some of it was pretty bleak. I mean, people from Spain talking about, you know, coffins going by their house and people in New York talking about what a disaster things were. And it was pretty bleak there for a while. And it was just, I thought, a very positive support group to help each other. And then, we developed an LPR session. LPR stands for Life Plan Review, and then every week there's about 60 people and they went over their lives. Here's what I'm proud of. Here's what I need to do better. And then they, we did feed forward and people love that. They felt a sense of community without being judged. And most of us today. Oh, don't live where we were brought up. We don't have that same sense of community. And it's nice to be a member of a community where you're not being judged, you're accepted, you're okay. You don't have to prove yourself every 5 minutes. And a lot of people on the calls are. There's an old saying, it's lonely at the top. It used to be lonely at the top. It is today lonelier at the top. They don't have anyone to talk to. Social media, you can just get crucified for saying anything and people are afraid. One person said, you know, it was nice. One hour a week. I just got to act like a human being. Didn't have to put on a show, didn't have to pretend that I was perfect, didn't have to watch what I said, every word. I just got to act like a human being.

Whitney Johnson: Marshall, can you say what feedforward is?

Marshall Goldsmith: Well, feedforward is a key element of everything I do. Now, I'm a Buddhist. I'm not a religious, but a philosophical Buddhist. And I learn feedforward from studying Buddhism. Buddha said, Only do what I teach. If it works for you. If it doesn't work for you, it's okay. Just don't do it. When feedforward, what I teach people is to ask for ideas. Ask for ideas, listen, and say thank you. And the ideas are ideas for the future, not feedback about the past, feedforward, not feedback. And for example, I want to be a better listener. Give me ideas for the future. And you listen to the ideas, and you say thank you. And people love feedforward. I've done this with one person as a coach over and over, but I've also done this with 50,000 people at once in Russia. Overall, I must have done this with a million people, literally, and they love it. After we do this feedforward exercise, they'll say, my name is Boris. I want to be a better listener. Please help me. Gets a couple of ideas, thank you. My name is Natasha. I want to be better at recognition. Help me. Thank you. Shake hands. Talk to somebody else over and over and over. And then I ask people. Describe. Give me one word to describe this exercise. People invariably say it's positive, useful, helpful, or even fun. So, what's the last word you think to describe any feedback activity? Fun. Anyone ever call you on the phone? So, I have feedback I'd like to share with you coming to follow in fun. Fun is the last word you think of, yet people love this. It's positive, useful, helpful, and fun. And it's something over that, Mark Thompson and I spent about 400 hours with a bunch of people doing this over and over again.

Whitney Johnson: So, Marshall, any final thoughts as we wrap up?

Marshall Goldsmith: My final thoughts are always the same. Breathe. Imagine you're 95 years old and you're just getting ready to die. You're given a beautiful gift, the ability to go back in time and talk to the person that's listening to me now. What advice would that wise person who knows what mattered in life and what didn't and what was important and what wasn't? Have for you that's listening to me right now? Whatever you're thinking. Now, do that. In terms of performance appraisal, that's the only one that matters. The old person says you did the right thing. You did. Says you made a mistake. You did. And then when old people were asked this question, they tended to say, number one, be happy now. Not next week, not next month. The great Western Disease, I'll be happy when I achieve X. No. There is no when. When is that old person looking to die? Be happy now. Number two is friends and family. Not getting so busy climbing the ladder of success, you forget the people who love you. That happens too much. And number three, if you have a dream, go for it because if you don't when you're 30, you may not when you're 80. Business advice isn't much different. Life is short. Have fun. Do whatever you can do to help people and just go for it. Old people. We don't regret the risk. We, we take and fail. We regret the risk we failed to take. And finally, as I've grown older, my mission in life has gone down, and down, and down my, my impacts on up, and up, and up. Why? Quit worrying about what I'm not going to change. So, let's talk about a great goal for this wonderful conversation between us. My goal is very simple. Help someone listening, have a little better life. And then, maybe help them help someone else have a little better life. If someone listening to this talk has a little better life, they help someone else have a little better life. This is a good talk.

Whitney Johnson: A worthy goal. Marshall, thank you very much.

Marshall Goldsmith: Thank you.

I have three big takeaways from my chat with Marshall. Number one, all we ever earn is a new beginning. Take a cue from Twyla Tharp, one of the most influential and successful American choreographers ever. When she completes a masterpiece, the only thing she expects to get is to start over. Marshall notes that this aligns with Buddhist philosophy. Every time I take a new breath, it's a new me. And it certainly aligns with my philosophy where once we hit Mastery, it's time to jump to the next S Curve if we hope to keep growing.

Number two, fortune favors follow up. In a sense, it's a numbers game. The more persistent you are, the more opportunities you will have to hear, yes. But interestingly, Marshall's research shows that even if you're not improving as fast as you'd like, the act of following up makes others perceive that you are. And as Marshall says, in leadership, it doesn't matter what I think I say, it only matters what you hear. So, that persistence is a double win.

Number three, sometimes you got to eat that dang marshmallow. You had the greatest year of your life. Profits are up. The launch was a success, and you got the big promotion. If your definition of happiness hinges on next year being even better, you'll have a tough time. Instead, Marshall reminds us to question the classic marshmallow study that tests which kids can delay gratification and get more marshmallows later.

One last thing Marshall says everything I teach is simple. None of it is easy. These concepts are not complicated, but they take work. I love that bit of wisdom too. For more on the particular challenges of women getting recognition for their achievements at work, listen to Sally Helgesen, [Episode 229](#). And to hear from one of the CEOs Marshall coached, listen to Hubert Joly, [Episode 165](#). And for Safi Bahcall, author of *Loonshots*, who Marshall mentioned, [Episode 110](#). Thank you again to Marshall Goldsmith for being our guest. Thank you for listening. Thank you to our producer, Matt Silverman, audio engineer and editor Whitney Jobe, and production assistant Stephanie Brummel.

I'm Whitney Johnson.

And this is Disrupt Yourself.