

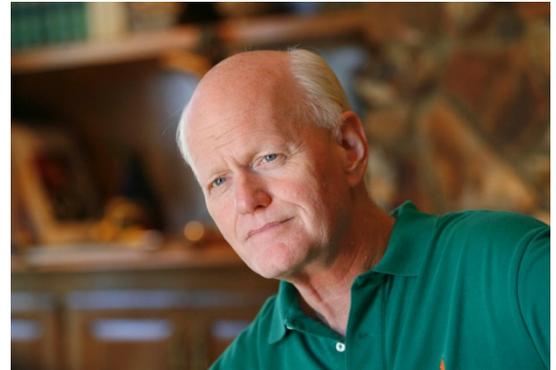


## 20 Sins of Successful People

Peter Drucker once said, "Most leaders don't need to learn what to do. They need to learn what to stop."

How true. Can you imagine your boss admitting a personal failing and outlining his efforts to stop doing it?

Probably not. There are good reasons for this. Leaders try to maintain a positive tone and commitment to positive action. Recognition and reward systems acknowledge the doing of something. Leaders get credit for doing good things - rarely for ceasing to do bad things.



What's Wrong With Us?

I find that the 20 flaws that hold most people back are rarely flaws of skill, intelligence, or personality. They are challenges in interpersonal behavior, often leadership behavior. They are the egregious everyday annoyances that make your workplace noxious. They are transactional flaws performed by one person against others.

### 1. **Winning too much:**

The need to win at all costs and in all situations - when it matters, when it doesn't, and when it's totally beside the point.

### 2. **Adding too much value:**

The desire to add our two cents to every discussion.

### 3. **Passing judgment:**

The need to rate others and impose our standards on them.

### 4. **Making destructive comments:**

The needless sarcasms and cutting remarks that we think make us sound witty.

### 5. **Starting with "No," "But," or "However":**

The overuse of these negative qualifiers which secretly say to everyone, "I'm right. You're wrong."

### 6. **Telling the world how smart we are:**

The need to show people we're smarter than they think we are.

### 7. **Speaking when angry:**

Using emotional volatility as a management tool.

### 8. **Negativity, or "Let me explain why that won't work":**

The need to share our negative thoughts, even when we aren't asked.

### 9. **Withholding information:**

The refusal to share information to gain or maintain an advantage over others.



**10. Failing to give proper recognition:**

The inability to praise and reward.

**11. Claiming credit that we don't deserve:**

The most annoying way to overestimate our contribution to any success.

**12. Making excuses:**

The need to reposition our annoying behavior as a permanent fixture so people excuse us for it.

**13. Clinging to the past:**

The need to deflect blame away from ourselves and onto events and people from our past; a subset of blaming everyone else.

**14. Playing favorites:**

Failing to see that we are treating someone unfairly.

**15. Refusing to express regret:**

The inability to take responsibility for our actions, admit we're wrong, or recognize how our actions affect others.

**16. Not listening:**

The most passive-aggressive form of disrespect.

**17. Failing to express gratitude:**

The most basic form of bad manners.

**18. Punishing the messenger:**

The misguided need to attack the innocents who are only trying to help us.

**19. Passing the buck:**

The need to blame everyone but ourselves.

**20. An excessive need to be "me":**

Exalting our faults as virtues simply because they're who we are.

Admittedly, this is a scary pantheon of bad behavior, and together they sound like a chamber of horrors. Who would want to work in a culture where colleagues are guilty of these sins? And yet we do every day. The good news is that these failings rarely show up in bunches. You may know one person guilty of one or two of them. But it's hard to find successful people who embody many of them.

There's more good news. These faults are simple to correct. The fix is in the skill set of every person. For example, the cure for not thanking enough is remembering to say, "Thank you." The cure for not apologizing is learning to say, "I'm sorry. I'll do better in the future." For not listening, it's keeping your mouth shut and ears open. And so on. Although this stuff is simple, it's not easy. We already know what to do - we just lose sight of the many daily opportunities to employ them.

