

AN EIGHT-WEEK STUDY FOR LEADERSHIP TEAMS



LEADERSHIP GROWTH:
8 KEYS TO MAXIMIZE
YOUR GROWTH AS A LEADER

STEPHEN BLANDINO

DISCUSSION GUIDE

Embrace a Growth Posture

Assess: On a scale from 1 to 10, how would you rank your commitment to grow your leadership potential over the last 90 days?

Insights and Ideas

Leaders carry a heavy responsibility. The decisions leaders make and the actions they take have a ripple effect on the people, organizations and churches they lead.

That's why, as author and pastor Bill Hybels says, "When the leader gets better, everyone wins." The leader wins, the team wins, the church wins, the city wins and the kingdom of God wins. Maximizing your growth as a leader is essential.

The starting place for your growth as a leader is to embrace a growth posture. A growth posture is a lifelong learning mindset. Basketball coaching legend John Wooden often said, "It's what you learn after you know it all that counts."

We cannot afford to coast, and we cannot fall prey to our own "expertise" as a reason for why we no longer need to grow. The moment you "arrive" is the moment your decline begins.

Jesus demonstrated a lifelong learning posture. Even as the Son of God, Jesus understood and actively embraced a mindset that would help Him fulfill the mission His Father sent Him to fulfill. Luke 2:40 says, "The child grew and became strong; he was filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was on him."

Verse 52 says, "Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man." Jesus' growth exhibited three characteristics.

It was *intentional*. Spiritual growth didn't just happen. It arose from fellowship with and obedience to God the Father. We must be intentional about cultivating healthy habits that facilitate growth.

It was *continual*. Jesus modeled the way to grow spiritually throughout life as He spent time with His Father (Luke 11:1) and always did the will of His Father (John 8:29).

It was *valuable*. Jesus' growth wasn't random or haphazard. He didn't waste His time learning or growing in areas that didn't matter. His growth focused on the most valuable areas of life. He grew mentally, physically, spiritually and relationally.

Philosopher Eric Hoffer once said, "In times of change, learners inherit the earth, while the learned find themselves beautifully equipped to deal with a world that no longer exists."

That's a sobering statement. A growth posture should never have an expiration date. Just because you graduate school doesn't mean you should graduate learning. Keep growing.

Reflect and Discuss

1. Why does our personal growth as leaders often get neglected?
2. Which of the three characteristics of Jesus' growth is your greatest struggle? Why?
3. How does Eric Hoffer's quote challenge you? In what ways do you need to upgrade your leadership through learning and growth?

Apply

Leaders understand that before they can lead others, they must first lead themselves by embracing a healthy growth posture.

This week, read Luke 2:40–52 in two or three different translations of Scripture. What stands out to you about Jesus' growth mindset? After studying this passage, commit yourself anew to a lifelong learning posture so that your leadership can be its best. Remember, "When the leader gets better, everyone wins."

8 KEYS TO MAXIMIZE YOUR GROWTH AS A LEADER

Embrace a Growth Posture

Assess: On a scale from 1 to 10, how would you rank your commitment to grow your leadership potential in the last 90 days?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

A growth posture is a _____.

Luke 2:40: “The child grew and became strong; he was filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was on him.”

Luke 2:52: “Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man.”

Jesus’ growth exhibited three characteristics:

1. It was _____.
2. It was _____.
3. It was _____.

Reflect and Discuss

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Develop a Growth Plan

Team Review: What did you learn from studying Jesus' model of personal growth in Luke 2:40-52?

Assess: How clear are you about which areas of your leadership need growth?

Insights and Ideas

A well-worn statement often tossed around in leadership circles goes like this: If you fail to plan, you plan to fail. I know it's overused, but it carries a nugget of truth for our growth as leaders. Without a plan, our growth will stagnate.

As the old formula goes, "Track + Action = Traction." A leadership growth plan provides the track to run on. I like to refer to this growth plan as a "Growth TRAC."

A Growth TRAC is how you create, implement and monitor your own plan for growth. Four ingredients are required to create a healthy Growth TRAC, and a question accompanies each ingredient.

Target: What are my growth goals? A good Growth TRAC begins with a clear and specific goal, or target, that provides direction for your growth as a leader. People often set goals in their areas of weakness (or liabilities), but a healthy Growth TRAC focuses attention on growing your leadership strengths, too.

Roadmap: How do I plan to grow? Once the target (or goal) is clear, you need a specific plan to help generate your desired growth. A good *roadmap* generally includes training, resources, relationships, and experiences that will lead to the growth you desire.

