

## Here are the Innovative Strategies to Keep Developing Yourself

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Everyone has experienced the need for personal growth at some point. This is prompted by many things, such as a major transition in life, a new professional challenge or simply the desire to evolve as a person. You have to be ready to leave your comfort zone, dream big and take real risks to grow. But it is not enough just to dream alone. Real change comes about gradually, through hard work and commitment over time. It requires you to combine your greatest, wildest dreams with practical everyday actions.

[John C Maxwell](#) outlines the 15 invaluable laws of growth in his book, [The 15 invaluable laws of growth](#), which will teach you how to chip away and stay committed to the challenges you set for yourself, even during those frustrating times when you don't seem to make any progress at all. They will be an invaluable guide to making your dreams a reality and they are going to help you stay vigilant along the way to be able to discover the potential that you didn't even know you had. Above all you will learn:

- Why devastating defeats will render personal growth turbo-charge;
- Why without your culture or community, no growth happens;
- Why you have to dream big but be realistic still.

### You need to know who you are and what you want

Without a map, you cannot walk through the jungle and expect to get to your destination. You can't evolve in the same way, unless you understand where you want to go. But for a lot of people, this is easier said than done; it's not always obvious to know exactly where you want to go. And how do you know? The best way to get to know yourself and what you want. That can, of course, be difficult to accomplish. But if you put these key questions to yourself, you'll be on the right track.

Tell yourself first, if you're satisfied with what you're doing right now. Does it make you feel satisfied and passionate about your work? Begin the day with a spring in your step? Or are you lethargic, tired and angry? If it's the latter you don't know what you're doing. So what are you going to fulfil? The response is as special as your fingerprints; it is relevant to your personality, beliefs, and dreams. You need to be closely watching yourself to recognise it. See when something causes you to "light up," pushes you or makes you excited. Think of moments in your life when the people around you have felt important and valuable to you.

Once you have discovered what you want to do, you can stop for quick verification of the truth. Will your dream come true? Yes, dreams should take you beyond your present reality – that's why dreams are called. But if your dream is to be a professional basketball player, and you hate exercising and have terrible coordination, then actually your dream is something else: a fantasy. An attainable dream should be aligned with your talents and abilities. You should ask yourself the next question when you have

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established that your dream is potentially achievable: Why do you want to do it?

## **Personal growth won't just happen by itself**

Just as plants need sunlight, so the purpose is needed for personal development. You've got to think carefully about what you want, what direction you're heading in and what steps you need to take to get there. But intent alone is not appropriate. By taking action, you must put your intentions into practice – not tomorrow, not next month when you have a gap in your calendar, but right now. A lot of people get stuck in that way. They continue to wait for a mythical moment of the future when they will have enough money and time to actively pursue their dreams. Or wait until they feel inspired or motivated enough to start.

The problem with waiting for the right circumstances is that personal development can be frightening; you come face to face with many of your fears and have to deal with confusion and insecurity inconveniences. Of course, most people have a certain knack to stop terrifying things. And then the ideal moment when you feel like focusing on the creation of yourself – well, it never comes. To get past the fear, you're going to have to accept that growth is innately uncomfortable – and that you're going to make lots of blunders along the way because you're trying to do things you never have done before.

You have to start after you have accepted this. Just do it, even if you're short of money, you've been looking after your kids all day and you just feel like curling up in front of the TV on the sofa. The motivation thing is, it comes with action, not before it. So just like you grumpily drag yourself into the gym, but come out radiant and inspired to do more exercise, you need to start focusing on your personal development to get the drive to continue.

## **To be successful, you need to ask for help**

It's not the same thing knowing what you want is knowing how to get it. It's a good start to learn you want to build your dream house. But you need the blueprints to get it built. So how do you get that once you know what you want? It's hard to start a daunting project, after all. Of course, it does not come naturally. One of the best ways to get started is by requesting help. Others have struggled before you along the path, and they can sustain you. Speak forth your dreams, even when it makes you feel vulnerable and foolish. Sharing your vision with the world is a vital first step towards realisation.

Where you share your dreams is equally important, so surround yourself with people who are as committed to growth as you are. The people around you will be greatly influencing your success. They will either lift you and support you or, with their apathy and unhelpful criticism, drag you down. In your network seek out people who are curious, humble and hungry to learn. Ask them when you have found them to keep you responsible for setting and achieving goals which will bring you closer to your vision. Replying to others is a strong incentive to get things done.

Next, try out people who do what you want to do. These guys are going to be your professors. Even if you cannot meet them face-to-face, you can find a wealth of inspiration by being acquainted with their work. For example, if your vision is to be an interviewer and Oprah is a source of inspiration, you don't

have to go to her house for lunch to learn from her. Go online and take a look at her interviews. One of the best ways to know is to study those people who do what you want to do! Sometimes you are going to be very fortunate to meet someone who's able to tutor you intensively. That's the very best way to know. Look out for your mentors. Value their time by getting ready for each session and soaking up as much information as possible.

