

Vanguard Scotland Interview Transcript



Stuart Corrigan, Managing Director of Vanguard Scotland Ltd
interviews Dr Marshall Goldsmith, October 2015.



S: This is Stuart Corrigan from Vanguard and today I have the absolute privilege of speaking with Dr Marshall Goldsmith. Dr Goldsmith has been recognised over the past 4 years as one of the top 10 business thinkers in the world and is a top rated executive coach.

Today we're going to talk about, specifically if you're a leader, how do you go about changing your behaviour?

Good afternoon Marshall.

M: Good afternoon, great to talk with you.

S: Thank you so much for giving us your time today. Could we start by you giving us a few minutes on, just exactly what it is you do?

M: Well my mission is to help successful leaders achieve positive long term change in behaviour, for themselves, their people and their teams. And I do three things. I coach executives which I am most famous for, and I've coached many, many wonderful people. Then I give talks or teach classes and I travel all around the world doing that, I've been to 93 countries. And the final thing I do is write and edit books and articles. My most famous book is called 'What Got You Here Won't Get You There' and then my new book 'Triggers' just made it to number 1 in the New York Times bestseller list, so, those are the three things I do.

S: Excellent. And are there some people you've coached that we may know?

M: Oh yes I've coached many people you may have heard of, I've been coach of Alan Mullaly who was the CEO of Ford [Motors] (just retired) CEO here in the United States; Ian Read, the CEO of Pfizer the world's largest drug company; Hubert Joly, who's done a spectacular job of turning around Best Buy; Brian Cornell, who's doing a wonderful job of turning around Target; Dr Jim Kim, the President of the World Bank; Dr John Noseworthy, the Head of the Mayo Clinic, I could pretty much go on and on, a long list of very, very distinguished people. The Head of the New York Public Library, The Head of the Red Cross, many organisations, CEO of Glaxo, Walmart, many, many top people.

S: Wow, it really is a privilege to have you here today then, thank you again. So let's get in this behavioural change, so, first question for me would be what are the kind of, or the typical, behaviours that you help leaders to change. What do they typically want to change?

M: Well I help them make the transition from the great achiever to the great leader. For the great achiever it's all about me and for the great leader it's all about them. One of the classic problems I talk about in my book, 'What Got You Here Won't Get You There' is winning too much. Because at the bottom of an organisation the entire focus is on being the winner yourself. As you get to the top the goal should be to help create other people who are the winners and let go. This is particularly challenging with the founder, or in an entrepreneurial business, as well as in a large organisation.

S: Ok. And give me an example of some of the specific behaviours that leaders would say to you, 'please help me with this'.

M: Oh for example it could be the leader needs to be a more effective delegator, that the leader is an excellent doer, a person who's technically gifted needs to start letting go more. Again, especially with the founder, they need to let other people start running the business and eventually sort of back away. It could be the leader tries to be right to much. I have a funny case study I use. Imagine you want to go to dinner at restaurant X your husband, wife or partner wants to go dinner at restaurant Y. You have a heated argument, you go to restaurant Y, it was not your choice and the food tastes awful and the service is terrible. Option A - you can critique the food and point out your partner was wrong, or Option B - shut up, eat the stupid food, try to enjoy and have a nice evening. What would I do and should I do: almost all my clients - what would I do - critique the food, - what should I do - shut up!

S: Yes

M: I try to teach leaders, don't win all the time. Let other people win. Win the big stuff and on the little stuff learn to let go, don't always add value, don't always prove you're right. Don't make everything about you make it about the great people you work with.

S: So what is the process that you go through to help a leader change the way they behave?

M: Well the way my process works is, first I have to have sign off from the leader that they want to do exactly my process. The cost of my client hiring me is their time. I mean whatever they pay me is incidental compared to the value of their time. What is the time of the President of the World Bank worth? Or the CEO of Pfizer worth? Or any of the other people I coach? Their time is incredibly valuable, so I don't waste time, I don't get paid on spending time, I only get paid for results, and so therefore don't waste time. Because their time is valuable.

So the way the process works is everything is either required or optional. On the required side they must get confidential feedback from everyone around them. They need to pick important behaviour to improve. If they're not CEO then the CEO has to agree that these are the right behaviours and the right people. They have to follow up on a regular basis with their colleagues, apologising for their mistakes. They have to involve their colleagues, listen in a non-judgemental way, thank their

colleagues for input - not promising to do everything - just promising to listen and learn and think about it. Then they follow up with me on a regular basis. And then we measure positive long term change improvement, as judged by the right people, the right behaviours judged by the right people, and if they're not the CEO the whole process has to be signed off on by the CEO.

S: Okay. My listeners to this call will be very much interested in what are the things that work, that cause people or leaders not to behave the way that they should. In other words, would you say that a lot of the behaviour that you help leaders with is their own choice? Or is it them reacting to events that cause them to behave in a way that they shouldn't?

