

Triggers: Creating Behavior That Lasts
Marshall Goldsmith

SYNOPSIS

Triggers is a book that discusses both what causes us to act in certain ways and how we can manage our reactions to people and situations to more effectively become the person we want to be. We don't operate in a vacuum. There are often triggers—or people and situations that lure us into behaving in a manner diametrically opposed the colleague, friend or parent we imagine ourselves to be.

Goldsmith says, “We are superior planners, but become inferior doers as our environment exerts its influences through the course of the day.” Basic tools such as anticipating, avoiding and adjusting are good ways to start correcting the conflict between avoider and planner, but they are Band-Aid solutions. At a deeper level, there are four options in pursuing any behavioral change, whether for a person or a group, which involve changing to keep the positive elements or changing to keep the negative elements. Goldsmith's Wheel of Change includes the following four options:

- Creating represents the positive elements that we want to create in our future.
- Preserving represents the positive elements that we want to keep in the future.
- Eliminating represents the negative elements that we want to eliminate in the future.
- Accepting represents the negative elements that we need to accept in the future.

Some of these choices are more dynamic, glamorous and fun than others, but they're equal in importance. For example, creating is the glamorous form of behavioral change where we imagine ourselves to be anyone we want to be. Preserving is a phase we probably don't do enough. Successful people are usually doing many things well, and we need to make sure we focus on that too.

Through the remainder of the book, Goldsmith talks about levels of engagement, the danger of “good enough behavior” and provides a multitude of stories and studies to support his approach to triggers and behavior change. He provides substantive food for thought for anyone focusing on behavior change for themselves or a group.

Review by Chris Gay, Bridge Consulting

Asking Engaging Question

Goldsmith suggestions using the idea of “reverse-engineered” questions to make sure you and your team are engaged.

For the individual he recommends the following six questions:

- Did I do my best to set clear goals today?
- Did I do my best to make progress toward my goals today?
- Did I do my best to find meaning today?
- Did I do my best to be happy today?
- Did I do my best to build positive relationships?
- Did I do my best to be fully engaged today?

In a study of 2,500 participants who asked themselves these six questions for 10 days, 65% improved in at least four items.

Taking this same framework, he suggests you ask these six questions of the people you manage at least once a month:

- Where are we going?
- Where are you going?
- What is going well?
- What can we improve?
- How can I help you?
- How can you help me?

This practice “forces” a manager to spend quality time with each employee at least once a month.