## **Become your own best cheerleader**

Support from other people is beneficial but eventually, you need to support yourself and motivate yourself. That's better said than done, again. The loudest criticism also comes from inside. Of course, not everyone is naturally confident. Many of us have even learned to grow up not to believe in ourselves. We were encouraged to doubt ourselves and our capacities, instead. Inward negative signals can be even louder for those who have grown up in an oppressive climate. It won't be easy to learn to respect yourself given all the misery you've internalised – but it's possible and worth it.

Next, you should start listening very carefully to your inner monologue. Which sorts of things in your brain do you think about yourself? Were you critical of never doing things well enough, or are you chastising yourself when you make a mistake? It would be hard to stay motivated and feel confident enough to take chances if you pepper yourself with negative messages all day. The first step in shifting certain negative thoughts and perceptions is to recognise them. When you have done that, you can take the second step: continue the work of transformation. You should deliberately shift the tone in your head when you catch yourself focusing a torrent of violence on yourself for messing up. Remember that making mistakes is natural and that you're brave to take risks. At first, it can sound uncomfortable but it will become second nature with enough practice.

Third, you will cease to equate yourself to others. Your path is special to you and what other people are doing is merely a diversion. You are the only one to be compared to. Make sure you live by your own goals and principles-and no one else! Take time to celebrate the major and small successes and consider the expense of getting there. The fourth and final step is to take every opportunity that you can get to contribute to the lives of others. Sometimes, when you feel small and worthless, you can't believe that anyone else will make a difference. Not only can the act of going out there and using your talents for good be of value to the world; it will give you more insight into what you are capable of.

## **Be patient; real growth is incremental and undramatic**

If you grew up on a Hollywood film diet, you're probably used to seeing clearly and dramatically packaged change: an inspired mathematician scribbles down the answer to an impossible puzzle! A woman is pursuing her husband at the airport and introducing hundreds of spectators to her! These dramatic moments are great fodder for moviemakers. However, in real life, it is the more traditional things – the items that typically end up on the cutting-room floor – that lead to real growth. The films don't show the mathematician waking up every morning and worrying over the numbers without going anywhere, just to do it the next day again. Until she meets The One, they don't depict the young woman going through countless boring Tinder dates.

Real growth is sluggish, gradual and frustrating at times. To pursue your ambitions it involves doing small actions every day. It takes a lot of patience and obstinate determination to be able to keep working when you can't see any significant change. It also needs you to start valuing the learning process instead of simply its eventual results. It's exciting to learn and develop in themselves! When you look at some of the brightest minds, you will find that the most intelligent of them are. We are still willing to learn more, and confident enough to keep asking questions, no matter how much information we possess.

To stay motivated, you'll have to keep your goals in mind and note that the bigger and more ambitious the dream, the more time it takes to achieve it. Think of tomato plants as opposed to apple trees. Tomatoes will mature in a few months, so they can be plucked from the plant. But the plant itself perishes, with the first frost. The apple trees, in contrast, take years to grow tall and bear their best fruit. And, year after year, they keep blooming. Investing time and patience in your vision results in rugged, sustainable, apple-like production. Slow and steady development may not be giving you the cinematic adrenaline rush. But it could give you something even better: the everyday pleasure of turning your mind to something you're passionate about, and the feeling that your dreams are being followed.

## **To achieve your vision, you need to be strategic and systematic**

Hard work is fantastic but it's not everything. Like anyone who ever knows tread water will invest a lot of energy and yet get nowhere. We can hop around on a wheel like hamsters, try as hard as we can to achieve our goals and yet struggle to get there. In themselves, hard work and business are not enough to move us to where we want to go; to be truly efficient, we need to strategise and build daily processes to help us achieve our goals. To do so, we need to avoid being busy – for a while at least – and take some time to consider and develop a plan.

To be effective you don't need to evaluate every day of the year. But you need to set aside time to reflect on the steps you've taken to grow and your dreams come true. Was your time well spent, or did you go to conferences and return home with nothing but a headache? Does the way your office was organised support or impede your progress? Having thought about this, you should shift to proactive methods that promote your success, such as finding a new way to file papers or going to a seminar to improve your skills.

This is a constant reflection and assessment process which means that you will need to start reviewing how well your systems are running. After some weeks or months, what measurable results would you like to see? Yeah, after a whole year? And how do you calculate whether you succeeded or not? Setting clear goals – such as a specific target for the number of new customers you would like to attract in the next quarter – will help keep you on the road to success.

## **Painful experiences can propel growth**

We all know there are ups and downs to life. And, of course, most of us would rather avoid the downs. Who wants to experience the loss or face unpleasant truths about themselves? Health scares are not the only thing we can't control at all times. Many traumatic events are coming our way, like loss and disappointment, whether we like it or not. And as we begin to dream big and take chances, we will

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eventually begin to try more and fail harder. This may mean we're starting to feel like even more is slipping out of our grasp.

