

NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR

JOHN C. MAXWELL

ANNIVERSARY
10TH
EDITION

LIVE THEM
AND REACH
YOUR POTENTIAL

15 INVALUABLE LAWS OF GROWTH

THE 15 INVALUABLE LAWS OF GROWTH

Introduction to the Tenth Anniversary Edition

Laws, Leaps, and Lessons Learned

I vividly remember the look Curt Kampmeier gave me across the table at breakfast that day in 1974. We'd been talking for a little while about my work and my life. I went on and on about all of my big plans, and to be honest with you, what I shared with Curt that day was long on vision but short on substance.

After listening as long as he could, Curt leaned forward and asked: "John, what is your plan for personal growth?"

Before that question, before Curt turned my world inside out, I could tell you all about my goals and dreams and ambitions, but I would leave out the most important part: how I was going to accomplish it all. When Curt asked me that question, *the question*, it was the moment I realized absolutely none of it would come true.

Unless.

Unless I got intentional about my life.

Unless I became committed to the discipline that would fuel everything else I hoped to do.

Unless I embraced the first Law of what would become fifteen Laws: ***growth doesn't just happen.***

So, I embraced that Law and began my journey of personal growth. If you've heard me speak or read any of my books, you know that Curt was a sales representative for a personal growth kit that cost \$799—an entire month's salary for me at that time. I was thrilled by the prospect

of having someone help me start and build my growth journey, so I asked if I could take the kit home to Margaret and show her what was inside.

Crazily, Curt said yes, and I raced home to show Margaret the kit's components: cassette tapes with lessons, a participant's guide, worksheets, and other resources, all designed to push you toward being your best. We agreed we'd do whatever was necessary to pay for it, and Margaret graciously took on more work to create enough supplemental income for us to buy it.

I share this story with you once again because I know that growth, for me, required more than just encouragement. It required more than just a push in the right direction. No, growth required someone else to speak into my life and tell me all my dreams were within reach if I'd willingly change the way I lived every day. For me, that person was Curt Kampmeier.

And when I sat down to write this book ten years ago, it was with the desire that I would be the Curt Kampmeier to thousands.

Turns out, that number was off. We're now over a million, as the book continues to sell well year over year. That's because these Laws aren't based on the latest trends or built on the back of Internet influence that's here today, gone tomorrow. These Laws are timeless truths, tested again and again through my own growth and also through the growth of others who've read the book and put these truths into practice themselves.

Of all the books I've written, this is the one most people want me to sign because of the life-change it has helped them achieve. This is the book that people want me to know they've read because they are so excited about the results of their growth journey. Ten years into its existence and *The 15 Invaluable Laws of Growth* continues to be relevant and transformational for those women and men who read it with an open mind and a willingness to get intentional about their life.

When my publisher asked me to review the book for a tenth anni-

versary edition, I was pleased with how well it's held up. Sure, some of the stories aren't as fresh as they were ten years ago, but that's true of anything after a decade of mileage; goodness knows, I'm not as spry as I was a decade ago!

But that doesn't change the fact that the principles—and the transformational power they have—hold up just fine.

And that's why I'm proud to present you with the tenth anniversary edition of *The 15 Invaluable Laws of Growth*. They will help you grow. They will help you succeed. They will help you discover the *you* you're supposed to be. But only if you take them seriously and follow them intentionally. Growth requires commitment and self-discipline, and the 15 Laws will help you with both.

So read the book, mark it up with your notes, and put intention behind your actions as you complete the exercises to help you grow. Stay committed to the process and you'll begin to see small results; over time, those small results will compound into big results. That's the beauty of consistency and commitment.

I may not be across a table from you in real life, but this is still your Curt Kampmeier moment. Will you go *all-in* on your commitment to growth? Will you get intentional about doing the work necessary to transform yourself from who you are into who you can become?

I hope you answer Yes to both questions because we need more people working to become their best selves. The best version of you is one that can help change the world—and we're all counting on you to turn that potential into reality.

Happy reading and may *The 15 Invaluable Laws of Growth* be your roadmap to the life you've been dreaming of.

1

The Law of Intentionality

Growth Doesn't Just Happen

Life is now in session. Are you present?

Do you have a plan for your personal growth?" Curt Kampmeier, the man who asked me the question, waited patiently for my response. It was a question that would change my life.

I fumbled for answers. I listed my accomplishments from the previous three years. I talked about how hard I worked. I outlined my goals. I explained the things I was doing to reach more people. All of my answers were based on activity, not on improving. Finally I had to admit it. I had no plan to become better.

It was something I had never considered before, and it exposed a major flaw in my approach to work and success. When I started my career, I was intentional about working, reaching my goals, and being successful. I had a strategy: hard work. I hoped that would get me where I wanted to go. But working hard doesn't guarantee success. And hope isn't a strategy.

How do you get better at what you do? How do you improve your relationships? How do you gain more depth and wisdom as a person?

2 THE 15 INVALUABLE LAWS OF GROWTH

How do you gain insight? How do you overcome obstacles? Work harder? Work longer? Wait for things to get better?

That conversation happened over lunch at a Holiday Inn restaurant in 1972. At the time, I had just been given the opportunity to move up in my career. I had been offered the best church in my denomination. Think about being offered the top leadership job in the premier location in your company. That's what it was for me. The problem was that I was twenty-four years old, I was in way over my head, and I knew that if I didn't rise to the occasion, I would fail spectacularly.

Curt was a salesman who was selling a growth kit—a year-long plan with materials designed to help a person grow. He slid the brochure across the table to me. It cost \$799, which was nearly a month's salary for me at the time.

My mind was racing as I drove home. I had believed that success would come to anyone who poured himself into his career. Curt helped me to realize that the key was personal growth. It occurred to me that if you focus on goals, you may hit goals—but that doesn't guarantee growth. If you focus on growth, you will grow and always hit goals.

