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# Student Services

ISSUE 6

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## “It’s Not about Me” A Leadership (Sort of) Lesson from Marshall Goldsmith

Submitted by Martha Kelley

As part of a past role of coordinating speakers and teachers for various executive events, I found myself often transporting the “guests of honor,” sometimes for extended periods of time. How great is the opportunity to have a world class expert, captive in your car and nothing to do but chat while maneuvering through traffic?

One of my all time favorite people to work with and chauffeur was Marshall Goldsmith, considered by many to be the executive coach’s executive coach. Marshall is the go-to-guy for many of the world’s top C-level personnel and his client list reads like a “who’s who” in business and corporate America. Fortunately, he has a passion for getting his message out and endless energy enabling him to teach, coach, and present at a dizzying pace.

Since his life’s work is with leaders of almost every nationality and background, I asked him about his most important findings in leadership, both theory and application. I was just sure he would share some magic bullets that would serve to be the much sought after keys to making leadership foolproof, consistent, and ultra effective.

To my surprise, he said “most of it just doesn’t really matter.” What he meant was that leadership development and personal improvement are important (and he would be out of business if that were not the case) but it’s more about the team environment you establish and insist upon. He went on to share his theory that the myth of the expert was overblown and the power of good work was firmly grounded in the teamwork.

In the February 5, 2008 issue of *BusinessWeek.com*, he explains further:

*Leadership: It's All About Them*

The team you lead is more critical to the success of a project than what you contribute as leader. Think of yourself as a facilitator.

By Marshall Goldsmith

As an executive educator and coach, I have had the privilege of working with many wonderful leaders. Although I have liked all of my clients, Barry (not his real name, by the way) is definitely one of my favorites. Compared with all of the executives that I had coached, he showed the most improvement—even though he was a fantastic leader to start with! I think that I have learned far more from him than he ever learned from me.

Barry was president of a division with more than 50,000 employees in one of the world’s foremost corporations. His CEO recognized Barry’s talents and asked me to help Barry expand his role, provide more leadership, and build synergy across the organization.

**Submit your  
Hub  
updates  
weekly  
by Friday  
to Martha  
or Marci**

## Marshall Goldsmith

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### *You're Only As Good As Your Team*

Barry eagerly accepted this challenge and involved his team in the project. Together, they established the most rigorous project management process I have ever seen. Each person took responsibility for creating positive synergy with cross-organizational colleagues. They regularly reported on their efforts in reaching out to their partners across the company. They kept learning from all of their colleagues—and sharing what they learned with each other. They thanked people for ideas and suggestions and followed up to ensure effective implementation.

Of all of the clients that I have ever coached, I spent the least amount of time with Barry. There seemed to be an inverse relationship between his team spending time with me and his team getting better! As a coach, this was very humbling. At the end of our project, I discussed my observations with Barry. I noted, “I think that I spent less time with you and your team than any team I have ever coached, yet you and your team produced the most dramatic, positive results. What should I learn from my experience?”

Barry thought about my question. “As a coach,” he said, “you should realize that success with your clients isn’t all about you. It’s about the people who choose to work with you.” He modestly chuckled, then continued: “In a way, I am the same. The success of my organization isn’t about me. It’s all about the great people who are working with me.”

### *Cutting Leadership Down to Size*

This flies in the face of conventional wisdom about leadership. If you read the literature, you’ll see that much of it exaggerates—if not glamorizes—the leader’s contribution. The implication is that everything grows out of the leader. She’s responsible for improving you. He’s the one who guides you to the promised land. Take the leader out of the equation, and people will behave like lost children.

This is far from the truth. On oft-quoted proverb says: “The best leader, the people do not notice. When the best leader’s work is done, the people say, “We did it ourselves.””

After my experience with Barry, I no longer hold myself up as “coach as expert.” I’m just a “coach as facilitator.” Most of what my clients learn about themselves comes not from me but from their friends, colleagues, and family members. I just try to provide help when needed and assist them in not wandering too far off the course that they have chosen.

For example, let’s say you want to do a better job of listening. It’s possible that a coach can explain to you how to be a better listener. The advice will probably be reasonably logical, supportable, and hard to dispute. But it will be generic. It’s much better to ask the most important people in your life, “Please give me some ideas on how I can do a better job of listening to you.” They can give you specific, concrete suggestions, not vague ideas that you

## Marshall Goldsmith

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can read in a book. They may not be experts on listening, but they actually know more about how you should listen to them than anyone in the world.

I cannot make my successful clients change. I don't try. Too many people think that a coach—especially an accomplished one—will solve their problems. That's like thinking that you'll get in shape by hiring the world's best trainer and not by working out yourself.

Truly great leaders, like Barry, recognize how silly it is to believe that a coach or a leader is the key to an organization's success. The best leaders understand that long-term results are created by all of the great people doing the work—not just the one person who has the privilege of being at the top.

*Dr. Marshall Goldsmith is a world authority in helping successful leaders get even better – by achieving positive, lasting change in behavior: for themselves, their people and their teams.*

Marshall's most recent book, *What Got You Here Won't Get You There*, is a New York Times best seller, Wall Street Journal #1 business book and winner of the Harold Longman Award as the Best Business Book of 2007.

