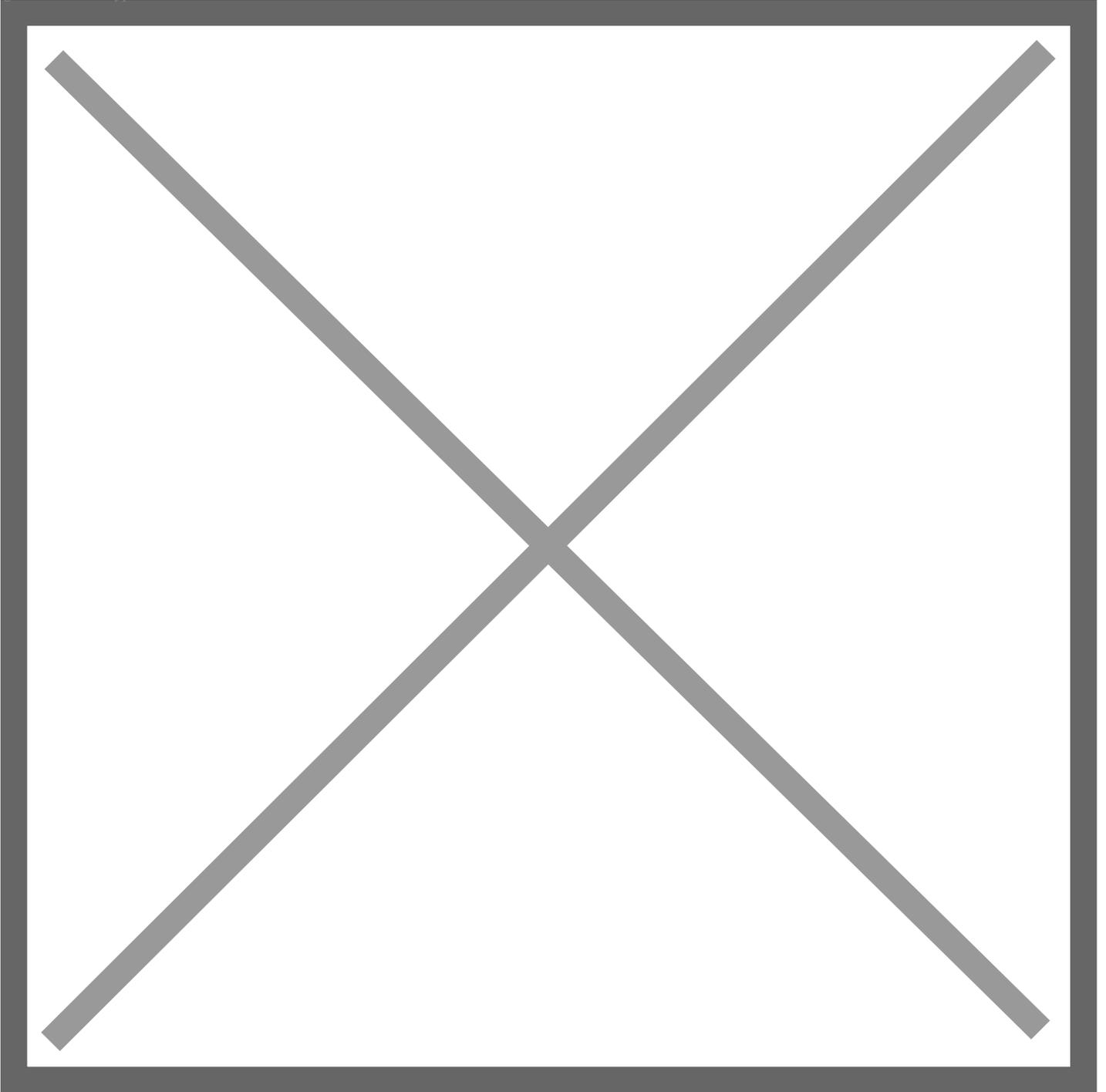


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NO, BUT, and HOWEVER

Description

Marshall Goldsmith is one of the greatest consultants to organizations of all time. His book Triggers reminds us that much of behavior is triggered by situations. I just reread my underlining's from another Goldstein book called What Got You Here Won't Get You There, which defines 20 habits that inhibit achievement. Habit # 5 is our penchant for starting thoughts with No, But, or However. A passage in Chapter 5:

There aren't too many cheap surefire, simple, guaranteed 100% accurate peeks into the competitive make up of our colleagues and friends. But the following drill fits the bill. For one week monitor your coworkers' use of "no," "but," and "however": Keep a scorecard of how many times each individual uses three words to start a sentence.

At the very least, you'll be shocked at how commonly used these words are.

If you drill a little deeper patterns will emerge. You'll see how people inflict these words on others to gain or consolidate power. You'll also see how intensely people resent it, consciously or not, and how it stifles rather than opens up discussion.

Words create frames, especially when they start sentences. As Goldstein notes, it does not matter if the habit is intentional or inadvertent. The result for the listener is the same. The sentence invoked: You are wrong, and I am right. Just once a year, ask a colleague to monitor your use of these terms for a week's worth of interactions or observations with you. I started doing this when I first read this book upon its 2007 arrival. I still have a way to go.

Note that Goldstein calls this and his other 19 no-no's (forgive the expression!) habits, not values. The good news is that habits, while tenacious, are perhaps more changeable than beliefs. Also, note how simple his exercise is. Just count the times three short words are used and you have some measure of a person. I find this more broadly true as I work with clients on observation. One of the things important to observe in any program is participant level of engagement. We can look for an arcane explanation or we can just ask, "Can you see and hear when a person is engaged?" The answer is invariably yes—and leads to a very reliable way to define level of engagement at an individual level.

So do it! Ask a friend to count how often you use these three terms. Then find yourself moving to a positive starting point, which creates the space for people to hear your concerns. Yes. And. Sure. Just not Absolutely.

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