Accountability: Who will hold me accountable for my growth? Most of us have great intentions, but we usually need someone in our lives to ask us the hard questions. Find *accountability* partners who will ask you about your progress with your *roadmap* as you endeavor to take steps toward your target.

Checkup: When and how will I evaluate my growth progress? Finally, schedule monthly or quarterly checkups to evaluate your growth as a leader. Include your accountability partner in this evaluation, and look for clear and measurable improvements.

If you create and follow a Growth TRAC each year, your leadership growth will compound over time, ultimately delivering greater impact in the church, ministry, or organization you lead.

Reflect and Discuss

1. Have you ever created a plan for your growth as a leader? If so, what did it look like?
2. What is one area of your leadership you need to grow in this month?
3. What resources might help you grow in the area that needs improvement?

Apply

This week, create a Growth TRAC for one area of leadership in which you want to grow. Set a clear *target* (or goal), along with a solid *roadmap* (with training, resources, relationships and experiences that will help you grow).

Then secure someone to hold you *accountable*, and schedule a *checkup* on your progress. (For a resource to help you create a Growth TRAC, download my free e-book, *How to Create a Plan for Personal Growth*, at StephenBlandino.com.)



Develop a Growth Plan

Assess: How clear are you about which areas of your leadership need to grow?

A Growth TRAC is how you _____,

_____ and _____

your own plan for growth.

Four ingredients of a healthy Growth TRAC:

T _____: **What are my growth goals?**

R _____: **How do I plan to grow?**

A _____: **Who will hold me accountable for my growth?**

C _____: **When and how will I evaluate my growth progress?**

Reflect and Discuss

1. Have you ever created a plan for your growth as a leader? If so, what did it look like?
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Enlarge Your Growth Environment

Team Review: What did you include in your Growth TRAC to help you grow as a leader?

Assess: Who or what in your environment (at home, work, etc.) has been most pivotal in helping you grow?

Insights and Ideas

H ebrews 5:11 says, “We have much to say about this, but it is hard to make it clear to you because you no longer try to understand.”

Listening is essential to our spiritual growth. Without it, we become dull, stubborn and ineffective. Likewise, listening is paramount in our growth as leaders.

Failure to listen stunts our growth, but a subtler danger is equally debilitating: always listening to the same people. To maximize your growth as a leader, you must enlarge your environment to include voices outside of your normal growth inputs. Constantly drinking from the same leadership fountain can result in the disease of “mindless mingling.”

Mindless mingling occurs when the thinking life of a leader experiences a deficit in knowledge or relationships. In other words, what I know, who I know, and who I listen to limit how I think. I become mindless because I mingle with the same people and draw from the same pool of knowledge.

Author and pastor Andy Stanley captured the essence of this concern when he said, “If you are surrounded long enough by people who think like you think, you will become more and more certain that’s the best way to think.”

One cure is to enlarge your growth environment in three ways.

Enlarge your network. Begin building relationships with people outside of your church, field or denomination. You’ll quickly discover how much you don’t know when you look beyond your bubble.

Enlarge your resource pool. We all have our favorite authors, podcasts and blogs. Lift your eyes to see what else is on the horizon, and don’t be afraid to look outside of your field of study. Some of the best learning comes from disciplines outside your area of expertise.

Enlarge your experiences. We tend to drift toward the path of least resistance. Look for ways to broaden your experience by attending new conferences, classes, and events, or pursuing new degrees. What can you do to put “new” back into your leadership growth?

Enlarging your growth environment will feel uncomfortable. We prefer being in rooms where everybody knows us — or even admires us. It’s hard to pursue environments where you’re suddenly thrust into anonymity. But unfamiliar environments often hold the gold you’ve been trying to mine in your current environments. Take a risk. Enlarge your growth environment. The width of your environment determines the depth of your development.

Reflect and Discuss

1. In what ways have you grown too comfortable in your current growth environment?
2. What could you do to enlarge your network, resource pool or experiences?
3. What is one thing you could do this week to enlarge your growth environment?

Apply

Do something new this week to enlarge your growth environment. Connect with a new leader outside of your church or denomination. Start reading a book by an author you’ve never read. Sign up for an event you’ve never attended. Pick one thing, and start today.

Enlarge Your Growth Environment

Assess: Who or what in your environment (at home, work, etc.) has been most pivotal in helping you grow?

Hebrews 5:11: “We have much to say about this, but it is hard to make it clear to you because you no longer try to understand.”

To maximize your growth as a leader, you must _____
 _____ to include voices
 _____ of your normal growth inputs.

Three ways to enlarge your growth environment:

1. Enlarge your _____ .
2. Enlarge your _____ pool.
3. Enlarge your _____ .

The _____ of your environment determines the _____ of your development.