As I drove, a quote from James Allen's *As a Man Thinketh* came to mind. I had first read that book in seventh grade and had subsequently read it nearly a dozen times. Allen wrote, "People are anxious to improve their circumstances but are unwilling to improve themselves; they therefore remain bound." I couldn't afford what Curt was offering. Yet in my heart I knew that he had uncovered the key to the ability to meet my next leadership challenge and go to the higher levels in my career. I could see the gap between where I was and where I wanted to be—where I needed to be! It was a growth gap, and I needed to figure out how to bridge it.

Growth Gap Traps

If you have dreams, goals, or aspirations, you need to grow to achieve them. But if you're like I was—and if you're like most

people—you have one or more mistaken beliefs that create a gap that keeps you from growing and reaching your potential. Take a look at the following eight misconceptions about growth that may be holding you back from being as intentional as you need to be.

1. The Assumption Gap—“I Assume That I Will Automatically Grow”

When we are children, our bodies grow automatically. A year goes by, and we become taller, stronger, more capable of doing new things and facing new challenges. I think many people carry into adulthood a subconscious belief that mental, spiritual, and emotional growth follows a similar pattern. Time goes by, and we simply get better. We’re like Charlie Brown in Charles Schulz’s *Peanuts* comic strip, who once said, “I think I’ve discovered the secret of life—you just hang around until you get used to it.” The problem is that we don’t improve by simply living. We have to be intentional about it.

Musician Bruce Springsteen commented, “A time comes when you need to stop waiting for the man you want to become and start being the man you want to be.” No one improves by accident. Personal growth doesn’t just happen on its own. And once you’re done with your formal education, you must take complete ownership of the growth process, because nobody else will do it for you. As Michel de Montaigne observed, “No wind favors him who has no destined port.” If you want your life to improve, you must improve yourself. You must make that a tangible target.

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need to stop waiting
for the man you want to
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man you want to be.”
—Bruce Springsteen**

2. The Knowledge Gap—“I Don’t Know How to Grow”

After my meeting with Curt Kampmeier, I talked to everybody I knew and asked the same question Curt had asked me: “Do you have a growth plan?” I was hoping that somebody had figured this out and

4 THE 15 INVALUABLE LAWS OF GROWTH

I could simply learn from him. Not one person said yes. Nobody in my world had a plan for growing and improving. I didn't know how to grow, and neither did they.

Designer, artist, and consultant Loretta Staples says, "If you are clear with what you want, the world responds with clarity." I knew what I wanted. I wanted to grow into the new job I was taking. I wanted to become someone capable of accomplishing the big goals I had set for myself. I just needed a way to do that.

Many people learn only from the school of hard knocks. Difficult experiences teach them lessons "the hard way," and they change—sometimes for the better, sometimes for the worse. The lessons are random and difficult. It's much better to *plan* your growth intentionally. You decide where you need or want to grow, you choose what you will learn, and you follow through with discipline going at the pace you set.

After I met with Curt and came to realize that I didn't know anyone else who could help me, my wife, Margaret, and I talked about ways we could scrimp, save, and go without to put aside \$799. (You have to remember that this was before credit cards!) I skipped lunches. We canceled the vacation we had planned to take. We made do. It took us six months, but finally we did it. You can't imagine my excitement as I opened up the growth kit and started to flip through the five areas it covered: attitude, goals, discipline, measurement, and consistency.

I look back now and I can see how basic those things were that the kit taught me. But that's what I needed. Learning those lessons opened the door of personal growth a crack for me. And through that crack

Outside of my faith, the decision to grow has impacted my life more than any other.

I began to see growth opportunities everywhere. My world began to open up. I accomplished more. I learned more. I was able to lead and help others more. Other opportunities began to

present themselves. My world expanded. Outside of my faith, the decision to grow has impacted my life more than any other.

3. *The Timing Gap—“It’s Not the Right Time to Begin”*

When I was a kid, one of my father’s favorite riddles to us went like this: Five frogs are sitting on a log. Four decide to jump off. How many are left?

The first time he asked me, I answered, “One.”

“No,” he responded. “Five. Why? Because there’s a difference between deciding and doing!”

That was a point that Dad often drove home with us. American politician Frank Clark said, “What great accomplishments we’d have in the world if everybody had done what they intended to do.” Most people don’t act as quickly as they should on things. They find themselves subject to the Law of Diminishing Intent, which says, “The longer you wait to do something you should do now, the greater the odds that you will never actually do it.”

The Law of Diminishing Intent says, “The longer you wait to do something you should do now, the greater the odds that you will never actually do it.”

Back when I was deciding whether to try to buy that first personal-growth plan, in a way I was lucky because I knew I was headed to a job where I would be in way over my head. I would be challenged beyond anything I’d ever done before. I would be under a microscope, with high expectations (some for me to succeed, some for me to fail) from everyone who knew me. And I knew that if I didn’t get better as a leader, I would fail. That prompted me to act as quickly as I could.

You may be under similar personal or professional pressure right now. If you are, you’re probably anxious to start growing and developing. But what if you’re not? Whether you feel prompted to or not,

now is the time to start growing. Author and professor Leo Buscaglia asserted, “Life lived for tomorrow will always be a day away from being realized.” The reality is that you will never get much done unless you go ahead and do it before you are ready. If you’re not already intentionally growing, you need to get started today. If you don’t, you may reach some goals, which you can celebrate, but you will eventually plateau. Once you start growing intentionally, you can keep growing and keep asking “What’s next?”

4. *The Mistake Gap—“I’m Afraid of Making Mistakes”*

Growing can be a messy business. It means admitting you don’t have the answers. It requires making mistakes. It can make you look foolish. Most people don’t enjoy that. But that is the price of admission if you want to improve.

