

The man *The Economist* calls “one of the most credible thought leaders in the new era of business” describes how to get – and keep – your Mojo.

Thought Leader Interview:

Marshall Goldsmith

by Karen Christensen

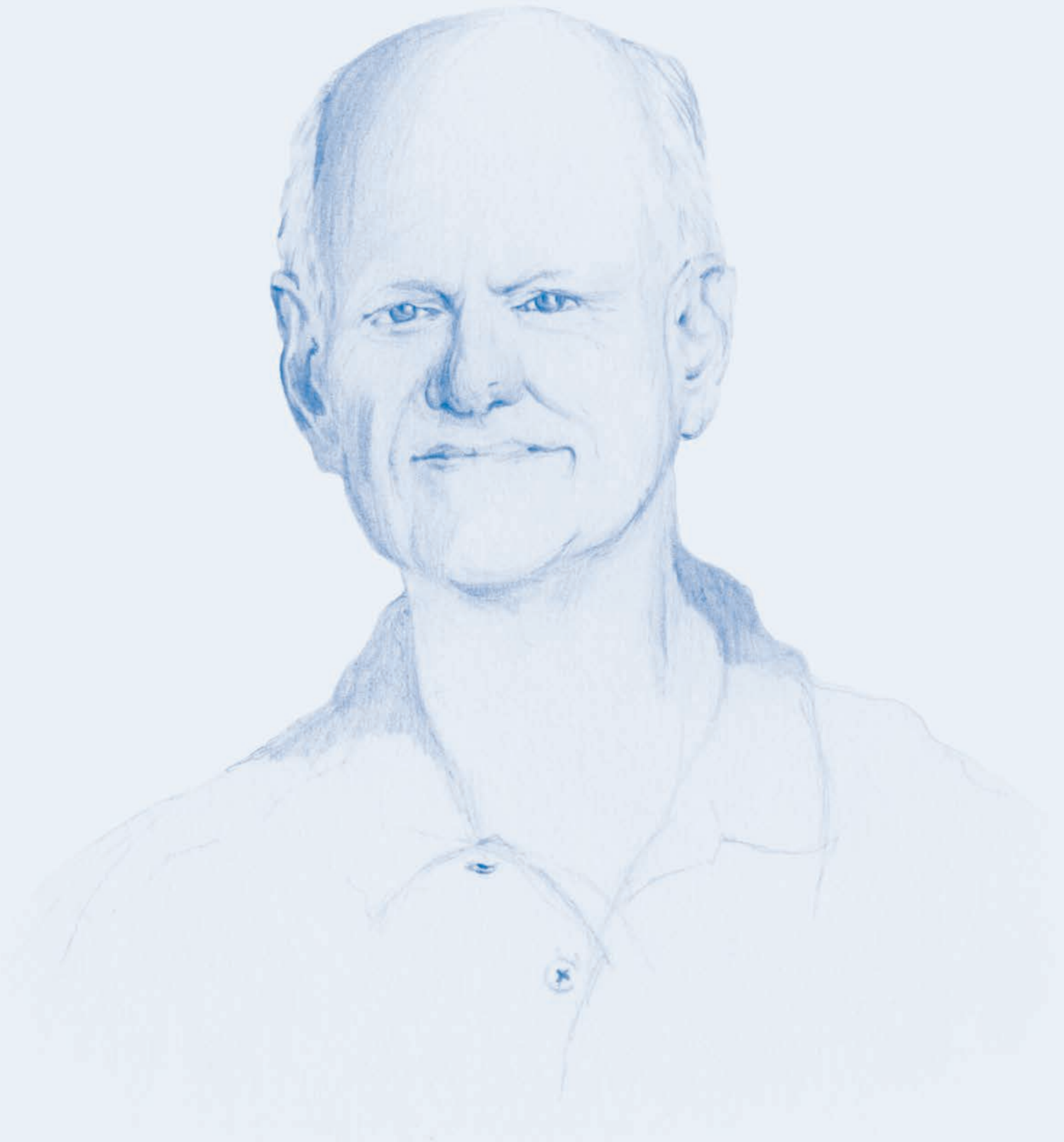
You believe that two things differentiate truly successful people from everyone else. What are they?