**An excessive need to be "me"**

Let's take a look at one of the 20 habits listed above: "an excessive need to be me." What do we mean by "an excessive need to be me?"



Each of us has a pile of behaviors that we define as "me." These are the behaviors, both positive and negative, that we think of as our unalterable essence.

While many of these "me" behaviors may be positive (e.g., "I am smart" or "I am hard working"), some may be negative (e.g., "I am a bad listener" or "I am always late").

If we buy into our behavior definition of "me," which most humans do, we can learn to excuse almost any annoying action by saying, "That's just the way I am!"

As you read this article, think about your own behavior. How many times does your own "need to be me" get in the way of building positive relationships with the important people in your life? How many times have you rationalized away inappropriate behavior by saying, "That's just the way I am!"

Some years ago, I worked with a CEO who was generally regarded as a great leader of people but was seen as lacking in the ability to provide positive recognition. As we reviewed his 360-degree feedback report, he snorted, "What do you want me to do, go around praising people who don't deserve it? I don't want to look like a phony!"

"Is that your excuse for not giving recognition?" I asked. "You don't want to look like a phony?"

"Yes," he replied.

We went back and forth as he desperately defended his miserable scores on giving recognition. He was very animated in articulating his defense. For example, he went into a tirade about when he shouldn't give recognition that included the following comments:

- He had high standards - and people didn't always meet them.
- He didn't like to hand out praise indiscriminately - because this cheapened the value of praise when it was deserved.
- He believed that singling out individuals could weaken the team.

While pointing out when he shouldn't give recognition, he completely failed to deal with the fact that there were lots of times when he should be giving positive recognition. After his dazzling display of rationalization, I finally stopped him and said, "No matter what you say, I am not impressed with your excuses, and I don't think that handing out praise makes you a phony. Your real problem is your self-limiting definition of who you are. You are afraid that if you recognize others, it won't really be 'me' who is doing the recognition. That's what the definition of phony is - not 'me.'"

I asked him, "Why can't doing a great job of providing positive recognition be you? It's not immoral, illegal, or unethical is it?"

"No," he conceded.

"Will it make people feel better?"

"Yes."

"Will they perform better as a result of this well-deserved positive recognition?"



"Probably."

"So please explain to me - why aren't you doing it?"

He laughed and replied, "Because it wouldn't be ME!"

That was the moment when change became possible - when he realized that his stern allegiance to himself was pointless vanity. He realized that he was not only hurting his employees' and company's chances for success - he was hurting his own chance for success!

He realized that he could shed his "excessive need to be me" and not be a phony. He could stop thinking about himself and start behaving in a way that benefited others.

Sure enough, when he let go of his devotion to a pointless definition of "me," all his other rationalizations fell by the wayside. He realized that his direct reports were talented, hard-working people who did indeed deserve his praise. He finally understood that giving recognition when deserved didn't damage his reputation as a leader who had high expectations.

The payoff was enormous. Within a year his scores on giving recognition were in line with his other positive scores on leadership - all because he had lost his excessive "need to be me."

The irony was not lost on him. He accepted the fact that the more he focused on his employees, the more they worked to benefit the company - and that benefited him.

It's an interesting equation: less me + more them = more success as a leader.

Keep this in mind the next time you find yourself resisting change because you are clinging to a false - and/or probably pointless - notion of "me."

*Dr. Marshall Goldsmith was recently named winner of the Thinkers50 Leadership Award (sponsored by Harvard Business Review), and ranks #6 in Global Guru's top 30 Leadership Professionals in 2013. Dr. Goldsmith's Ph.D. is from UCLA's Anderson School of Management where he was recognized as one of 100 distinguished graduates in the 75 year history of the School (in 2010). He has been asked to teach in the executive education programs at Dartmouth, Michigan, MIT, Wharton, Oxford and Cambridge Universities. Marshall is the co-author or editor of 32 books, including the bestseller 'What Got You Here Won't Get You There'. He is one of a select few executive advisors who have been asked to work with more than 120 major CEOs and their management teams.*