



**READINESS:** Marshall Goldsmith says people fail to plan for improbable events. *Photo: Attila Csaszar*

## Make the call for lasting change

**Best-selling leadership coach and author Marshall Goldsmith was in Perth this week, and his advice was simple yet challenging.**

Have you ever tried to lose weight, go on a diet or start an exercise regime? How often did you say to yourself, 'I'll start tomorrow – today's too hot' or 'I'll start in the New Year' or 'Once I've got this stuff I have to do out the way I'll get into it'?

Life, as best-selling author and executive coach Marshall Goldsmith explained in a visit to Perth earlier this week, tends to get in the way.

“Everyone has an ideal image of what they want to be, as a leader or as a person, but as you journey through life we don’t tend to become this ‘ideal’ person,” Dr Goldsmith told [Business News](#) .

“We never plan for those improbable events, like our printer does not work, or it’s too hot outside to go for my run today, or it’s my birthday, so I’ll start my diet tomorrow.”

The trouble is, these improbable events have a nasty habit of getting in the way of what we want to achieve.

“It’s easy to understand how to lose weight, or become a better listener” explains Dr Goldsmith, “but it’s really difficult to do.”

Dr Goldsmith’s advice can be best boiled down to one simple concept, which is also the title of his latest best-selling book, Triggers.

A trigger is an environmental cue such as a sound, event, smell or image that can either remind you to change your behaviour or throw you off course. It triggers a response, and the secret to affecting lasting change in yourself and your team is to build these triggers into your daily life, to prompt you to act.

“I employ a lady to ring me up every day, no matter where I am, and get me to go through my daily questions,” Dr Goldsmith said.

“People think I’m crazy – why do I do this? Surely I can remind myself to do this, everyday? Well, no I can’t. I’d find an excuse not to do it. I could get a programmed robot to ring me, or a calendar reminder, but it would be easy to dismiss them. Far harder to ignore a phone call.”

So, every day, Dr Goldsmith runs through various questions he has to answer. He sets the questions and he knows the answers. Each question has a yes, no or number (rating) answer.

Questions include: “Who did I help today?” and “Did I learn to do something new today?” By the end of the week, a spreadsheet report tells him how well he did.

The trigger is the daily phone call. The questions – in themselves – are not hard, but the discipline to do it every day, is. It’s this self-discipline that will allow you to be the best person, leader, or CEO you want to be.

“What we have to do as leaders is get over this macho BS about always having to know everything,” Dr Goldsmith said.



“It’s ok not to know, it’s ok to say we’re lost. Only when the CEO of Ford Motor Company 2006-2014, Alan Mulally, stood up to this fact, when they were losing \$US17 billion at the time, and said ‘We’ve been going bankrupt for 40 years and I don’t have a plan’ were they able to move forward.”

So leaders should be asking their team how they can help the team get better, Dr Goldsmith said. In fact, all members of the team should be asking this. If everyone tries to ‘fix themselves’, argues Dr Goldsmith, then the team will improve.

“It’s all about attitude, it’s what’s going on inside,” he said.

“A simple technique is to write your own questions, which you are then going to answer every day. The questions are not difficult, and you know the answer. You understand this is important. That’s all easy. Here’s the hard part – doing it every day.”

If you do this, argues Dr Goldsmith, this will effect massive change, and it will stick. Research backs up the argument, but most people don’t do it.

“I wrote 23 books before I had a hit,” Dr Goldsmith said.

“And then I got a New York Times bestseller. Want to know why it was a best seller? Because I did not write it.

“It’s ok to be modest, it’s ok not to have the answers. I can write, but Mark Reiter is a better writer and so he does the writing. They are my words and ideas, but he writes it up, and he’s very good at it. I give him 50 per cent and I can tell you I earn far more this way than when I was writing it. I now have three best sellers thanks to him.”

Often the answers to your leadership issues are not hard, but enacting them everyday can be.

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*Triggers: Sparking Positive Change and Making it Last*, Marshall Goldsmith, published May 2015. Marshall Goldsmith was in Perth to present an [AIM WA](#) one-day workshop.

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