



John C. Maxwell: How to Design an Optimum Life

8 growth principles vital to charting your path to personal development

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It's amazing how seven words can so dramatically shape the course of your life: *"What is your plan for personal growth?"*

I can still hear my mentor Curt Kampmeier asking me that question, even though 40 years have passed. Answering it helped define me and chart the course of my career and my life.

On the day he asked, however, I had no answer. I scrambled and talked about how hard I was working and all the things I was trying to accomplish.

Curt just looked back at me with a knowing smile. He could see through all the bluster to the truth: I really had no plan.

If I were to ask you the same question, how would you answer?

Perhaps you're like I was: You've never thought about creating a personal growth plan. The fact is, you won't [reach your full potential](#) in any area of life until you have a map for personal growth. So you need to create one with specifics, tailored to your gifts and goals. Before you put pen to paper, let me share eight growth principles vital to charting your path to personal development.

1. Growth is not an automatic process.

Improvement doesn't just happen. It takes time, effort and a plan. You may have heard the saying "what gets scheduled gets done." The same principle applies to your personal development. Unless you set aside the time to grow, you won't do much growing.

2. Growth separates those who succeed from those who do not.

Show me a successful person, and I'll show you someone who is serious about personal development. Nobody becomes highly successful by accident. [Intentional growth is the key.](#)

3. Growth takes time.

I often say that experience isn't the best teacher; evaluated experience is. When you look back on your experiences and reflect upon what you've learned, it spurs you to continue progressing. Don't be impatient with the time it takes to grow. Instead use the time and the lessons you've learned to your advantage.

4. The more we grow, the more we know we need to grow.

Legendary basketball coach [John Wooden](#) loved the saying, "It's what we learn after we know it all that counts!" So true. Personal development is a process with no end. The more you learn, the more you realize how much you still need to learn.

I've been teaching leadership for more than 40 years, and I learn things every day. Rather than becoming frustrated by this, I embrace it. You should, too!

5. Growth equals change.

Sometimes personal growth can be intimidating because it requires you to push beyond your comfort zone and [make changes](#). That's difficult for most people. It's uncomfortable.

It's often easier to stay where we are. However, I've learned the most when I've been the most uncomfortable.

6. Growth inside fuels growth outside.

Your development journey begins with an inward focus. Start by making small internal changes. Before long, those changes begin to manifest themselves outwardly with big results. Your growth plan should reflect the patience and discipline this will require.

7. Growth requires a forward focus.

By definition, growth requires you to get bigger. It's easy to celebrate past successes and milestones and focus on them. Warning: Too much of that, and you'll get stuck! Shift your thinking into forward gear. You should want to be bigger tomorrow than you are today. Learn from today—and use those lessons to make tomorrow even better.

8. *You* determine the areas where you need to grow.

One big key to successful personal development is to grow in your areas of strength. Why is this so powerful? Because if you can master the areas where you are strongest, you'll find yourself head and shoulders above the crowd. If you bog down in your weaker areas, you might waste valuable energy on a skill and never rise above average. Target your strengths in your plan.

Ultimately only one person is responsible for your growth and development: you. You might have a manager or mentor who pushes you or work in an organization that encourages employee development, but it's up to you to lead your own journey.

Great Tools for Growth

What will you use to form and achieve your plan for growth? Over the years I've consistently chosen five things to help me grow. Intentionally plan your growth by committing yourself to the discipline of learning in these five areas:

- **Great people.** The people you surround yourself with will shape you more than anything else. Spend time with talented, experienced, growing people.²

Tactic: Schedule one lunch a month with someone who will stretch your thinking.

- **Great messages.** In our connected world, you literally have access to thousands of speakers at your fingertips. Take advantage of that!

Tactic: Listen to one message that challenges you every week.

- **Great places.** Find places that inspire and instruct you, and spend time there. Soak up your surroundings and see what they can teach you.

Tactic: Plan one trip every year that will inspire you.

- **Great events.** Conferences, workshops and celebrations stimulate you to engage with your environment and learn from it.

Tactic: Set aside time and money to attend one per year.

- **Great books.** I've saved the best for last. [Great books](#) can give you access to a world of mentors with expertise in any area. Read deeply to guide and improve your thinking.

Tactic: Commit to reading a book every month. If possible, increase that discipline to one per week.

If you want to change your results, you have to change your thinking first. Ask yourself 9 questions to trigger thought and action.

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