I've led sessions where I have successful people talk about their lives, and five things tend to really matter to them: the first is health, which of course is critically important; the second is wealth, but that doesn't matter as much as you might think. Studies show that after about \$65,000 to \$80,000 a year, there is *zero correlation* between wealth and happiness. Third is relationships; it's very important to have positive relationships in your life with people that you love. So assuming that you're healthy, you have a middle-class income and you have good personal relation-

ships, what else differentiates successful people from others? *Happiness* and *meaning*. Truly successful people spend a great deal of their lives engaging in activities that simultaneously a) make them happy and b) provide meaning. The trick is, the activities that create these results are highly individual: no one else can determine what is meaningful for you or what will make you happy. But together, they lead to something very powerful: Mojo.

How do you define Mojo?

The term has evolved to describe a sense of positive spirit and momentum, especially in the shifting tides of business, politics or



The Four Ingredients of Great Mojo

By understanding the impact and interaction of the following four elements, you can begin to alter your own Mojo – both at work and in your personal life.

1. Identity: Who do you think you are? Taking everyone else out of the equation, including the opinions of your spouse, family and closest friends, how do you perceive yourself? Without a firm handle on our identity, we may never be able to understand why we gain – or lose – our Mojo.

2. Achievement: What have you done lately? These are the accomplishments that have meaning and impact. If you're a salesperson, it might be landing a big account; if you're a creative type, it could be coming up with a breakthrough idea. We often underrate or overrate our achievements based on how easy or hard they were to pull off; until we can honestly put a value on what we've accomplished lately, we may not be able to create or regain our Mojo.

3. Reputation: Who do other people think you are? What do other people think you've done lately? While identity and achievement are definitions that you develop for yourself, your reputation is a score-board kept by others: your co-workers, customers, friends. Although you can't take total control of your reputation, there's a lot you can do to maintain or improve it, which can have an enormous impact on your Mojo.

4. Acceptance: What can you change, and what is beyond your control? We must be realistic about what we can and cannot change in our lives and accommodate ourselves to those facts. While this seems easier than creating an identity from scratch or rebuilding a reputation, acceptance is often one of our greatest challenges. When Mojo fades, the initial cause is often a failure to accept *what is* – and get on with life.

Measure Your Mojo

Five qualities that we need to bring to an activity in order to do it well are; motivation, knowledge, ability, confidence and authenticity. Likewise, five benefits we may receive from the activity after doing it well are: happiness, reward, meaning, learning and gratitude. Think of a typical day in your life. Pick your important activities and rate yourself on each of the following questions on a scale of 1 to 10; a perfect Mojo score would be 100. You can do this test after a five minute phone call with a customer, a half-hour session to return e-mails, or at the end of a long trip.

Professional Mojo: What I bring to this activity

- 1. Motivation:** You want to do a great job in this activity. If you are just 'going through the motions,' score yourself low.
- 2. Knowledge:** You understand what to do and how to do it. If you are unclear on processes or priorities, score yourself low.
- 3. Ability:** You have the skills needed to do the task well.
- 4. Confidence:** You are sure of yourself when performing this activity.
- 5. Authenticity:** You are genuine in your level of enthusiasm for engaging in this activity. If you are faking it or being insincere, your score will be low.

Personal Mojo: What this activity brings to me

- 6. Happiness:** Being engaged in this activity makes you happy.
- 7. Reward:** This activity provides material or emotional rewards that are important to you.
- 8. Meaning:** The results of this activity are meaningful for you. If you do not feel a sense of fulfillment or that you're contributing to a greater good, your score would be low.
- 9. Learning:** This activity helps you to learn and grow.
- 10. Gratitude:** Overall, you feel grateful for being able to do this activity and believe that it is a great use of your time.

SCORE out of 100: _____

sports. Mojo entails moving forward, making progress, achieving goals, clearing hurdles, passing the competition, and doing so with increasing ease because what you are doing matters to you and you enjoy doing it. Mojo plays a vital role in our pursuit of happiness and meaning, because it heralds the achievement of two simple goals: *loving what you do* and *showing it*. People who love what they do but never show it are doomed to be misunderstood; their Mojo and their careers will never reach their full potential. Likewise, people who hate what they're doing but manage to convey a convincing positive spirit on the outside are phonies, and their lack of authenticity usually catches up with them in one way or another. The big challenge for many of the

people I work with – not just at work, but also at home – is the discrepancy between how they feel on the inside and the way they come across on the outside. Once we learn to ask for input and get feedback on how we are seen by others, we frequently realize that a discrepancy exists. I teach my clients to take steps to close the gap between the person they want to be and the person the world sees on the outside. And I try to practice what I preach: in my executive coaching practice, I don't get paid if my clients don't get better, and better is not judged by me or them – it's judged by everyone around them. So in essence, I only get paid if their reputation improves, and their reputation arises from what radiates to the outside.