## Frequently Asked Questions

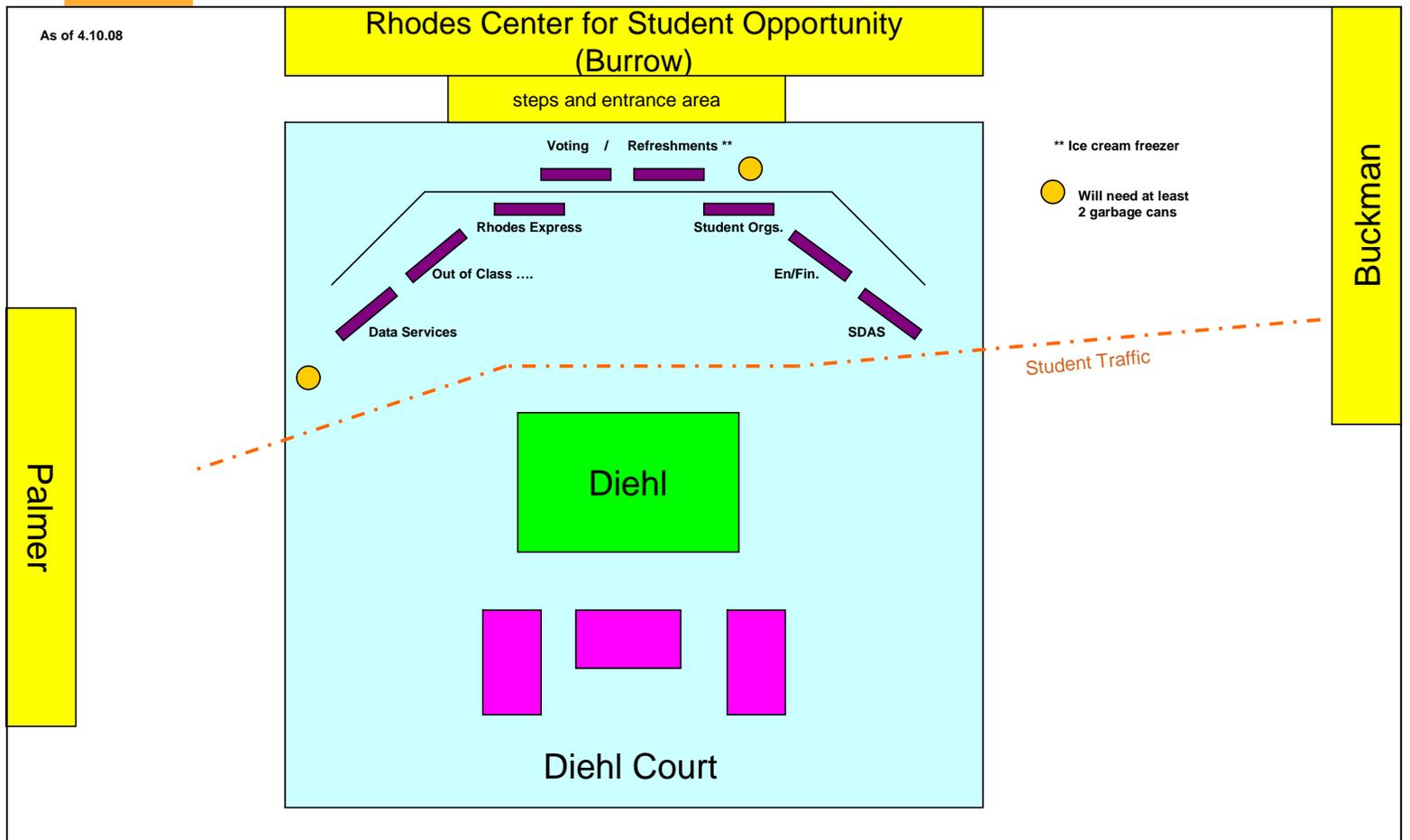
Please don't forget the FAQ assignment due at the end of April. Please see Issue 5 for complete details.

# Be an architect of the future

## Visit the Rhodes Center for Student Opportunity Expo

We're just **ONE DAY** away! Tuesday, April 15, 2:30-4:00 p.m.

The weather for Tuesday's Expo is expected to be sunny, wind-free and 60° — a perfect poster environment. Tables will be set-up and ready to go and posters and reps should be in place by 2:20. We have 500 nutty buddies, ice cream sandwiches and popsicles ordered. If it looks like we're drawing a crowd, just so we have plenty for our customers, maybe we should hold off on digging into the ice cream until later in the event.



## OMT Update

Jay provided the team with research that he is putting together for SACS review (requested last time to help address the question of “why are we re-engineering student services?)

Additional research information is available at [www.rhodes.edu/IR](http://www.rhodes.edu/IR)

The team also discussed who should be responsible for administering year-end surveys that could be administered to first-year, sophomore and junior classes (OMT or RMT). If surveys are used, we discussed the importance of “feeding back” survey results to students in the form of a report (on-line and/or print) so that students know that their comments are being heard.

The charge and objectives were reviewed. Next meeting we will look at the charge and determine how we are doing in meeting our objectives (providing evidence for each).

We also talked about putting together a “packet” for each team with:

- Vision
- Mission statements for each office/department of the respective team
- PDP Info
- Charge
- Partnership Plans
- Information on putting together Standard Operating Procedures
- Goal: to get each team to develop a shared/merged mission statement