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## One Step Away from Stupid

Not long ago I heard someone say, “We are all just one step away from stupid.” As I write this, I can hear my wife saying, “don’t say stupid.” Okay, I didn’t say it I just wrote it, but it is so true. We are all just one step away from being stupid. It’s not that we are trying to be stupid. Not even that we are careless, we just have our behavior compass out of whack.

In our recent Transformational Leadership class, we discussed the topic of our behavioral compass. According to Marshall Goldsmith, author of *What Got You Here, Won’t Get You There*, our behavioral compass needs calibrating from time to time. What is quite fascinating and also frightening, is that our compass is knocked out of whack by success, not failure. Goldsmith puts it this way, “One of the greatest mistakes of a successful person is the assumption that ‘I have behaved this way, and I achieved results.’ Therefore, I must be achieving results because I behave this way.” I know that sounds like he’s talking in circles, so please let me explain.

When we are successful, we believe that our success is a result of our actions and behaviors. Based on his research Goldsmith has found the following:

- We overestimate our contribution to a project.
- We take credit, partial or complete, for the success that truly belongs to others.
- We have an elevated opinion of our professional skills and our standing among our peers.
- We conveniently ignore the costly failures and time-consuming dead ends we have created.
- We exaggerate our projects’ impact on the net profits because we discount the real hidden costs built into them. (The costs are someone else’s problems; the success is ours.)

The crazy part of this is that all of these delusions come from being successful and since we are successful, we believe doing more of the same will make us even more successful when in reality it just moves us one step closer to stupid. In his book, Goldsmith identified 20 bad habits that he has seen frequently as an executive coach for the highly successful. Any one of which could be holding his clients back from even greater success.

The solution to help us back away from the precipice of stupidity is asking others to speak into our lives and help us identify habits or behaviors that may be holding us back. In my recent Transformational Leadership class, I asked the attendees to pick two people who are their closest friends. The assignment is simple; each friend is to identify the attendee’s greatest strength and greatest weakness. Once identified, a plan is developed to build on the attendee’s strength and help overcome the weakness. The close friends then become accountability partners to help the attendee stay the course.

This was a tool that I was asked to employ when going through coaching certification. I picked my wife and my best friend that has known me since my youth. I figured that these two would know me the best and would have the greatest insight into my “issues.” Now, it’s not very hard to ask for the feedback, but it can be tough to listen to. Through this process, I learned that I didn’t value people enough. WOW, that was tough to hear. As I thought about that feedback, I had a decision to make. I could resist what I was hearing and stay on the path I had been traveling for over 50 years, or I could listen to what was said, take it to heart and work hard to correct my misguided thinking. It’s been over four years now, and I can tell you those conversations helped change my life. It was well worth the discomfort at the beginning.

What about you? You have the choice before you at this very moment. Will you ask others to speak into your life, or take the next step toward stupidity?