What Got You Here Won't Get You There - Book Summary and Key Learnings

"What Got You Here Won't Get You There" by Marshall Goldsmith explores how successful people often develop behavioral blind spots that impede further advancement. The core message is that the very skills and habits that helped you succeed so far might be the exact things holding you back from reaching the next level.

Book Summary

Marshall Goldsmith, a renowned executive coach, identifies common interpersonal habits that successful people develop which ultimately become career-limiting factors. The book argues that at higher levels of leadership, success depends less on technical skills and more on how you interact with others. Goldsmith provides a methodical approach to identifying these behavioral issues through feedback, acknowledging them, apologizing for past mistakes, making visible changes, and following up to ensure improvement.

He outlines 20 specific workplace habits that hold people back and provides practical advice for overcoming them. The book emphasizes that small behavioral changes can lead to significant improvements in leadership effectiveness and career advancement. Goldsmith's methodology involves a structured feedback process, public commitment to change, and consistent follow-through to solidify new behaviors.

50 Key Learnings

1. Success can lead to overconfidence that blinds us to our flaws
2. The higher you go in an organization, the more your problems are behavioral
3. Technical skills become less important than people skills as you advance
4. The "superstition trap" - connecting unrelated behaviors to success
5. Successful people tend to believe their success is due entirely to their own merits
6. The more successful we become, the more positive reinforcement we get
7. Feedback becomes less frequent and honest as you rise in status
8. Most successful people have excessive need for approval from others
9. Sometimes adding a new behavior is less important than stopping a negative one
10. The importance of "feedforward" - asking for suggestions for the future rather than feedback about the past
11. The power of apologizing for past mistakes
12. Leaders are often unaware of how their actions affect others
13. The difference between winning too much (always needing to be right) and successful leadership
14. How adding too much value (improving others' ideas) diminishes engagement
15. The danger of passing judgment too quickly
16. How making destructive comments damages relationships
17. The negative impact of starting sentences with "no," "but," or "however"
18. The habit of telling others "that's great, but..." invalidates praise
19. How claiming credit that we don't deserve erodes trust
20. The problem with making excuses rather than accepting responsibility

21. Clinging to the past prevents adaptation to present challenges
22. The habit of favoritism and its impact on team morale
23. Refusing to express regret damages relationships
24. The inability to celebrate others' successes limits leadership effectiveness
25. The necessity of listening fully rather than formulating responses
26. How failing to express gratitude diminishes loyalty
27. The negative impact of punishing the messenger
28. Taking credit for others' achievements destroys motivation
29. How an excessive need to show our intelligence makes others feel inferior
30. The importance of knowing when to stop talking
31. Not respecting the value of others' time sends negative messages
32. How failing to share information creates organizational silos
33. The negative impact of withholding deserved praise
34. The importance of "before and after" feedback to measure change
35. Changing behavior requires daily practice and reinforcement
36. Successful behavioral change often requires involving others
37. The "wheel of change" - creating, preserving, eliminating, and accepting
38. The value of measuring improvement over time
39. How to gracefully accept negative feedback
40. The power of asking "How can I do better?"
41. Why publicly declaring your intention to change increases commitment
42. The importance of following up to ensure sustainable change
43. How behavioral change efforts fail without accountability
44. The value of structured feedback processes
45. How to separate perception from reality in feedback
46. The difference between understanding feedback and acting on it
47. Creating systems for ongoing behavioral improvement
48. How to overcome resistance to change in yourself
49. The impact of gratitude on relationships and leadership effectiveness
50. Why character flaws that are tolerated in skilled leaders become intolerable at higher levels

The book's ultimate message is that self-awareness, coupled with the willingness to change and follow through, can transform good leaders into exceptional ones by eliminating counterproductive behaviors.