Years ago I read a quote by Robert H. Schuller, who said, “What would you attempt to do if you knew you wouldn’t fail?” Those words encouraged me to try things that I believed were beyond my capabilities. They also inspired me to write the book *Failing Forward*. When I received the first copy of that book from the publisher, I immediately wrote a thank-you in it to Dr. Schuller and signed it to him. And I made a trip to Garden Grove so I could present it to him and thank him for the positive influence he had on my life. A photograph that was taken of us on that day sits on the desk in my office as a reminder of his investment in me.

If you want to grow, you need to get over any fear you may have of making mistakes. As author and professor Warren Bennis asserts,

**“A mistake is simply
another way of doing
things.”**

—*Warren Bennis*

“A mistake is simply another way of doing things.” To become intentional about growing, expect to make mistakes every day, and welcome them as a sign that you are moving in the right direction.

5. *The Perfection Gap—“I Have to Find the Best Way Before I Start”*

Similar to the Mistake Gap is the Perfection Gap, the desire to find the “best” way to get started in a growth plan. When Curt presented me with the idea of a growth plan, I went looking for the best way. But what I discovered is that I had it backward. I had to get started if I wanted to find the best way. It’s similar to driving on an unfamiliar road at night. Ideally, you’d like to be able to see your whole route before you begin. But you see it progressively. As you move forward, a little more of the road is revealed to you. If you want to see more of the way, then get moving.

6. *The Inspiration Gap—“I Don’t Feel Like Doing It”*

Many years ago, I was stuck in a doctor’s waiting room for a really long time—so long, in fact, that I had completed all the work I’d brought with me for the wait and was looking for something productive to do. I flipped through a medical journal and found the following text, which has become one of my favorite examples of the inertia of motivation (and by the way, this was before Nike coined the phrase):

Just Do It

We hear it almost every day; sigh, sigh, sigh.

I just can’t get myself motivated to . . . (lose weight, test my blood sugar, etc.) And we hear an equal number of sighs from diabetes educators who can’t get their patients motivated to do the right things for their diabetes and health.

We have news for you. Motivation is not going to strike you like lightning. And motivation is not something that someone else—nurse, doctor, family member—can bestow or force on you. The whole idea of motivation is a trap. Forget motivation. Just *do it*.

Exercise, lose weight, test your blood sugar, or whatever. Do it without motivation and then guess what. After you start doing the thing, that's when the motivation comes and makes it easy for you to keep on doing it.

Motivation is like love and happiness. It's a by-product. When you're actively engaged in doing something, it sneaks up and zaps you when you least expect it.

As Harvard psychologist Jerome Bruner says, "You're more likely to act yourself into feeling than feel yourself into action." So act! Whatever it is you know you should do, do it.

When Curt suggested I needed to be intentional about growing, I had thousands of reasons *not* to do it. I didn't have the time, the money, the experience, and so on. I had only one reason *to* do it. I believed I *should* do it because I hoped it would make a difference. That certainly didn't feel inspirational. But I started. To my astonishment, after a year of dedicated growth, I started to pass some of my heroes. My reason for putting in the work changed from getting *started* to *staying* with it, because it *did* make a difference. After that, I didn't want to miss a single day!

You may not feel inspired to aggressively pursue a growth plan if you haven't started yet. If that's the case, please trust me when I say that the reasons to keep growing far outweigh the reasons to start growing. And you discover the reasons to stay with growth only if you stick with it long enough to start reaping the benefits. So make a commitment to yourself to start *and* stick with it for at least twelve months. If you do, you will fall in love with the process, and you will be able to look back at the end of that year and see how far you've come.

7. The Comparison Gap—"Others Are Better Than I Am"

Fairly early in my career, I attended an idea exchange with three other leaders in Orlando, Florida. I went because at the time I realized

that I needed to be exposed to bigger and better leaders outside of my own small circle. At first when I arrived, I was intimidated. As we talked and shared ideas, it became clear very quickly that I was not in their league. Their organizations were six times the size of mine, and they had many more and much better ideas than I did. I felt like I was in over my head and trying to swim. Despite that, I was encouraged. Why? Because I discovered that great men were willing to share their ideas. And I was learning so much. You can learn only if others are ahead of you.

The first ten years that I was intentionally pursuing personal growth, I was always behind trying to catch up. I had to get over the comparison gap. I had to learn to become comfortable with being out of my comfort zone. It was a difficult transition, but it was well worth it.

8. The Expectation Gap—"I Thought It Would Be Easier Than This"

I don't know any successful person who thinks growth comes quickly and climbing to the top is easy. It just doesn't happen. People create their own luck. How? Here's the formula:

$$\text{Preparation (growth) + Attitude + Opportunity + Action} \\ \text{(doing something about it) = Luck}$$

It all starts with preparation. Unfortunately, that takes time. But here's the best news. As Jim Rohn said, "You cannot change your destination overnight, but you can change your direction overnight." If you want to reach your goals and fulfill your potential, become intentional about personal growth. It will change your life.

"You cannot change your destination overnight, but you can change your direction overnight."

—Jim Rohn

Making the Transition to Intentional Growth

The sooner you make the transition to becoming intentional about your personal growth, the better it will be for you, because growth compounds and accelerates if you *remain* intentional about it. Here's how to make the change:

1. Ask the Big Question Now

The first year that I engaged in intentional personal growth, I discovered that it was going to be a lifetime process. During that year, the question in my mind changed from “How long will this take?” to “How far can I go?” That is the question you should be asking yourself right now—not that you will be able to answer it. I started this growth journey forty years ago, and I still haven't answered it. But it will help you set the *direction*, if not the distance.

Where do you want to go in life?

What direction do you want to go?

What's the farthest you can imagine going?

