

# Business Times

# Careers

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SECTION

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## Stop being a jerk!

**A**RE you an executive? Are you a manager? Are you an executive coach? Read this book. It made the best-seller list of The New York Times, The Wall Street Journal and Amazon, and you will see why.

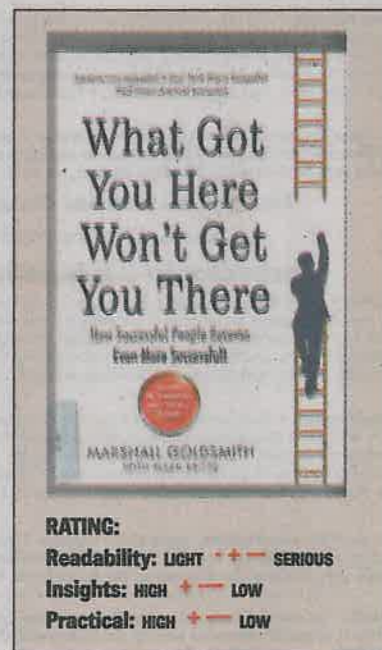
Marshall Goldsmith is an executive coach to Fortune 500 CEOs, leaders in the military and others occupying senior positions in corporations. The basic thesis is that the skills that got you to where you are now are the very ones that are going to destroy your career from here on. Well, at best they will give your career a severe limp.

The truth is that the further you rise in your career or profession the less you are judged by your technical skills and the more you are judged by your interpersonal skills.

You choose your physician for his bedside manner; you presume he is highly skilled.

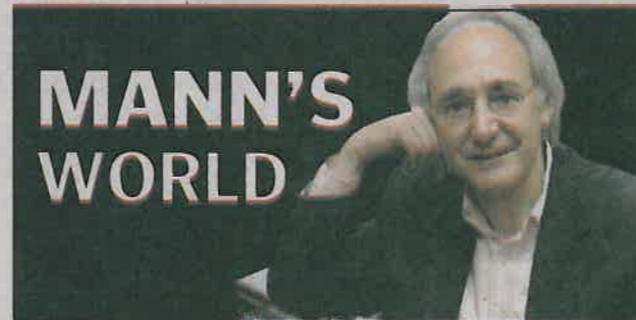
Who would you rather have as your financial director? A moderately good accountant who is great with people outside the firm and skilled at managing very smart people? Or a brilliant accountant who is inept with outsiders and alienates the smart people under him?

There are two reasons why it is difficult to get successful people to change: we don't know we are messing up and we are resistant to change. Goldsmith believes that one of his greatest challenges is in helping people to see that they often



confuse "because of" with "in spite of" behaviours.

How come you made it to the top of your company, department or unit? You are ambitious, hard-working, smart, forceful and unafraid of stepping on toes to achieve results. You talk straight, take no prisoners and everyone knows exactly how you feel all the time — well, you tell them rather forcefully, rather loudly and



Ian Mann is a business consultant who provides insights from the latest business books for his clients

unequivocally. Is this a case of "in spite of" or "because of"?

To make matters worse, successful people have two problems with straightening out their offensive behaviour. They don't want to hear about it from you, and you don't want to alert them to it. (Quick: when was the last time your efforts to improve your boss worked as a career-enhancing manoeuvre?)

The bulk of the book feels like a coaching session, and with one of the best. Goldsmith is a clever coach.

Among other insights he identifies 20 transactional flaws that he sees most commonly.

Here is an example: adding too much value. This is the overwhelming desire to add your two cents to every discussion. "Great idea, but it would be better if you tried it this way."

You may have improved the content by 5%, but you have probably

reduced commitment to executing it by 50% because you have taken away your employee's ownership of the idea. Now her idea is your idea. She walks away less enthused about it than when she walked in. That is the fallacy of the value add.

What is remarkable about the book is how it gets you to take what it says personally. All too often books like this make you want to give it to someone else who really needs it, while you ignore the lessons.

How about telling the world how smart you are? The paradox is that this need to demonstrate how smart we are rarely hits its intended target. Being smart is impressive, announcing how smart you are turns people off.

Before beginning to coach a client, Goldsmith always does a survey of the impressions of the client's colleagues, manager and subordinates which acts as the

reality check. Often the problem is destructive comments — the cutting, sarcastic remarks we spew out daily with or without intention and which serve no other purpose than to put people down, hurt them, or assert ourselves as their superiors.

Where this is an issue he asks the client to list the destructive comments they made in the last 24 hours — they usually can't think of any.

Destructive comments is one of the issues with the lowest correlation between how we see ourselves and how others see us.

His advice to those who wish to "be nicer" is elegantly simple and at the same time genuinely useful. All you have to do is "stop being a jerk". That's it. If someone offers a less than brilliant idea in a meeting, don't criticise it, say nothing.

Goldsmith comes across as sincere about his work and his solutions are thoughtful and realistic.

He often uses himself as an example of some common flaw and describes his struggle to sort it out.

He also draws compelling and insightful examples from his consulting assignments that flesh out the points unequivocally.

As you read the book you will see yourself in many of his examples and your colleagues and manager in the rest!

The book will be really useful to anyone who wants to get better — at work or at home.

### HUMAN RESOURCES

## 'We believe that well employees are productive'

Margaret Harris spoke to Naseema Fakir, the head of human resources at Sasfin.

### What is Sasfin's view on employee wellness?

We believe that well employees are productive employees. To this end, we provide an informal, familial working environment that promotes sound working relationships. As part of our formal wellness offering, we host Wellness Days where we provide, among other things, confidential HIV/Aids testing.

Financial counselling is available, which is particularly relevant in the current economic climate.

We offer counselling to staff who have been exposed to trauma or who are experiencing emotional difficulties. The needs of the individual employee are catered for in terms of job flexibility. Training and development ensure that employees remain stimulated... We equip employees to deal with vocational challenges, by facilitating life-coaching interventions as well as conflict and diversity management programmes.

### What are the particular issues that can affect the wellbeing of workers in financial services?

- The lack of a work-life balance, particularly during cyclical periods of pressure;

- The impact of changes in legislation, and how this translates into changes on an individual level, for example, how the implementation of the National Credit Act required changes to certain processes;

- The effect of changes in the economy, for example, stockbrokers are experiencing a particularly stressful period at present;

- The ease of migration of labour among different financial institutions despite the differences in organisational culture.

### What formal qualifications do you look for when recruiting for Sasfin?

This would depend on the business

unit concerned. For example, if we were filling a vacancy within Sasfin Securities, which is our stockbroking division, we would require all applicants to have at least completed a Registered Persons Examination. In addition to the relevant qualification we look for experience, entrepreneurial flair, talent and potential. This significantly enhances the competencies in the organisation, and it allows room for our employees to carve out a career path in the Sasfin Group.

### What softer skills are most important when working for Sasfin?

Good interpersonal skills, adaptability and flexibility are required. EQ (emotional intelligence) is also an important consideration. Ideally, we are impressed by open-minded, proactive, big-thinking individuals who walk the talk by having a hands-on approach in their areas of responsibility.

### The needs of the individual employee are catered for in terms of job flexibility

### Have you always been in human resources?

No, when I joined Sasfin in 2001, I was in business finance. I was offered the opportunity to transfer to human resources two years ago, which bears testimony to the point above — that at Sasfin employees can develop and progress within the group.

### What is your favourite business book?

It would have to be *Who Moved My Cheese?* by Dr Spencer Johnson. This book is as relevant today as it was when first published. It deals with change, which is essentially the only constant of life. Irrespective of whether the change is personal or professional, this book provides valuable insight on how to manage change successfully.