But we can control how we respond to pain – and how we interpret what's going on with us. We should ask ourselves how this traumatic experience will help us to develop, instead of feeling like a victim. What does that tell us? If we made a mistake, what practical steps can we take to ensure next time the outcome is different? If we ask these kinds of questions, we will acquire valuable self-knowledge and will learn how to develop new skills and capabilities to manage the situation. If all goes well we'll never have the urgent drive to rise. Our natural creativity and innovation are prompted by painful experiences. They are turbocharging our production. So while our instinct may be running away from pain, there's a lot to gain from facing it head-on.

## **Focus on developing character, and external success will follow**

Imagine your dream being about starting a company. You are desperately trying to get financially stable as part of chasing the dream. Personal development is likely to be the last thing on your mind—who has time to win when there are clients and business plans to write? But all you do is you at the start. If you're not cultivating good character through qualities like honesty and integrity, then all you're creating will have a quicksand base. Say you're creating a great business plan – maybe it's an awesome opportunity, but if people feel they can't trust you, they're not going to invest.

You may think that character, like fingerprints, is something you're born with. And that is, in part, real. You have certainly been influenced by your early life and the ideals you grew up with. But the good news is, you can actively establish real character. In reality, something so important is beyond your power. Then make sure that everything you do is done with integrity; it should be in full accordance with what you believe and what you tell you to think. If they are, then you are going to talk authentically, which will give real power to your speech. The words you speak are going to express your thoughts to others and get them to share your dream because you are genuinely passionate about your beliefs.

Finally, always be open to criticism for creating the real character. Instead of withstanding negative criticism, find it a gift. After all, someone else takes the time to point you into their weaknesses. Recognise that character-building work is a lifelong task, and can never be finished. You will still be a work in progress which may be just the best scenario possible.

## **To win, you have to accept the loss**

We can no longer express our emotions so freely, but when we have to give up something as adults many of us feel the same emotions. But all development in the form of trade-offs means losses. Time and other resources are finite, so inevitably saying yes to one thing means saying no to another. Acceptance of failure means that we should be bent on making trade-offs. It also makes sure that what we lose turns into a bigger profit. During his lifetime the author has made seven big career changes, and he has taken a pay cut during five of those moves. But he determined the loss of money in growth opportunities was worth the benefit. Had he not been willing to take those risks, his life would have been

far more stable – but still much less satisfying emotionally and financially than it is today.

Money was not the only thing the author had been selling. When he changed careers he also gave up health. He went from being a priest to becoming a business-world public speaker, from being a speaker to writing books, and from writing to founding a non-profit organisation. Making trade-offs can be especially hard when you're already productive. After all, the higher you're going up, the more you'll lose. But being complacent won't let you hit your full potential. Of reality, it isn't worth all the trade-offs. It is where your values are important. If you're committed to spending time with your family then there's never going to be a business opportunity that eats up every waking hour. If being imaginative is what makes you feel alive the most, then taking a job where you literally execute the plans of other people does not satisfy you – no matter how high the salary! But do not hesitate to go for it when you identify an opportunity that will genuinely stretch you out in an enriching way – even if the price seems high.

## **To grow, you need to contribute to others**

Ever heard the saying, "No person is an island?" This makes sense because our lives are in communities – in families, businesses, church groups, knitting clubs and parenting groups. In definition, our achievements are never really our own because families, teachers, mentors, colleagues, friends and countless others cultivate and encourage us. Recognizing this, and practising appreciation will only help us grow more – because it will ensure we not only accept support but also think about how to provide it to others.

Start by asking yourself what other people will like to do for you. Then, make sure other people do those things. That can be applied to any area of your life. If you wish your spouse to be more considerate in the preparation of the dishes, practice consideration in an environment that is important to them where you may fall short. If you want to work in an atmosphere where you are respected for your talents, make sure that anyone for whom you work knows their efforts are not going unnoticed.

When you are a leader, you will contribute to your employees' well-being by building the kind of work atmosphere that you'd always wish you had. Model strong leadership that others can look out for and learn from. We live in an age of mass consumption in which virtually all appears eager to gain more material goods, more capital and more prestige. The pursuit of personal growth can turn into just another commodity that people want to hoard and use for their advantage.

But this is not the way real growth works. In reality, if you share it with the world, it does work better. Had the author wanted to keep his hard-won wisdom to himself, he would never have been motivated to start a coaching business and encourage others to offer his teachings. He should not have begun his academy of non-profit leadership, which turned out to be one of the most rewarding things he's ever done. When he freely gave his insights to the world, he was rewarded by a more interesting – and capacious – career than he ever could have dreamed of.

There is a lot we can't control in life but the good news is that personal growth is always within reach. When we take responsibility and commit to using adversity to speed up our growth we develop

ourselves. Having a clear plan and working regularly to address challenges will allow us to achieve our goals. Personal growth requires loss, uncertainty and a willingness to err. But discomfort is a small price to pay, time and again, for the joy of exceeding your potential.

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