

# Let It Go

by Marshall Goldsmith

*Draft*

My mission is to help successful leaders achieve positive change in behavior: for themselves, their people and their teams.

Research has shown that successful people have a strong need for self-determination. Simply put, this means, "I am doing, what I am doing because I choose to, not I am doing what I am doing because I have to." People who are doing what they choose to do are committed. People who are doing what have to do are compliant.

The impact of self-determination on success does not have to relate to money. Do you remember when you were in high school? Some teachers were teaching their class because they loved teaching. Others were teaching their class only because they needed to collect a check at the end of the month. Could you tell the difference?

Successful people are committed. Normally this sense of commitment leads to even more success. Committed people have a drive that comes from the inside, not from the outside. They don't give up when times are tough. They try even harder.

While our personal commitment usually leads to more success, it can make it extremely hard for us to change. The more committed we are to a strategy, the harder it is for us to realize it is the wrong strategy. This is not a theory. This is a well-documented fact. Have you ever heard the old saying, "Winners never quit!" Sometimes it is time to quit.

I have had the privilege of working with over 50 major CEOs. I have also have the unfortunate experience of working with four CEOs who needed to leave their companies. In all four cases I suggested, "Leave. Leave now. It is over. Don't humiliate yourself and the company. Leave with dignity." I failed in all four cases. All four were forced to leave. Two ended up being featured in national magazines, embarrassing themselves and their companies.

It is hard to make successful, highly committed people change what they don't choose to change. Have you ever tried to change the behavior of a successful adult that had absolutely no interest in changing? Have you ever tried to change the behavior of any adult that had absolutely no interest in changing? How much luck did you have in these "religious conversion" activities?

Have you ever tried to change the behavior of a spouse, partner or significant other that had no interest in changing? How much luck did you have there?

I have asked these questions to thousands of people. Their answers are usually the same - lots of wasted effort and almost no results. It wasn't worth it!

My mother was a fantastic first grade school teacher. In her mind, the entire world was populated by first-graders. I was always in the first grade. My dad was in the first grade. All of our relatives were in the first grade. Dad's name was Bill. Mom would get frustrated with him and start yelling, "Bill! Bill!" When I was a teenager, we got a talking bird. After a while the bird started chirping, "Bill! Bill!"

One day, when Dad was eighty years old, Mom was still correcting his grammar. He looked at her lovingly, smiled and said in his shaky voice, "Honey, I'm eighty years old. Let it go!"

How much of our lives have been wasted in attempting to change the behavior of adults that have no interest in changing? What is our return on this investment?

The time we waste on the people that don't care is time that is stolen from the people that do care. My guess is that you have very little time. You are probably as busy today as you have ever been in your entire life. Only invest your coaching time where you are going to get a return on your investment. Don't waste your time on a road to nowhere.

After a few days (or maybe even a few minutes) you can tell if the person that you are trying to coach is willing to try. If they are willing to try, do whatever you can to help them. If they aren't be willing to try, either "live with it" or find someone else to do the job.

In my work as an executive coach I finally decided to only work with people who care and who are willing to try. You should do the same thing.

I am a Buddhist. Along with becoming more successful, I would like you to have a happier life. If you learn nothing from me but this tiny lesson, you will not only become more effective in your work, you will have a happier life.

If they don't care - don't waste your time.

Let it go.