The four key elements of Mojo are identity, achievement, reputation and acceptance [see sidebar, page 12]. In your experience, which area tends to need the most work?

For most of the people I meet, it would probably be *acceptance*. I had the privilege of spending 50 days with the late-great **Peter Drucker**, and he taught me a very valuable lesson: that every decision in life is made by the person who has the power to make that decision. It is critical to make peace with this: it is not necessarily the smartest person, the best person or the right person, it's the person with the power to make the decision who will make it. All we can do is to treat that person with respect, change what we can change about the situation and make peace with what we can't change. If you do this, not only will you become more effective, I predict that you will be happier.

What is the Mojo Paradox?

Our default reaction in life is not to experience happiness or meaning: our default reaction is to experience inertia. That's the Mojo Paradox. We all have a tendency to keep on doing what we're doing, and it is incredibly difficult to break these patterns. I'll give you a simple example. I fly on airplanes constantly – I've surpassed ten million frequent flyer miles on **American Airlines**, and after all this time, my routine is very much set: I get off the plane; I walk into my hotel room and I turn on the TV. Often I come upon some silly made-for-TV movie, and if I'm not careful, two hours later I'm still sitting there, glued to it. Why, when I should be catching up on much-needed rest? Because I didn't have the discipline to turn off the TV. That's plain old inertia in action.

You advocate that we practice the Two-Question Discipline. Please describe it.

For every activity that you undertake in life, you should ask yourself two questions: 'How much short-term satisfaction or happiness did I experience from this activity?' and 'How much long-term benefit or meaning did I experience from it?' Imagine you have to go to a meeting – yet another stupid meeting with boring PowerPoint slides. You really don't want to go, but you have to. In such instances, I advise people to remember that *this is your life*; if the meeting makes you feel miserable and empty, it's your misery and emptiness. So try to make the best of the situation rather than defaulting to the role of victim. Option A is to attend the meeting

and be miserable (and probably assist others in being miserable, too) and Option B is to make the meeting more meaningful and enjoyable in some way. You might be able to do this by observing your colleagues more closely than usual, by asking a question you've been dying to ask, or by generating a new idea. If you knew that at the end of each meeting you were going to evaluate how happy you were about it and how meaningful it was to you, my theory is that you would start acting quite differently. You'd be more likely to make those meetings worthwhile, because that hour of your life will be gone, either way. By changing the way you usually approach things, you can ensure you don't fall victim to inertia.

The opposite of Mojo is 'Nojo' – which pretty much defines itself. How prevalent is this?

It is pervasive, and nowhere is the difference between the two states more evident than in the service industry, especially when you are confronted by two employees doing exactly the same job at the same time. Let's return to air travel for a minute: one of the flight attendants on my last cross-country flight was upbeat and enthusiastic, while the other was negative, bitter and cynical. Both the Mojo and the Nojo flight attendants were doing exactly the same activity for the same company at the same salary for the same customers, yet the message that each was sending to the world couldn't have been more different. What is the real net effect of such behaviour? The important part is not what shows on the outside, it's what's happening on the inside. American Airlines may lose a little bit because of the negative employee's behaviour – maybe one passenger will vow to never fly them again, or they'll receive a couple of complaints; but chances are, I will fly them again regardless of the Nojo attendant's behaviour, because it's convenient for me. The fact is, it's not the company that pays the price in the end, *it is that flight attendant*, because this is her life, and she is miserable. My daughter **Kelly Goldsmith** – a professor at the Kellogg School of Management – and I are working on a whole new approach to employee engagement where we focus on engagement as a *responsibility of the individual*. Rather than saying, 'I should do this because it will make my company more money', you should look at it as, 'I should do this because I'm going to have a happier and more meaningful life, and guess what – my company will be better off, too'.