M: Well often times in my book 'Triggers' I talk about this. Often times environmental things set people off in a direction that they don't want to go in. They don't choicefully plan to do the things that are wrong, they end up doing the things wrong without having thinking about it. For example I ask people - do you believe in encouraging input? - yes - should we shoot the messenger? - no - should we encourage people to tell the truth? - of course. You know, you want people to be honest - yes, yes, yes. And I say here's a case study: You're driving your car, there's lots of traffic, the person in the front seat goes, 'Look out there's a red light up ahead!', do you say thank you? Or do you yell and scream at the person? - Which is the opposite of what you just told me you wanted to do. Well almost everybody says they yell and scream. Why? That environmental trigger sets off an impulse, the impulse leads to a behaviour and behaviour is exactly the opposite of the person we want to become. What I try to teach people in my book 'Triggers' is - there will always be impulses. The idea is to breathe. To breathe. Realise - alright here's a trigger, here's an impulse, I'm aware of what's going on and I have a choice. And once we can do that we're much more likely to behave in a way that's consistent with the person we want to be, not the person the environment is creating.

S: Okay. So you start by doing the feedback, then you have the leader identify the behaviours that they want to change, and I guess you and the leader have agreed on that, and then what's the model that you

M: If they're not the CEO the CEO has to sign off on it, if they are the CEO the board has to sign off on it.

S: Okay

M: Yes cos I get sign off either from the CEO or the board. Yep exactly, But excuse me, then go ahead.

S: So, well, let me just ask a follow up question to that point then. Do you have leaders who actively resist? Who say one thing and then do something different or?

M: Oh no, no, no. Well yeah they might for a while but you see I don't get paid if people don't get better.

S: Okay

M: So my tolerance for that attitude is close to zero.

S: (Laughs)

M: Cos I don't get paid if they don't get better. So if they have a bad attitude what do I say? Goodbye! I'm not in the religious conversion business. So I just help people that care. If people don't care I just tell them, 'thank you for not caring, go away'.

S: (Laughs). And does that happen?

M: Actually not too much.

S: Okay, excellent. So what's the model that you teach them for changing behaviour? I guess it starts with anticipate does it?

M: Well no. Ask for input.

S: Okay.

M: Ask for input. Listen. Listen. Think about it. Thank people. Respond in a non-judgemental way. Involve them. Change. And then the key is you've got to follow up to make change last. I wrote an article called 'Leadership as a Contact Sport' 86,000 people from 8 companies. If any of your listeners would like to get a copy send me an email - Marshall@marshallgoldsmith.com - I'll send you a copy of it. And it talks about how if you do ask for input, listen, think about, thank people, respond in a positive way, follow up on a regular basis - you get better.

S: Okay. And what if there's a behaviour that someone wants to change at work and they're listening to this call, and they know that they need to change that behaviour - what do you suggest they do?

M: I'm going to give them 2 or 3 suggestions. Are you ready?

S: Okay.

M: The first suggestion is they need to talk to who are the important stakeholders. For example if they want to be better listeners they would say, 'You know, one thing I've committed - I've decided to do - is become a great listener. Now I can't change the past, I'm not going to ask you for feedback about the past I'm going to ask you for what it is for the future'.

The idea is if I want to be a great listener in future what would I be? Then you have the people talk. Then you say, 'I can't promise to do everything you and everybody say. I am going to promise that I'll listen to the ideas and to think on them and do what I can. Then I'm going to follow up with you and I'm really going to focus on becoming a better listener. And if you don't mind I'm going to ask you to help me out.' Then on a regular basis you follow up about every couple of months and say, '2 months ago I said I wanted to be a better listener. It's been 2 months. Based on the last 2 give me ideas for the next 2.' 4 months, 6 months, 8 months - and it's amazing how that'll help.

Then the second thing I would suggest is what I call the daily question process. This is something you can do on your own. Just everyday evaluate yourself with one question. 'Did I do my best to be a good listener today?', 'Did I do my best to be a good listener today?'. And evaluate yourself on that question every day on a 1 to 10 scale. Well if you do the daily self-reflection and you do the follow up with the other people, your odds of not getting better are real close to zero.

S: Okay. And how did you go about developing those daily questions, the 'did I do my best questions' because that sounds just, one of these obvious but fabulous ideas.

M: Well you know, a couple of things. One I've been doing the daily questions for years. And then my daughter Kelly really helped me with the idea of what are called active questions, ones that focus on 'Did I do my best?' Because we studied the concept of employee engagement and realised every question was a passive question. Passive questions - 'Do you have clear goals?', 'Do you have meaningful work?' - and if we ask ourselves passive questions and we have negative responses we blame the environment. If we ask these active questions that begin with, 'Did I do my best to...?' we take responsibility ourselves. And so, of the active questions there are 6 I recommend every day: 'Did I do my best to set clear goals?', 'Did I do my best to make progress or achieve my goals?', 'Did I do my best to find meaning?', 'Did I do my best to be happy?', 'Did I do my best to build positive relationships?' and finally 'Did I do my best to be fully engaged?'. If you look at our research on this it's pretty amazing. And again if any of your listeners want to find out about this then email marshall@marshallgoldsmith.com I'll enrol them in the 2 week study, they can experiment themselves. And we'll send them an email, all we need is people's email address, and we'll send them an email every day for 10 working days. And then after 10 days we measure progress. The results are amazing. So far about 79 studies of 2,537 people - what have we found out? 37% of the people 2 weeks later seem better at everything, 65% said they were better at 4 out of 6, 89% said they got better at something, about 11% stayed the same and 0.4% get worse.