Answering those questions will get you started on the personal-growth journey. The best you can hope to do in life is to make the most out of whatever you've been given. You do that by investing in yourself, making yourself the best you can be. The more you've got to work with, the greater your potential—and the farther you should try to go. As my dad used to say to me repeatedly when I was a kid, “To whom-ever much is given—much shall be required.” Give growing your best so you can become your best.

2. Do It Now

In 1974 I attended a seminar at the University of Dayton, where W. Clement Stone spoke on the subject of having a sense of urgency.

Stone was a business tycoon who had made his fortune in insurance. His session was titled “Do It Now,” and one of the things he told us was this: “Before you get out of bed every morning, say ‘do it now’ fifty times. At the end of the day before you go to sleep, the last thing you should do is say ‘do it now’ fifty times.”

I’m guessing there were about eight thousand people in the audience that day, but it felt like he was talking to me personally. I went home, and for the next six months I actually followed his advice. The first thing every morning and the last thing before I went to sleep, I repeated the words “do it now.” It gave me a tremendous sense of urgency.

The greatest danger you face in this moment is the idea that you will make intentional growth a priority *later*. Don’t fall into that trap! Recently I read an article by Jennifer Reed in *SUCCESS*. She wrote,

Can there be a more insidious word? Later, as in “I’ll do it later.” Or, “Later, I’ll have time to write that book that’s been on my mind for the past five years.” Or, “I know I need to straighten out my finances . . . I’ll do it later.”

“Later” is one of those dream-killers, one of the countless obstacles we put up to derail our chances of success. The diet that starts “tomorrow,” the job hunt that happens “eventually,” the pursuit of the life dream that begins “someday” combine with other self-imposed roadblocks and lock us on autopilot.

Why do we do this to ourselves, anyway? Why don’t we take action now? Let’s face it: The familiar is easy; the uncharted path is lined with uncertainties.¹

By starting to read this book, you’ve already begun the process. Don’t stop there! Keep taking more steps. Pick a resource that will help you grow and begin learning from it *today*.

3. Face the Fear Factor

I recently read an article on the fears that keep people from being successful. The following five factors came into play:

Fear of Failure

Fear of Trading Security for the Unknown

Fear of Being Overextended Financially

Fear of What Others Will Say or Think

Fear that Success Will Alienate Peers

Which of those fears most impacts you? For me it was the last one: alienating my peers. By nature I'm a people pleaser, and I wanted everyone to like me. But it really doesn't matter which fear affects you the most. We all have fears. But here's the good news. We also all have faith. The question you have to ask yourself is, "Which emotion will I allow to be stronger?" Your answer is important, because the stronger emotion wins. I want to encourage you to feed your faith and starve your fear.

4. Change from Accidental to Intentional Growth

People tend to get into ruts in life. They get in an easy groove, and they don't try to break out if it—even when it's taking them in the wrong direction. After a while, they just get by. If they learn something, it's because of a happy accident. Don't let that happen to you! If that is the attitude you've developed, then you would do well to remember that the only difference between a rut and a grave is the length!

How do you know if you've slipped into a rut? Take a look at the differences between accidental growth and intentional growth:

ACCIDENTAL GROWTH

Plans to Start Tomorrow
 Waits for Growth to Come
 Learns Only from Mistakes
 Depends on Good Luck
 Quits Early and Often
 Falls into Bad Habits
 Talks Big
 Plays It Safe
 Thinks Like a Victim
 Relies on Talent
 Stops Learning after
 Graduation

INTENTIONAL GROWTH

Insists on Starting Today
 Takes Complete Responsibility to Grow
 Often Learns Before Mistakes
 Relies on Hard Work
 Perseveres Long and Hard
 Fights for Good Habits
 Follows Through
 Takes Risks
 Thinks Like a Learner
 Relies on Character
 Never Stops Growing

Eleanor Roosevelt said, “One’s philosophy is not best expressed in words; it is expressed in the choices one makes. In the long run, we shape our lives and we shape ourselves. The process never ends until we die. And the choices we make are ultimately our own responsibility.”

“One’s philosophy is not best expressed in words; it is expressed in the choices one makes. In the long run, we shape our lives and we shape ourselves.”

—Eleanor Roosevelt

If you want to reach your potential and become the person you were created to be, you must do much more than just experience life and hope that you learn what you need along the way. You must go out of your way to seize growth opportunities as if your future depended on it. Why? Because it does. Growth doesn’t just happen—not for me, not for you, not for anybody. You have to go after it!

Applying the Law of Intentionality to Your Life

1. Which of the gaps discussed in the chapter have caused you to neglect growing the way you perhaps could have?

- The Assumption Gap—I assume that I will automatically grow.
- The Knowledge Gap—I don't know how to grow.
- The Timing Gap—It's not the right time to begin.
- The Mistake Gap—I'm afraid of making mistakes.
- The Perfection Gap—I have to find the best way before I start.
- The Inspiration Gap—I don't feel like doing it.
- The Comparison Gap—Others are better than I am.
- The Expectation Gap—I thought it would be easier than this.

Now that you have gained insight about the gaps, what strategies can you create and implement to help you bridge the gaps? Write a specific plan for each gap that applied to you and take the first step of that plan *today*.

2. Most people underestimate the unimportance of nearly everything in their lives. They get distracted. As a result, they put growth on the back burner, and if they do grow, it happens accidentally instead of intentionally. Take a look at your calendar for the next twelve months. How much time have you specifically scheduled for personal growth? If you're like most people, your answer will be none. Or you may have planned to attend one event in the coming year. That's not going to cut it.

Rework your calendar so you have an appointment with yourself for personal growth every day, five days a week, fifty weeks a year. You might be thinking, *What? I don't have time for that!* That's probably true. Do it anyway. If you want to succeed, you need to do whatever it takes. Get up an hour early. Stay up an hour later. Give up your lunch hour. Put in extra time on the weekends. If you don't, you'll have to prepare to give up your dreams and any hope of reaching your potential.

