

Leading Up

OPENING

You are already proof that growth is possible.

Think of something you couldn't do ten years ago that you do naturally today. A skill, a way of handling conflict, a level of patience you didn't have.

Growth is part of our own story. We wouldn't be here without going through the process of growth. Look at the stories added to a building until its completion. A tree you planted many years ago, now towering over your garden. Your children, from their first steps to having their own life now.

Growth is always happening around us. The question is whether it is happening *in* us. And, if so, if it is *intentionally*.

PART 1 — What Is Growth?

Growth is becoming more (not just getting bigger).

We live in a three-dimensional world: left and right, front and back, up and down. And we measure growth in all three directions:

- we add: height, knowledge, experience;
- we multiply: a growing family, a bigger school, a larger team;
- we deepen: in character, in wisdom, in influence.

Some say the fourth dimension is time. In other words, I am the same person, and yet a different one from who I was ten or twenty years ago. Growth will not be seen on a daily basis. You need time. You need distance. You may find yourself in a new situation and realise: “Hey, I handled that better than I would have before.” That’s growth you can only see in hindsight.

PART 2 — The Six Stages of Growth

Stage 1 — Awareness

Growth begins with honest self-awareness. A need, a crisis, an opportunity, a painful experience — something makes you stop and look at where you actually are.

Three honest triggers:

1. A need — something is missing and you feel it
2. A crisis — something breaks and forces a new response
3. An opportunity or inspiration — you see what's possible and you want it

Most growth begins not with a plan, but with a moment of discomfort or wonder. The question is not whether something will trigger you. It will. The question is whether you will respond to it or ignore it. And if you ignore it, it tends to come back later, at a greater cost.

Stage 2 — Working With Yourself

Once you see where you are, you begin to work *with* yourself, *for* yourself. *Not* against!

We suggest two directions:

- **Enforce your strengths:** focus on what you do best. Don't spend all your energy patching weaknesses.
- **Address your weaknesses honestly:** Some you can improve, others you manage or limit. Wisdom is knowing the difference.

Quitting something that holds you back is growth. Not repeating the same mistake is growth. Not walking the same destructive path again, that is growth too. Growth is not always about adding something new. Sometimes it is about removing what no longer serves, making room (energy, enthusiasm, hope) for something better.

Stage 3 – Finding Models

No one grows in isolation.

We are inspired by people who are ahead of us — teachers and mentors who shaped us, leaders we read about, key people who believed in us before we believed in ourselves.

Finding a model is not weakness. It is wisdom. It is saying: “I don't have to invent everything from scratch. Someone has walked this road. Let me learn from them.”

Look for people who have the character, the skills, the results (“fruits”) you want. Study them. Absorb their thinking. Let their example raise your standard.

Stage 4 – Finding Your Own Voice

Here is the tension: the same models that inspire you can also limit you — if you stay too close to them for too long.

At some point, growth demands that you step out from the shadow of your influences and ask: “What do I actually think?” “What is my own contribution?” “Who am I, beyond who I was taught to be?” (Your teacher will be proud of you.)

This is not ingratitude. It is maturity. The goal was never to become a copy of your model. The goal was to absorb the best of them and then build something of your own. Caution: this is the stage many people skip (and it is exactly why they plateau, “they have arrived”).

Stage 5 – Teaching Others

The most underrated stage of growth is teaching.

When you take what you have learned and invest it in someone else, something remarkable happens: you grow further yourself. It is double growth.

Teaching forces clarity. It exposes the gaps in your understanding (your students and critics will make sure of that). Once again, you grow, they grow; your growth has a purpose beyond yourself.

This is what separates personal development from leadership development. Leaders don't just grow — they grow others.

Stage 6 – Leading Up

Our final stage — our focus for today — is this: reaching for a higher ground, not as a destination you arrive at, but as a direction you keep moving forward. Leading up!

This is the stage where you realise: “I am not the model. I am still becoming.” And that posture of humbleness is what makes you worth following.

Leading Up means two things at once:

- You keep growing *personally* (there is always more to know, to become, to offer)
- You *lift others* as you go (not by pretending you have arrived, but by showing what it looks like to keep moving)

The best teachers in this room are not the ones with all the answers. They are the ones with answers and still better questions.

PART 3 – The Costs and Perils of Growth

Growth is not free. It helps to name the price.

Costs:

- Pain; growth always involves discomfort. If it doesn't stretch you, it won't change you.
- Misunderstanding; when you grow, some people around you won't understand it (they are used to the old version of you).
- Envy; sometimes from others, sometimes your own, directed at those ahead of you.

Perils (what can stop growth)

- Discouragement: growth is slow and invisible day to day. Expect seasons of doubt.
- Wrong standards: if your ruler is wrong, every measurement is wrong.
- Getting stuck: same patterns, same complaints, same excuses.
 - Perfectionism: the enemy of progress disguised as high standards.
 - Laziness and contentment with the minimum: A fish grows only as large as its tank allows.

Time: Growth takes time, and so does stagnation.

- Five years from now you will be five years older. The question is only whether you will also be five years wiser, more capable, more whole.
- Growth is not instant. There are seasons: planting, nurturing, harvesting. There are cycles and there is waiting — there are periods where nothing seems to be happening (above ground, but roots are deepening). Be patient with the process. Be impatient with complacency.

CLOSING – The Invitation

You have not arrived. Neither have I. That is not failure — that *is* the point of growth.

Growth is becoming more whole. It is not about knowing everything or being able to do it all. It is about two things: (1) acting rightly with what you already know, and (2) remaining open (curious) to what you don't yet know.

Be honest. Look clearly at where you are. Be humble. You have not arrived. Be generous. Grow not just for yourself, but for those who are watching you lead.

And keep moving up. Keep leading up!

Quotes that might be useful

Albert Einstein: “Don’t think about why you question, simply don’t stop questioning. Don’t worry about what you can’t answer, and don’t try to explain what you can’t know. Curiosity is its own reason. Aren’t you in awe when you contemplate the mysteries of eternity, of life, of the marvelous structure behind reality? And this is the miracle of the human mind—to use its constructions, concepts, and formulas as tools to explain what man sees, feels, and touches. Try to comprehend a little more each day. Have holy curiosity.” (Som Bathla, *Think Out of The Box*)

Ellen White: “True education means more than the pursual of a certain course of study. It means more than a preparation for the life that now is. It has to do with the whole being, and with the whole period of existence possible to man. It is the harmonious development of the physical, the mental, and the spiritual powers. It prepares the student for the joy of service in this world and for the higher joy of wider service in the world to come.” (White, *Education*)

Carol Dweck: “Let’s be totally clear here. We as educators must take seriously our responsibility to create growth-mindset-friendly environment – where kids feel safe from judgment, where they understand that we believe in their potential to grow, and where they know that we are totally dedicated to collaborating with them on their learning.” (Dweck, *The Growth Mindset*)

Jim Burns: “The force that may be the most important in shaping most leaders is learning. Learning from experience, learning from people, learning from successes and failures, learning from leaders and followers” (Burns, *Leadership*).

“The most marked characteristic of self-actualizers as potential leaders [...] is their capacity to learn from others and from the environment—the capacity to be taught. That capacity calls for an ability to listen and be guided by others without being threatened by them, to be dependent on others but not overly dependent, to judge other persons with both affection and discrimination, to possess enough autonomy to be creative without rejecting the external influences that make for growth and relevance. Self-actualization ultimately means the ability to lead by being led.” (Burns, *Leadership*)

Cloud and Townsend: “All growth is spiritual growth” (Cloud & Townsend, *How People Grow*).