

# Break Out of a Rut

The Steps to Take Toward Progress

by SANDRA BIENKOWSKI



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**M**arshall Goldsmith is a leadership expert who has helped people grow by achieving positive, lasting change in behavior—for themselves and their teams. Ranked as one of the most influential business thinkers in the world by *The London Times* and *Forbes*, Goldsmith has published numerous books, including the *New York Times* best-selling *What Got You Here Won't Get You There*. His latest book is *MOJO: How to Get It, How to Keep It, How to Get It Back If You Lose It*.

**SUCCESS: Let's talk about how people end up in ruts and how they can begin to get out.**

**Marshall Goldsmith:** Well, our default reaction in life is not to experience happiness and not to experience meaning. Our default reaction in life is to experience inertia. We all tend to go where we have been going, do what we have been doing, say what we have been saying, be what we have been being. And what works is just the discipline of stopping and asking: *How can I change what I am to find more meaning in my own life? How can I change what I am to make myself happier as opposed to being a victim?*

Entrepreneurs tend to be better at this than most people because they take responsibility for their lives. They tend to be doing what they are doing because they choose to do it. They tend to be people who have a high internal locus of control, which means they take responsibility for their lives, rather than feel like victims or hopeless cogs in the wheel of life. That's the good thing about entrepreneurs.

**Is there a bad thing?**

**MG:** There are actually two. The challenge with entrepreneurs—the biggest mojo killer—is overcommitment. Entrepreneurs chronically overcommit. They are hardworking and dedicated, but they keep committing and committing. It is hard *not* to if you are an entrepreneur. But when they overcommit, they get tired because they hit an exhaustion level. And then they get stuck.

Another problem is sunk cost. When you commit to an idea, it's very hard to admit it's a bad idea. And the more you commit to it, the more you put into it, the harder it is to get out of it. I had an idea, I tried it and it didn't work. And even though I put a lot of time and money and effort into it, I have to let it go. Financial traders have a name for this, they say, "You can't fall in love with your position—you have to be willing to sell." And entrepreneurs tend to be in love with their position, which is good a lot of the times, but it can be bad. Entrepreneurs put heart and soul into what they do and can get easily lost in the wrong path. The great entrepreneurs can cut losses. They can

get out. Great entrepreneurs say, "I tried it; it didn't work; time to move on," as opposed to the ones who get so psychologically committed they can't let go.



**So, what are some of the solutions to getting unstuck?**

**MG:** Let me talk about a classic entrepreneurship dream, and the reason a lot of entrepreneurs don't do things that are good for their long-term health or even their development as leaders. It sounds like this: *You know, I am incredibly busy right now. And given the pressures of work and home and new technology that follow me everywhere I go, I feel about as busy as I ever have and I sometimes feel overcommitted. But I think the worst of this is going to be over in four or five months. After that, I am going to take two or three weeks and get organized, spend some time with my family, and start my new healthy life program. After that, everything will be different and it won't be crazy anymore.*



The reality is there are not going to be two or three weeks. It is always going to be crazy. Sanity never prevails. Focus on what you are going to do now to change. A lot of people are stuck in that dream of, "I am going to do it next week, next month or next year," or "I am going to do it when I have some time." Well, you know what? Next week, next month or next year will never get here. If you aren't doing it right now, it's probably never going to happen. To get unstuck, you have to look in the mirror—and do it day after day—and it requires hard work and discipline. Americans get fatter and fatter and read more and more diet books. You don't lose weight by reading the diet book; you have to go on a diet. You get unstuck by working.

**Love that. OK, hard work. What else?**

**MG:** Start tracking as you go through the day the amount of happiness and

meaning you experience. Certain activities tend to make you more negative. Change those activities and if you can't change them, then change your approach to them. Ask yourself: *If I have to spend this time doing this activity, how can I make it more meaningful? How can I make myself happy?*

The second suggestion I have is the daily question process. I have a peer coach. Each day he asks me, "On a scale of one to 10, how happy were you yesterday? On a scale of one to 10, how meaningful was yesterday? How many minutes did you write? How many push-ups did you do?" It works. I highly recommend it. You don't need to get someone with fancy degrees or who charges you a fee. Get a friend to do it.

**What's your parting advice to help people avoid falling into a rut?**

**MG:** What percent of all interpersonal communication is about people talking about how wonderful and special they are versus how stupid and inept someone else is? Or listening to it? If you want to be more successful, quit doing that all the time. Listening to people calling in to radio talk shows complaining about basketball coaches? What a waste of time. The basketball coach doesn't care about you. Why are you wasting your life? Why does anyone care what Ashton Kutcher had for lunch? It's not your life. Successful people spend a large part of their lives engaging in activities that simultaneously make them happy and have meaning for them. They don't live vicarious lives. They live their own lives. Instead of wasting time on something you aren't going to change, spend the time on yourself. **S**

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