3. Start now. No matter what time of day you're reading these words, make a commitment to start growing today. Give that first hour before you go to sleep tonight. Put in the time today and for the next five days. You probably won't feel like doing it. Do it anyway.

2

The Law of Awareness

You Must Know Yourself to Grow Yourself

“No one can produce great things who is not thoroughly sincere in dealing with himself.”

—JAMES RUSSELL LOWELL

In 2004, Adam Sandler and Drew Barrymore starred in a comedy called *50 First Dates*. It is the story of a man who falls in love with a young woman, only to discover that she cannot remember him the next day. In fact, she can't remember anything that has happened to her since a car crash she was in a year before. She is destined to live every day as if it were the day before her accident. It was a cute movie, even if the premise seems a bit silly. But what if something like that were true and had actually happened?

No Recall

There is a famous neuropsychology case of someone with a similar condition that was first documented in 1957 and has been studied by thousands of doctors and researchers. The patient is called Henry M.

He was born in Hartford, Connecticut, in 1926, and he suffered from a case of epilepsy that was so severe and debilitating that he couldn't function. At age twenty-seven, he underwent an experimental surgery in which parts of his brain were removed to try to treat his epilepsy. The good news was that after the surgery, he no longer suffered constant debilitating seizures. In addition, he suffered no negative impact on his intelligence, personality, or ability to interact with others socially. However, there was one horrible side effect. He seemed to have no short-term memory.

Henry M. couldn't remember anything that happened after the surgery. He didn't recognize his doctors. He couldn't find his way to the bathroom. When he returned home, he would do the same jigsaw puzzles every day and read the same magazines without having any memory of having done so. When his family moved to a new house, he could never remember having moved, nor could he find the way to his new home, though he remembered his old one vividly. When interviewed thirty minutes after lunch, he could not recall a single item he had eaten. In fact, he could not remember having eaten at all.¹ He was stuck in time, unable to learn, grow, and change. What a tragedy.

Do You Have a Sense of Direction?

Any person who wants to grow but doesn't know himself is in many ways like Henry M. To grow, you must know yourself: your strengths and weaknesses, your interests and opportunities. You must be able to gauge not only where you've been, but also where you are now. Otherwise you cannot set a course for where you want to go. And of course, every time you want to learn something, you must be able to take the new thing you've learned today and build upon what you learned yesterday to keep growing. That's the only way to gain traction and keep improving yourself.

To reach your potential, you must know where you want to go and

where you currently are. Without both of those pieces of information, you're liable to get lost. Knowing yourself is like reading "You Are Here" on a map when you want to find your way to a destination.

I've observed that there are really only three kinds of people when it comes to having direction in life:

1. People Who Don't Know What They Would Like to Do

These people are often *confused*. They lack a strong sense of purpose. They don't possess a sense of direction for their lives. If they are growing, they are unfocused about it. They dabble. They drift. They can't reach their potential because they have no idea what to shoot for.

2. People Who Know What They Would Like to Do But Don't Do It

These people are usually *frustrated*. Every day they experience the gap between where they are and where they want to be. Sometimes they aren't doing what they want because they worry that it will cause them to neglect other responsibilities, such as providing for their families. Sometimes they aren't willing to pay the price to learn, grow, and move closer to where they want to be. Other times fear prevents them from changing course to pursue their passion. No matter what the reason, they, too, miss their potential.

3. People Who Know What They Would Like to Do and Do It

The third kind of people know themselves, possess a strong sense of passion, are focused in purpose, grow in areas that help them move closer to their purpose, and do what they were created to do. The word that best describes them is *fulfilled*.

Few situations are as extreme as Henry M.'s, yet most people seem to fall into the first category. They don't know what they want to do. I believe the main reason is that they don't know themselves as well as they should, and thus remain unfocused in their growth.

Knowing yourself isn't necessarily an easy thing for everyone to do. In a commencement address at Princeton, future American president Woodrow Wilson proclaimed,

We live in an age disturbed, confused, bewildered, afraid of its own forces, in search not merely of its road but even of its direction. There are many voices of counsel, but few voices of vision; there is much excitement and feverish activity, but little concert of thoughtful purpose. We are distressed by our ungoverned, undirected energies and do many things, but nothing long. It is our duty to find ourselves.

Wilson made that statement in 1907! Imagine what he might have said if he were alive today.

What makes finding themselves and growing to their potential difficult for some people is that it can be a bit of a catch-22. You have to know who you are to grow to your potential. But you have to grow in order to know who you are. So what's the solution? Explore yourself as you explore growth.

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The way to start is to pay attention to your passions. For me, that started when I focused my growth in areas that I knew would help me as a minister, which was my passion. The four areas can be represented by the word REAL: relationships, equipping, attitude, and leadership. My passion led to my growth. But then my growth led to my passion, as I discovered my love and ability for leadership. That has continued to be a major focus of my personal growth for nearly forty years. Other areas that passion and purpose revealed include faith, family, communication, and creativity. All of these continue to be important parts of my life where I love to learn and to grow.

How to Find Your Passion and Purpose

Psychotherapist Nathaniel Branden asserts, “The first step toward change is awareness. The second step is acceptance.” If you want

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—*Nathaniel Branden*

to change and grow, then you must know yourself and accept who you are before you can start building. Here are ten questions to help you start working through that process.

1. Do You Like What You’re Doing Now?

I am amazed by how many people I meet every day who don’t like doing what they do for a living. Why do they do it? I understand the necessity of having to make a living. We’ve all done jobs we didn’t love. I worked in a meat-packing plant when I was in college. I didn’t like that job. But I didn’t stay there my whole life, doing something I found unfulfilling. If I’d loved it and it had fit my passion and purpose, I would have stayed there and tried to build a career. But it wasn’t what I wanted to do.