We often tell people what they want to hear instead of what we really think. How big a role do 'undiscussables' play in today's workplace?

I think it's huge, and that's why I'm a great believer in having people ask themselves a very simple question: How can I be a better person? We don't ask this nearly enough. In my classes, I ask, 'Is customer satisfaction important?' Of course, everyone says Yes; 'Should the company ask for customer input?' Again, Yes; 'Should we listen to our customers?' Yes. Then I say, 'Are you married?' Most say Yes. Then I ask 'Do you ever ask your husband or wife, What can I do to be a better partner?' Inevitably, the answer is No. We don't ask these questions in the workplace, and we don't ask them at home. Why? Because we're afraid. One of the greatest qualities of the best leaders I've met is that they have courage. It takes courage to ask, 'How can I make things better for you?' When you start asking these questions, undiscussables gradually become discussable.

How can we get better at saying what we really think?

One tool I teach in my classes is 'feed forward', whereby you get into the habit of asking people not for feedback about the past, but for ideas for improvement in the future. That means saying things like, 'I want to become a better listener: please give me some ideas on how to do that.' Then you have to sit there and listen, take notes and at the end, say only two words: 'Thank you'. One gentleman participating in this exercise had a Nobel Prize, and he told me he listened better in this exercise than he ever had in his life. When I asked why, he said, 'Normally when other people speak, I'm so busy composing my next comment to prove how smart I am that I'm not listening. It's amazing how much better I listened when I knew all I could say at the end was *thank you*'. By the way, I don't suggest promising to do anything specific at the end of this exercise – all you should promise is to listen to the feed forward and vow to do what you can going forward. We did a study called Leadership is a Contact Sport with 86,000 participants that showed leaders who do this exercise almost invariably increased their effectiveness, not as judged by themselves, but by everyone around them.

In the book you describe six 'Mojo killers'. What is the most common one?

For the busy, successful people I work with, one serious Mojo killer is over-commitment. A wise person once said, "If you want to get something done, ask a busy person," but there is a fine line between taking on a lot of work and taking on too much. It's easy to see how this happens: if you're good at what you do and you like your job, everybody wants to 'rub up against you' in some way: they want you in their meetings; they seek your opinion; they ask you to run a project for them. People with high Mojo tend to be literally assaulted with opportunities, and they often can't resist the siren call of being asked to help out; after all, it's a validation of their skill and another way of being told, 'We really like you.' However, when we chronically over-commit, our sagging spirit inside becomes

That Negative Spirit Called Nojo

MOJO

Take Responsibility
Move forward
Run the extra mile
Love doing it
Appreciate opportunities
Make the best of it
Inspirational
Grateful
Zest for Life
Awake

NOJO

Play the Victim
March in place
Satisfied with the bare minimum
Feel obligated to do it
Tolerate requirements
Endure it
Painful to be around
Curious
Zombie-like
Asleep

obvious to everyone, and our formerly-enjoyable job can become rote, our execution sloppy and halfhearted. We can all benefit from realizing that we can fall into this trap. Before replying with an enthusiastic 'yes' to that next request, think of the long-term impact on your Mojo. Are you doing what is right for the long term, or just saying what will make others happy in the short term? Is what you are about to commit to going to increase the happiness and meaning that you experience in life?

How hard is it to get leaders to embrace the idea of saying No?

They tend to do it at first, but here's an example of what often happens: at the end of a recent class I taught at **Johnson & Johnson**, participants were asked, 'Are you going to do what Marshall taught you?' Ninety-eight per cent said 'Yes!' One year later, we checked in with them and found that 70 per cent had done something and 30 per cent had done absolutely nothing. When I asked them why, the answer was always the same. People have this fantasy: 'I'm so busy right now; I'm totally over committed, but in just two or three weeks, everything is going to calm down and I'll be able to spend more time with my family and start my new healthy life program.' Well guess what: that never happens. If you want to do something differently, you have to start now. In the end, our true values are not what we *say* we believe, they come alive in what we do and say each and every day. **R**

Dr. Marshall Goldsmith is one of the world's leading executive educators and coaches. His 30 books include *MOJO: How to Get It, How to Keep It, How to Get It Back If You Lose It* (Hyperion, 2010) and *What Got You Here Won't Get You There* (Hyperion, 2007).