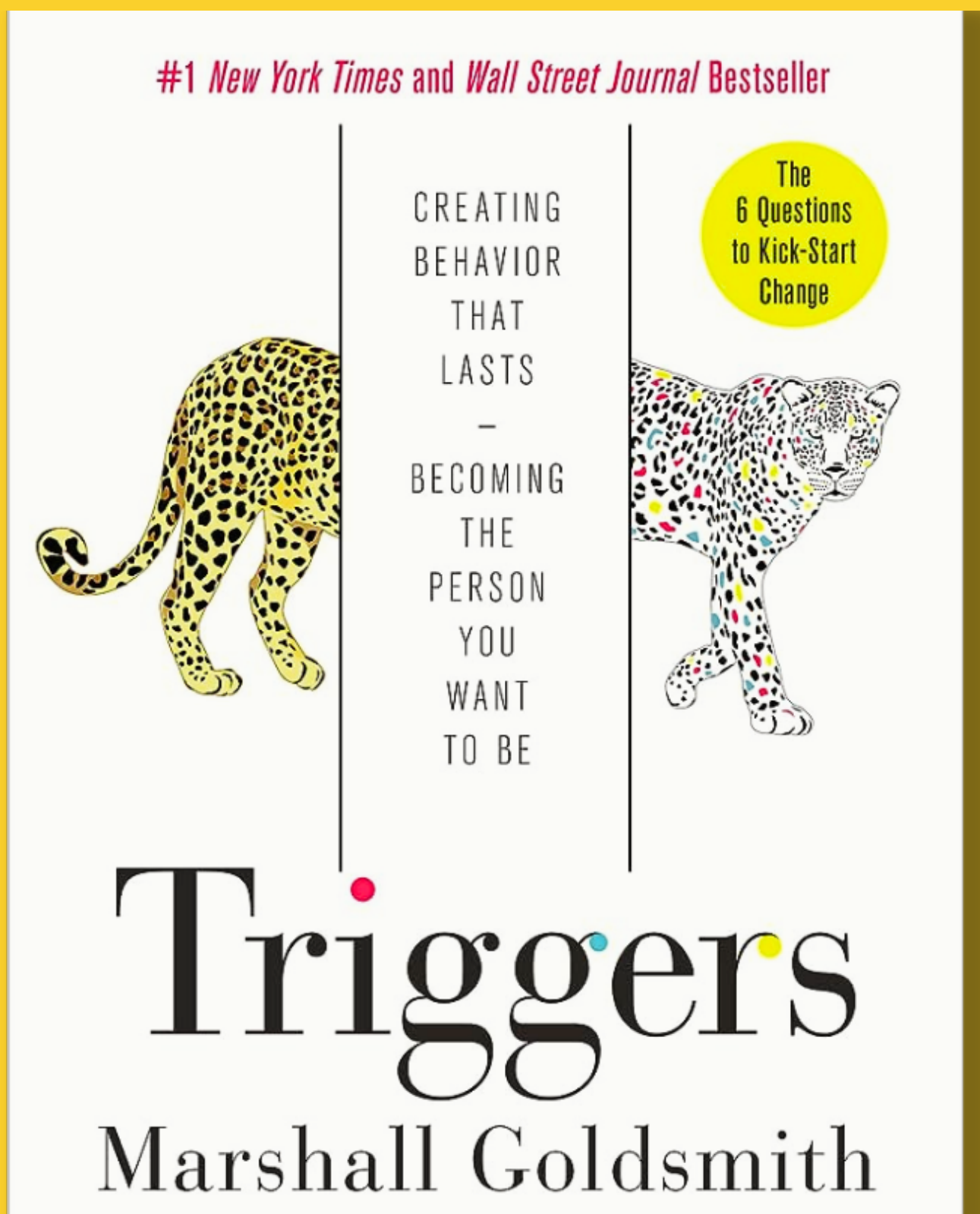




15 Ways we Sabotage our Change Efforts

... from Marshal Goldsmith's Classic





Why did your last attempt at behavior change fail?

Often **it's not the method but instead our own preconceived notions that derail us.**

Marshall Goldsmith is one of the **world's top executive coaches.** If anyone knows about what works and what doesn't in behavior change, it's him.



How we're our own worst enemy

In his now classic *Triggers*, Marshall identifies what he calls “**belief triggers**” — commonsensical notions about change that trigger failure even before we get started.

They sound logical, but they STOP us from learning, BLUNT the effectiveness of a method, and at worst SABOTAGE our efforts.

Training yourself to watch out for them, keeps change efforts realistic and thus more likely to succeed.



What follows are the 15 belief triggers that Marshall identified from his multiple decades of coaching.

1. If I understand, I will do



- What it triggers: CONFUSION
- The core mechanism at play here is the difference between **KNOWING and DOING.**
- It's what plagues most advice. If you hear yourself saying, "I already know this", a better reframe is to ask "Have I tried this in physical reality?"
- Thinking and reading about swimming is not the same as jumping into the water. Obvious right? But **when it comes to mental constructs we forget this.**

2. I have willpower & won't give in to temptation



- What it triggers: OVERCONFIDENCE
- We set goals in a “higher state of mind”, when we’re at our best.
- But execution doesn't wait for the right moment, willpower, or convenience. It demands consistent action regardless of how we “feel” or if we’re in the “right” mindset.
- We rely too much on willpower and self-control **instead of designing systems that assume a lack of it.** Without supporting systems in place there’s a high likelihood we'll regress when right action becomes inconvenient.

3. Today is a special day



- What it triggers: INCONSISTENCY
- When things don't go per plan, or we don't want to follow it, our fallback is to designate "only today" as an exception.
- Somehow we'll have more willpower tomorrow. "**Just today I will...**", we tell ourselves
- Do it enough times, and we create a pattern of being inconsistent with ourselves or what Goldsmith calls "**self-indulgent inconsistency**".