Philosopher Abraham Kaplan noted, “If, as Socrates said, the unexamined life is not worth living, so the un-lived life is worth examining.” If you’re not enjoying what you do for a living, you need to take some time to examine why.

Is it a risk making a change from what you’re currently doing to what you *want* to do? Of course. You might fail. You might find out that you don’t like it as much as you expected. You might not make as much money. But isn’t there also great risk in staying where you are? You might fail. You might get fired. You might take a pay cut. Or worst of all, you might come to the end of your life feeling regret for never having reached your potential or doing what you love. Which risk would you rather live with?

2. *What Would You Like to Do?*

There is definitely a direct connection between finding your passion and reaching your potential. TV journalist Maria Bartiromo says, “Every successful person I’ve met has a strong sense of his or her unique abilities and aspirations. They’re leaders in their own lives, and they dare to pursue their dreams on their own terms.”

There is definitely a direct connection between finding your passion and reaching your potential.

Have you found and harnessed your passion? Do you know what you would like to do? When you do, it makes all the difference. Why? When you tap into your passion, it gives you the E&E factor: *energy* and *excellence*.

- You will never fulfill your destiny doing work you despise.
- Passion gives you an advantage over others, because one person with passion is greater than ninety-nine who have only an interest!
- Passion gives you energy.

As a kid, all I ever wanted to do was play. I didn’t like work. But I learned the power of tapping into my passion when I transitioned from high school to college. In high school, I was simply marking time. But when I got to college, I was working in areas connected to my purpose. I was pursuing my passion. That got me excited!

I’m still excited about what I do. Now that I’m in my midsixties, people ask me when I will retire. To be honest, that’s not on my radar. Why would anyone want to quit doing what he loves? Nothing’s work unless you’d rather be doing something else. Want to know when I’ll retire? When I die! That’s when I’ll stop speaking and writing books.

How do you *know* what you want to do? How do you tap into your passion? Listen to your heart. Pay attention to what you love doing.

Pulitzer Prize–winning journalist and author Thomas L. Friedman advises,

So whatever you plan to do, whether you plan to travel the world next year, go to graduate school, join the workforce, or take some time off to think, don't just listen to your head. Listen to your heart. It's the best career counselor there is. Do what you really love to do and if you don't know quite what that is yet, well, keep searching, because if you find it, you'll bring that something extra to your work that will help ensure you will not be automated or outsourced. It will help make you an untouchable radiologist, an untouchable engineer, or an untouchable teacher.

If you never figure out what you want to do, you will probably be frustrated all of your life. Author Stephen Covey observed, "How different our lives are when we really know what is deeply important to us, and keeping that picture in mind, we manage ourselves each day to be and to know what matters most." Knowing yourself and what you want to do is one of the most important things you'll ever do in this life.

3. Can You Do What You Would Like to Do?

When I was a minister, I once had a young man named Bobby working for me. He was my worship leader. If you're unfamiliar with that role, it's the person who prepares the music for a Sunday service, leads the other singers and musicians, and actually leads the congregation in singing.

I could see that Bobby was an unhappy person, and I suspected that he would rather be doing something different. So one day I sat him down for a heart-to-heart talk. He confessed that he was really unhappy. I asked him, "Bobby, what would you like to do?"

He hesitated a moment and then confided, “I’d really like to be the announcer for the Chicago Cubs baseball team.”

All I could think was *You’re going to be unhappy for a very long time*. He didn’t have the skills to do that job. Even if he did, the job wasn’t available! I told him he needed to find something more realistic that aligned with his gifting and opportunities.

There’s a big difference between having a dream that propels you to achieve and pulling an idea out of thin air that has no connection with who you are and what you can do. I feel so strongly about helping people with this problem that I wrote a book about it called *Put Your Dream to the Test*. You must have some kind of criteria for knowing if the desire you have matches the abilities you possess.

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Warren Bennis has also developed something to help people with this issue. He offers three questions you can ask yourself to identify if what you want to do is possible. Ask yourself:

- ***Do you know the difference between what you want and what you’re good at?*** These two things don’t always match up. I believe that was the case for Bobby. What he wanted and what he could do were two very different things. To be successful, you need to be doing what you’re good at.
- ***Do you know what drives you and what gives you satisfaction?*** Sometimes people get it in their heads to do something for the wrong reasons. Maybe the job they want doesn’t look like hard work, when in fact it is. Or they want the rewards that come with the job, not the work itself. When what motivates you lines up with what satisfies you, it is a powerful combination.
- ***Do you know what your values and priorities are, and what your organization’s values and priorities are?*** The more you

can align these two, the greater your chance of success. If you and your employer are working at cross-purposes, success will be difficult to achieve.

Measuring the differences between what you want and what you're able to do, what drives you and what satisfies you, and your values and those of the organization reveals many of the obstacles between you and what you want to do. At that point the question you need to ask yourself is whether you are able to overcome those differences.

One of the main keys to being successful and fulfilling your purpose is to understand your unique talents and to find the right arena in which to use them. Some people have an inherent ability to know who they are and who they're not. Others have to work hard to make those discoveries. Poet and critic Samuel Johnson observed, "Almost every man wastes part of his life in attempts to display qualities which he

"Almost every man wastes part of his life in attempts to display qualities which he does not possess."

—Samuel Johnson

does not possess." Your goal should be to waste as little of your life as possible. As former MLB catcher Jim Sundberg says, "Discover your uniqueness; then discipline yourself to develop it."

4. Do You Know Why You Want to Do What You Would Like to Do?

I believe it's very important not only to know what you want to do, but also why you want to do it. I say that because motives matter. When you do things for the right reason, it gives you inner strength when things go wrong. Right motives help you to build positive relationships because they prevent hidden agendas and incline you to put people ahead of your agenda. Doing something for the right reasons also keeps life less cluttered and your path clearer. Not only is your vision clearer, but you also sleep well at night knowing you're on the right track.