I've got some good news for your listeners, are you ready?

S: Yes, go on.

M: The odds on anyone getting worse based on anything I teach are phenomenally close to zero!
(Laughs)

S: (Laughs) excellent. Well, who wouldn't want to take you up on free coaching from the world's number one coach? I mean that just sounds an offer that's too good to miss. And you do these questions yourself every day, I read in 'Triggers' that you have somebody call you every night to talk about these questions, is that right?

M: Well actually she called me this morning, she called me this morning and I talked to her probably about an hour ago and I went over my questions. Now I have a whole bunch of other questions that are also added on to my list. I need lots of remedial help.

S: (Laughs)

M: So there's a long list of questions I've added to my list. By she talked to me today, she calls me every day. Somebody asked, 'why do you pay some woman to call you on the phone every day just to listen to you read questions that you wrote and provide answers you wrote? Don't you know the theory about how to change behaviour?'. I wrote the theory about how to change behaviour. So I pay a woman to call me every day because I know how hard it is. It's hard.

By the way if I had the courage to do this by myself I would. I don't have the courage to do this by myself. My name is Marshall Goldsmith and I'm too cowardly and undisciplined to do this by myself. I need help. And guess what? It's okay! Once we get over this macho, self-willpower, I can do it on my own crap, life is much better. Okay you do know this I'm going to ask you a question, are you ready?

S: Yes

M: What's one behaviour that you've needed to improve for years but you haven't improved it?

S: Behaviour for me would definitely be - in a meeting when I'm with the client, let the client talk first and fully explain the problem.

M: Okay, here's what I want you to say: 'I have this problem'. Repeat after me, 'I have this problem'.

S: I have this problem.

M: 'I've not fixed it by myself for years.'

S: I've not fixed it by myself for years.

M: 'I probably won't fix it by myself in the future.'

S: I would say I definitely won't fix it by myself in the future.

M: 'I need help!'

S: I need help!

M: 'And it's okay.'

S: And it's okay.

M: (Laughs). You see once we get over this silly macho I can do it on my own crap, life is much better.

Look every tennis player - one thing I'm proud of in my book is 27 major CEO's on the US version of the book put their name on the book in endorsement. They all said that - know what they all said?

'I'm one of the most powerful leaders in the world. Guess what? I have a coach, I need help, it's okay'. What percentage of the top 10 tennis players have coaches? They all have coaches. It's okay. I have people help me, it's okay. (Laughs).

S: Absolutely.

M: And once we get over this ridiculous fantasy that we can do everything on our own, life is much better!

S: Yes. Exactly. I mean even Roger Federer was without a coach for about a year, and now he's back working with a coach again and winning again. So there you go, if it's good enough for Roger it must be good enough for us?

M: I agree.

S: So final question then, what is your single best piece of advice on leadership?

M: I'm going to give my best advice on life. Are you ready?

S: Yes.

M: Take a deep breath. Imagine that you're 95 years old and you're just getting ready to die. But right before you take that last breath you're given a beautiful gift. The ability to go back in time and talk to the person who's listening to me right now. The ability to help that person be a better leader, more importantly, have a better life. What if I ask with the wise 95 year old you - who knows what mattered in life and what did not matter - what was important and what was not important? What advice would that wise old person have for the you that's listening to me right now?

Well, whatever you're thinking now do that. In terms of performance appraisal that's the only one that's going to matter. That old person says 'you did the right thing' then you did. And if that old person says 'you screwed up' you did.

Some friends of mine interviewed old folks who were dying; 3 themes emerge.

Theme number one is people. Take the time to help people, do what's right for people. You know and the main reason to do it has nothing to do with money or status or getting ahead. It's just the 95 year old you will be proud of you cos you did.

And then the number 2 theme: be happy now. Not next week, not next month, not next year. That great Western disease - 'I'll be happy when' - when I get the money, status, BMW. When I get that million dollars I be happy when. We all have the same when. (Unintelligible) old people I got so busy chasing what I didn't have that I never saw what I did when I had everything.

Then the final point out of it is family. Do whatever you can to look around and realise these people are important in your life. And then it gets to - if you have a dream go for it. Cos if you don't when you're 45 by now then you're 85.

So anyway that would be my advice.

S: That's fabulous advice. Well some amazing points for people to act on and think about and really change their behaviours. Give us again your email Marshall, if somebody wants to get in touch and they want to join the 2 week programme who do they email?

M: Marshall@marshallgoldsmith.com

S: Excellent. And I'll put a link into this particular blog for people who want to get 'Triggers' or any of your other books, and I can highly recommend 'Triggers' and 'What Got You Here Won't Get You There' another fabulous book. So Marshall, can't thank you enough, and I hope you have a great day and a great week. Thank you so much.

M: Thank you for inviting me.

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