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Have you ever attended a self-improvement themed seminar and wished that someone else who needed to hear the message could have been there with you? Or sat in a religious service and thought about someone else who needed to hear the sermon? Or read a self-help book and wished someone else would read it too? We often hear helpful insights, but think about how they apply to others, not ourselves. We hear, read, and see ideas that we could benefit from, but miss the opportunity to apply them

because we see a greater need in applying them to others. We even receive candid feedback on occasion that is directed solely at us and we dismiss it. We rationalize it away or blame uncontrollable circumstances. It is hard to look in the mirror.

Most people could be more successful in life—at home or work—if they would only make a few subtle but important changes. They could be more effective sales people, leaders, engineers, or whatever their profession. Yet they don't admit the need to change or want to put in the effort. The unfortunate reality is that those who need the most help are those who most resist it. They attend a seminar and think it doesn't apply to them. They take pride in their success without realizing it was the work of others around them. Or for those in unfortunate circumstances, they simply blame others and factors outside of their control.

Everyone admits they aren't perfect. They acknowledge that they could improve their leadership skills, communication skills, domain knowledge, work ethic, or whatever, but that doesn't correlate to taking action. Few people actually put significant effort into improving themselves. They don't regularly read blogs, books, or articles that could help them improve. They don't seek wise counsel from colleagues, friends, or coaches. They skip the opportunities to attend training programs and seminars. They rarely take on special assignments or accept invitations to gain new experiences. They shy away from getting out of their comfort zones. They prefer to keep doing what they've been doing and performing below their peak potential.

If only people really knew how much better they could be, but most don't. The people who are generally late to meetings don't appreciate the impact of their lateness. Managers who rely on fear and intimidation don't realize the employee disengagement they cause. Procrastinators don't understand the disruption they create. People who struggle to gain buy-in don't grasp their ineffective communication skills. The self-absorbed don't know how little they listen or show empathy. The physically unfit don't realize how much energy and mental acuity they give up. The short-tempered don't recognize the emotional pain they create. If only people would look in the mirror and put in the effort required to make the small improvements that would give them huge returns.

The most successful and respected people I work with are those who strive to continually learn and grow. They are confident and accepting of who they are now, yet humbly make their self-development a top priority. They put their coaching sessions and learning opportunities at the top of their to-do list. They allocate uninterrupted time on their calendar for reading, researching, and learning. They courageously ask for feedback. They don't rationalize, get defensive, or become jealous. Even when enjoying success, they don't become arrogant or selfish. They respect other top performers and surround themselves with people they can learn from, not people who merely tell them what they want hear.



Those Who Need Help May Not Be the Ones You Think

You may be the exceptional person who regularly requests candid feedback, looks in the mirror, and continually improves. If so, yes, please pass this message on to someone else who might benefit from it, but be careful. The next time you snuggle into your comfort zone, realize that others might be wishing you wouldn't. You could be the person they wish would hear the message. To be sure, ask someone in your circle of trust what message they wish you would hear. Ask what you might do differently to be even more effective than you currently are. Ask for the two or three ideas that you could put into practice going forward that might enable you to be an even better parent, spouse, colleague, boss, or friend than you already are. It's hard isn't it? But do it. It is life changing! Take the feedback you receive and set goals for yourself. Identify the actions you need to take and track your progress.

Alternatively, if you truly are one of those people who regularly asks for feedback, reads non-fiction, maintains knowledge of contemporary best practices, attends training programs, and seeks wise counsel, congratulations. Keep it up. You are undoubtedly improving yourself in valuable ways. You are increasing the positive contributions you are making to your employer, colleagues, friends, family, and community. You are operating at level well above those who have chosen to stay behind and take the easy route of just doing what they think is best.

Article written by Mike Hawkins, award-winning author of *Activating Your Ambition: A Guide to Coaching the Best Out of Yourself and Others* (www.ActivatingYourAmbition.com), author of the *SCOPE of Leadership* six-book series on coaching leaders to lead as coaches (www.ScopeOfLeadership.com), and president of Alpine Link Corp (www.AlpineLink.com), a boutique consulting firm specializing in leadership development and sales performance improvement.

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