The work that I do is a calling on my life. When I lead or communicate, I think, *I was born for this*. It relies on my strengths. It gives me energy. It makes a difference in the lives of others. It fulfills me and gives me a touch of the eternal.

I believe you can have the same kind of satisfaction and can experience success if you do the things you were meant to do, and do them for the right reasons. Take time to reflect. Explore your intentions and attitudes. As psychiatrist Carl Jung advised, “Your vision will become clear only when you look into your heart. Who looks outside, dreams. Who looks inside, awakens.”

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—Carl Jung

The first four questions you should ask yourself relate to *what* you want to do. As I said at the beginning of the chapter, you must know yourself to grow yourself. That’s the Law of Awareness. But I want to help you to do more than just know what to do. I want you to have a sense of *how* to start moving in that direction. That will help you to target and eventually fine-tune your growth. With that in mind, the remaining questions will help you to create a game plan.

5. Do You Know What to Do So You Can Do What You Want to Do?

To move from what you’re doing now to what you want to do is a process. Do you know what it will take? I believe it begins with . . .

AWARENESS

Darren Hardy, the publisher of *SUCCESS* magazine, says, “Picture where you are in [any] area, right now. Now picture where you want to be: richer, thinner, happier, you name it. The first step toward change is awareness. If you want to get from where you are to where you want to be, you have to start by becoming aware of the choices that lead you

away from your desired destination. Become very conscious of every choice you make today so you can begin to make smarter choices moving forward.”

You cannot change direction if you aren't aware that you're not headed where you want to go. That probably sounds obvious. But have you taken the time to look at where your current choices and activities are taking you? Spend some time really thinking about where you're presently headed. If it's not where you want to go, then write out what steps you need to take to go where you desire to go, to do what you want to do. Make them as tangible as possible. Will they definitely be the *right* steps? Maybe, maybe not. But you won't know for sure until you start moving forward. And that takes us to the next phase:

ACTION

You cannot win if you do not begin! The people who get ahead in the world are the ones who look for the circumstances they want, and if they can't find them, they make them. That means taking initiative. It means doing something specific every day that will take you another step closer to your goal. It means continuing to do it every day. Nearly all successes are the fruit of initiative.

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ACCOUNTABILITY

Few things prompt a person to follow through like accountability. One of the ways you can do that is to make your goals public. When you tell others about what you intend to do, it puts pressure on you to keep working at it. You can request that specific individuals ask you about your progress. It's similar to having a deadline to keep you moving. You can even write things down as a form of accountability. That's

what Darren Hardy suggests. He says that you should track every action that pertains to an area where you want to see improvement, whether it relates to finances, health, career, or relationships. “Simply carry around a small notebook, something you’ll keep in your pocket or purse at all times, and a writing instrument,” says Hardy. “You’re going to write it all down. Every day. Without fail. No excuses, no exceptions. As if Big Brother’s watching you. Doesn’t sound like much fun, I know—writing things down on a little piece of paper. But tracking *my* progress and missteps is one of the reasons I’ve accumulated the success I have. The process forces you to be conscious of your decisions.”

ATTRACTION

If you become aware of the steps you must take to do what you want to do, take action, and become accountable for following through, you will begin to produce the behavior you desire and you will start getting closer to doing what you want to do. And that will start to result in a positive side effect: You start attracting like-minded people. The Law of Magnetism in *The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership* says, “Who you are is who you attract.” That is true in leadership, but it is also true in every other aspect of life. As my mother used to say, “Birds of a feather flock together.”

If you want to be around growing people, become a growing person. If you’re committed, you attract others who are committed. If you’re growing, you attract others who are growing. This puts you in a position to begin building a community of like-minded people who can help one another succeed.

6. Do You Know People Who Do What You’d Like to Do?

My greatest growth has always come as a result of finding people ahead of me who were able to show me the way forward. Some of them have helped me through personal contact, but most have

helped through the books they've written. When I've had questions, I've found answers in their wisdom. When I wanted to learn how to lead better, I looked to Melvin Maxwell, John Wooden, Oswald Sanders, Jesus Christ, and hundreds of others to show me the way. If I've learned how to communicate more effectively, it is because I've learned from Andy Stanley, Johnny Carson, Howard Hendricks, Ronald Reagan, Billy Graham, and hundreds of others. If I create and write in a way that helps people, it is because Les Stobbe, Max Lucado, Charlie Wetzel, Les Parrott, Bob Buford, and others have spent time with me.

If you have discovered what you want to do, start finding people who do what you want to do with excellence. Then do what you must to learn from them.

Get committed. Pay people for their time if necessary.

Be consistent. Meet purposefully every month with someone who can teach you.

Be creative. Start with their books if you can't meet them in person.

Be purposeful. Spend two hours in preparation for every hour of interaction.

Be reflective. Spend two hours in reflection for every hour of interaction.

Be grateful. These people are gifts to your personal growth; be sure to let them know.

Always remember that you cannot get where you want to go on your own. You will need the help of others to guide you on your way.

7. Should You Do What You'd Like to Do with Them?

If you are someone who is dedicated to personal growth, you will always be learning from many people in many places. Occasionally

you will have an opportunity to be mentored on an ongoing basis by an individual. Being mentored by someone who is successful in your area of interest has great value, and I will discuss it more thoroughly in the Law of Modeling chapter. However, I pause now to give you advice as you approach a mentor. If you find a potential mentor, know that the following are your responsibility:

- Possess a teachable spirit.
- Always be prepared for the time you get with your mentor.
- Set the agenda by asking great questions.
- Demonstrate how you've learned from your time together.
- Be accountable for what you've learned.