4. “At least I’m better than..”



- What it triggers: false sense of IMMUNITY
- When we fail our own standards, we look to others as lower benchmarks, giving ourselves a “free pass”.
- Do this long enough and our standards never change, lowering our bar permanently. **We are now, them.**

5. I shouldn't need help and structure.



- What it triggers: EXCEPTIONALISM
- Getting help or external accountability structures is seen as a weakness. That's too simplistic, & we're just too smart for that.
- Per Goldsmith we do this because of our:
 - **contempt for simplicity** (we love complexity)
 - **contempt for instruction**/follow-up
 - **confidence** that we can succeed all by ourselves
- It also ensures we don't have the most basic ingredient for change: **humility**

6. I won't get tired and my enthusiasm won't fade.



- What it triggers: DEPLETION
- Energy and willpower fade as the day progresses. They are akin to muscles that get tired with use, and need rest and recovery. Same for longer cyclical patterns.
- When we work as if this is not the case, we keep fighting, and deplete ourselves in the process.
- Depletion gone too long is what **ultimately leads to the extreme of burnout**. You can't win the game if you can't stay in the game.

7. I have all the time in the world.



- What it triggers: PROCRASTINATION
- Two dynamics at play:
 - We underestimate how long something will take.
 - We overestimate how much we can actually get done in a finite amount of time.
- We tell ourselves that there will always be tomorrow. **Our perfect day is always in the future, not today.** Of course, tomorrow never comes.

8. I won't get distracted & nothing unexpected will occur



- What it triggers: UNREALISTIC EXPECTATIONS
- Goldsmith call this the “**the high probability of low-probability events**”.
 - The probability of a given dramatic event happening is low. But in the constellation of all the possibilities, something is very likely to occur.
- Assuming this will not be the case is setting ourselves up for failure.
- While **we cannot predict** which low probability event will occur, **we should expect** something to happen and plan accordingly.

9. An epiphany will suddenly change my life.



- What it triggers: *MAGICAL THINKING*
- Culture always highlights **the singular moment when everything changed for someone**: a sudden insight, winning the lottery, changing overnight, and so on.
- But for the majority of us, it won't be that one moment, but instead a process of **consistent and intentional action, making incremental progress**.
- Waiting or searching for that magical moment is not strategy, but wishful thinking.

10. My change will be permanent & I'll never have to worry again.



- What it triggers: false sense of PERMANENCE
- It's the notion that once we achieve or get something, that change will be permanent. Except it never is. Instead, its a lifelong process, and something we have to be at consistently.
- The core of this notion is of : HAVE-DO-BE. Once I **have** x, I can then **do** y, and THEN I'll **be** happy....
- But most of the **"being' and "doing" can be done without the "having"**. (eg happiness & satisfaction) More importantly, you have to keep "being" and "doing".
- Most **commercials sell the shortcut of going straight to the "being" by buying** whatever they're selling.

11. Eliminating old problems won't bring on new problems



- What it triggers: misunderstanding FUTURE CHALLENGES
- We somehow imagine that once our current set of problems is solved, there won't be any more. Of course that's not the case, but it's how we operate, leading to disappointment once we achieve our goals.
- Eg. you made VP, only to find that it's a mess. You now would rather have your old job back, where at least you knew how to solve the problems.

12. My efforts will be fairly rewarded.



- What it triggers: RESENTMENT
- Also known as the fairness fallacy. (link to another post in comments)
- It's the expectation that because we're undertaking changes it should result in something. We tend to have an **"in order to" attached to everything we're doing.**
- The process needs to be its own reward. Expectation of timely external rewards (not in our control), in line with our efforts, has a high likelihood of frustration.

13. No one is paying attention to me.



- What it triggers: ISOLATION
- Improvement is often not visible to others, especially in the early stages. But **reverting back to old bad behaviors gets immediately noticed.**
- As I noted in a previous post, **“It’s always showtime, especially in leadership”**. Your actions get copied, analyzed and amplified throughout the organization.

14. If I change I'm “inauthentic.”



- What it triggers: ISOLATION
- We equate habitual behaviors with the notion of an “authentic self”. Anything that’s new and doesn’t “feel right” is not being our true self.
- Eg. if we're not used to complimenting others, it of course feels awkward in the beginning. But dismissing it as “**that’s just not me**” ensures we never change.
- **All new behaviors feel inauthentic in the beginning**, until it becomes familiar, and part of muscle/neural memory.

15. I have the wisdom to assess my own behavior.



- What it triggers: lack of OBJECTIVITY
- Multiple studies have shown that **we consistently overrate ourselves.**
- All our successes come out of sheer effort and talent on our part, while **all failures are due to external circumstances** or others.
- Everyone else overrates themselves. But we're somehow an exception, and excellent judges of our abilities.

Wrap up



Which one of these do you fall for regularly? Study these and revisit them particularly when starting something new.

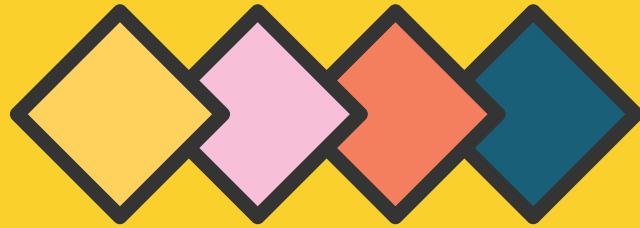
This is one of a series of posts on Self-Competence (SC). SC along with Organizational Competence (OC) and Professional Competence (PC) form the 3 pillars of effective leadership, and career success. Stay tuned.

P.S.

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