



GALE MOTE ASSOCIATES

Training People, Inspiring Growth

Create a Stop Doing List and then, Stop!

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In their book, *The Extraordinary Leader*, Joseph Folkman and Jack Zenger, note that if a leader is seen as only having an ability to get things done and achieve results, 13% of people would view him as an effective leader. If the same person had only great interpersonal skills, 9% of his

peers and direct reports would view him as an extraordinary leader. However, if the same leader had the ability to get things done in an emotionally intelligent way, 68% of his stakeholders would view him as being a great leader. Clearly positive results combined with strong interpersonal skills are necessary to be effective as a leader.

In his best selling book, *Good to Great*, Jim Collins encourages leaders to create a “stop doing” list to eliminate non-value added systems, processes, and personal behaviors that negatively impact organizational performance and relationships. Horace Schultz, former CEO of the Ritz-Carlton hotels used to drop in on his hotels, unannounced, to visit with staff and ask, “What are we doing that’s stupid around here?” questions. Listening to the responses helped him and his staff recognize that they needed to stop doing to move forward.

Marshall Goldsmith’s new book, *What Got You Here, Won’t Get You There*, identifies twenty of the most annoying interpersonal behaviors demonstrated by leaders that hold them back from going and growing within the business. Let’s look at a five of them to help you think about your own personal stop doing list as a leader.

1. **Stop being negative.** When your peers and direct reports have ideas, comments, or suggestions, listen to what you say when you respond. If you hear “Let me explain why that won’t work” or “The only problem with that is” you are taking on the role of the chief critic. Most people find critics annoying and not open to listening to anyone except themselves. The result: people stop bringing their ideas, issues, and concerns to you. When that happens, you have stopped being a leader. A better approach is to listen, ask questions, and encourage the person to tell you more.
2. **Stop adding too much value.** Are you the leader who consistently has to put her two cents into every

conversation? When someone brings an idea or suggestion to you, don’t respond with “Great idea BUT...” As Goldsmith points out, “You may improve the content of the idea by 5% and you’ve reduced the employee’s commitment to executing it by 50%.” Take a breath and ask yourself if what you are about to say is really going to add that much. Be quiet and stop trying to add value. Sometimes, you have more to gain by not winning.

3. **Stop making destructive comments.** This includes cutting sarcastic remarks made directly or indirectly about peers and direct reports that serve no positive intent. It is even worse when these comments are spewed with an audience. “Can you believe he’s in that position? He is such a jerk!” In his research, Goldsmith points out “avoids destructive comments” is one of the leadership attributes that has the lowest correlation between how we see ourselves and how others see us. The danger here is that you and I make jabs without thinking and therefore, without noticing or remembering. We permit ourselves to issue destructive comments under the excuse they are true. The question is not, “Is it true?” but rather “What are the consequences of what I’m saying?”
4. **Stop passing judgment.** When you specifically ask for someone’s opinion, it is not appropriate to pass judgment on it, positive or negative. Grading people’s comments rather than just accepting them without comment, makes people hesitant and defensive. Try to address ideas and comments that come your way with more neutrality by simply saying “Thank You” or “Thank You. You’ve given me some things to think about.”
5. **Stop making excuses.** When you hear yourself saying, “I’m sorry but,” stop talking at the word ‘sorry.’ Look at yourself and take ownership, learn from mistakes, make changes to your behaviors, and move on. Goldsmith says, “I have never seen feedback that said, “I think you are a great leader because I love the quality of your excuses!” Stop blaming others for the choices you make.

Changing behaviors requires that you genuinely solicit feedback, apologize for behaviors that negatively affect your relationships with others, tell people you are committed to change, ask for help, listen to ideas, show appreciation for suggestions, follow up with others to see how you are doing and ask for ideas on how to improve going forward. Think about what you are going to stop doing and then stop doing it.

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