As someone who has mentored a lot of people, I can tell you what I think the responsibilities of a mentor are. My responsibility to the people I mentor is to add value. My goal is always to help them to become more than they are, not to try to make them something they're not. These are the areas I focus on:

- | | |
|----------------|-----------------------------|
| • Strengths | • Advice |
| • Temperament | • Support, Resources/People |
| • Track record | • Game plan |
| • Passion | • Feedback |
| • Choices | • Encouragement |

For each of these areas, think about what specific contribution you can offer to the person you are mentoring.

One of the people I have enjoyed investing in is Courtney McBath of Norfolk, Virginia. The second time I met with him, he said the following:

Here's what I asked.

Here's what you shared.

Here's what I did.

Now can I ask more questions?

With someone who follows though like that, my answer is always yes!

Every person who *can* help you is not necessarily the right person to help you. You must pick and choose. And so must they. Your goal should be to find a fit that is mutually beneficial for both mentor and mentee.

8. Will You Pay the Price to Do What You Want to Do?

Author and educator James Thom said, “Probably the most honest self-made man ever was the one we heard say: ‘I got to the top the hard way—fighting my own laziness and ignorance every step of the way.’” That sure has a lot of truth in it, doesn't it? When it comes to barriers to success, we are usually our own worst enemies.

Several years ago, I came across a piece called “Dream Big.” It's full of encouraging words but also captures what it takes to follow your dreams. It says,

*If there were ever a time to dare,
To make a difference,
To embark on something worth doing,
It is now.
Not for any grand cause, necessarily—
But for something that tugs at your heart,
Something that's your aspiration,
Something that's your dream.
You owe it to yourself to make your days here count.
Have fun.
Dig deep.
Stretch.*

*Dream big.
 Know, though, that things worth doing seldom come easy.
 There will be good days.
 And there will be bad days.
 There will be times when you want to turn around,
 Pack it up, and call it quits.
 Those times tell you that you are pushing yourself,
 That you are not afraid to learn by trying.²*

Taking the steps necessary to live your dreams and do what you want to do will cost you. You will have to work hard. You will have to make sacrifices. You will have to keep learning and growing and changing. Are you willing to pay that price? I certainly hope you are. But know this: Most people aren't.

9. When Can You Start Doing What You'd Like to Do?

Ask people when they will do what they want to do, and most answer that they hope to do it "someday." Why not now? Because you're not ready? Perhaps you're not. But if you wait until you are, maybe you never will do it.

Most of the accomplishments I've achieved in life I began to attempt before I was really ready. When I was teaching pastors leadership in 1984 and they asked for ongoing teaching, I wasn't ready to give it to them. But during a conference with thirty-four people in Jackson, Mississippi, I decided to pass around a legal pad and get the contact information for anyone who wanted to receive a monthly leadership tape. All thirty-four signed up. Was I ready to start a monthly leadership subscription series? No. Did I start it anyway? Yes. When I needed to raise money to relocate my church, did I know how to do it? No. Did I start to

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do it anyway? Yes. When I founded EQUIP to teach leadership to people in countries around the world, did I have a proven strategy to get it done? No. Did we get started anyway? Yes. Nobody ever got ready by waiting. You only get ready by starting.

10. What Will It Be Like When You Get to Do What You'd Like to Do?

Because I've had the privilege of doing what I've always wanted to do, I want to help you see ahead to what it's like. First, it will be *different* from what you imagined. I never thought that I would affect as many people as I do. I never knew life would be so beautiful. I never thought I would want to occasionally withdraw from people to think and write. But I also never anticipated the expectations others would put on me to produce.

When you do what you want to do, it will be *more difficult* than you ever imagined. I had no idea how much time it would take to be effective. I never expected to have such great demands put on my life or to have to keep paying the price to be successful. I also never dreamed that my energy level would go down as much as it has in recent years.

Finally, let me tell you this. When you do what you've always wanted to, it will be *better* than you ever imagined. When I started investing in my personal growth, I didn't anticipate a compounding return—for me personally, for the individuals I've mentored, and for my team. And I never dreamed it would be this much fun! Nothing else compares to doing what you were created to do.

A few years ago at Exchange, a leadership event I host for executives each year, we were privileged to have Coretta Scott King and Bernice King as two of our speakers. We all sat in the sanctuary at Ebenezer Baptist Church in Atlanta and listened to them tell stories. What the Exchange attendees most wanted to know about was Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech. Bernice told us that there were many speakers scheduled to address the crowd that day on the steps

of the Lincoln Memorial. Many of them jockeyed for the best places in the speaking order, hoping to get TV time. Bernice's father gave up his time. He didn't care about his place on the docket. All he cared about was getting to communicate with the people. And when he did, it made history. Why? Because he was doing what he was made to do. The next year, the Civil Rights Act was passed in Washington, D.C. King had followed his passion, found his purpose, and as a result, made an impact on the world.

People say there are two great days in a person's life: the day you were born and the day you discover why. I want to encourage you to seek what you were put on this earth to do. Then pursue it with all your effort.

**There are two great days
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Applying the Law of Awareness to Your Life

The questions in this chapter are designed to prompt you to know yourself and get on course to do what you were made to do in life. Here is a streamlined version of the questions. Spend a significant amount of time answering them so you have a plan of action to follow when you're done.

1. What would you like to do?
2. What talents, skills, and opportunities do you possess that support your desire to do it?
3. What are your motives for wanting to do it?
4. What steps must you take (beginning today) to start doing what you want to do?:
 - Awareness
 - Action
 - Accountability
5. Whose advice can you get to help you along the way?
6. What price are you willing to pay? What will it cost you in time, resources, and sacrifices?
7. Where do you most need to grow? (You must focus on your strengths and overcome any weaknesses that would keep you from reaching your goal.)