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Access Growth Resources

Team Review: What specific step did you take last week to enlarge your growth environment?

Assess: What resources do you regularly use to help you grow as a leader?

Insights and Ideas

The apostle Paul was nearing death when he wrote his second letter to Timothy. Paul celebrated the fact that he had fought the good fight, finished the race and kept the faith. Then he made a special request: “When you come, bring the cloak that I left with Carpus at Troas, and my scrolls, especially the parchments” (2 Timothy 4:13).

As most people near the end of life, their final requests tend to ease their regrets, restore their relationships or comfort their weakening bodies. But not Paul! He refused to toss learning and personal growth in the backseat just because his days were numbered. His books were among his final requests. He wanted to continue growing to his full potential right up to the end of life. As the old saying goes, “Our potential is God’s gift to us. What we do with it is our gift to God.”

Paul maximized his potential because of his commitment to growth, and he honored God because of it.

Resources play a critical role in our growth as leaders, and today’s technology makes it easier than ever to access a broad range of resources. With all the books, podcasts, webinars, blogs, downloads, apps, TED Talks, magazines, assessments, and other tools available today, we can access a gigantic library of helpful content — much of which doesn’t cost a dime. As you choose content to help you grow, ask yourself three questions.

The technology question: What technology am I not currently leveraging for my personal growth and development?

The time question: What am I doing to maximize my down time for my growth as a leader?

The travel question: How do I use my travel (daily commute, airline, etc.) for my growth as a leader?

According to research from Gallup, the average round-trip daily work commute is 46 minutes. Do the math. That averages 230 minutes per week, over 15 hours per month, and nearly 200 hours per year. Between ages 22 and 65, you may have more than 8,000 hours of personal growth potential sitting in your car. How are you using that time to grow as a leader? What are you listening to besides the radio?

Reflect and Discuss

1. What are the two best resources you regularly use to grow as a leader?
2. Which of the three questions (technology, time, travel) needs more of your attention?
3. What is the last leadership insight or idea you learned from a resource you still have not put into practice?

Apply

Take two steps to apply what you’ve learned.

First, do a quick audit of your technology, time and travel. How can you regularly leverage these opportunities to grow as a leader?

Second, discuss with your team, a coach, a co-worker, or friends the best resources they use to grow as leaders. Choose at least one of those resources this week to help you grow in your leadership journey.

Study
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TEAM GUIDE

8 KEYS TO MAXIMIZE YOUR GROWTH AS A LEADER

Access Growth Resources

Assess: What resources do you regularly use to help you grow as a leader?

2 Timothy 4:13: “When you come, bring the cloak that I left with Carpus at Troas, and my scrolls, especially the parchments.”

As you choose content to help you grow, ask yourself three questions:

1. The _____ question. What technology am I not currently leveraging for my personal growth and development?

2. The _____ question. What am I doing to maximize my down time for my growth as a leader?

3. The _____ question. How do I use my travel (daily commute, airline, etc.) for my growth as a leader?

Reflect and Discuss

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Pursue Coaching Relationships

Team Review: What new resource did you access last week to help you grow as a leader?

Assess: Whom do you meet with regularly to help you grow as a leader?

Insights and Ideas

Leaders often use books, conferences and online tools for growth while overlooking coaching. Yet Scripture places a high value on mentoring-type relationships.

Proverbs 27:17 says, “As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another.” And the apostle Paul challenged Titus to mobilize older men and women to mentor and invest in younger generations (Titus 2:3–8).

Coaching doesn’t have to be a long-term, time-intensive relationship. In fact, that’s a good way to scare off a potential coach. You can benefit from coaching simply by inviting a pastor to lunch and requesting permission to ask him or her a handful of leadership questions. Nothing beats outside perspective when you’re bumping up against a growth lid.

So, what exactly do coaches do? The best coaches take A.I.M. at your leadership potential by offering three things:

Assessment. Coaches don’t usually begin by rattling off answers to questions you never asked. Rather, they take time to understand you, your needs, and your situation. Context is important, and good coaches ask questions to assess what you’re going through.

Insight. Once a coach assesses your situation, he or she will offer some practical insights in two ways.

First, a coach will ask questions that cause you to dig deep for answers. Rather than handing you solutions on a silver platter, he or she will likely ask questions to help you uncover the solution for yourself. This process creates more buy-in to the solution.

Second, at strategic moments, coaches will offer their own breakthrough insights to help you move forward. This combination of asking questions and offering breakthroughs allows the best insights to emerge.

Motivation. Finally, good coaches are encouragers. They see potential in you and motivate you to become your best. Coaches don’t do the work for you, but they encourage you, pray for you, and cheer you on in the journey.

When a coach takes A.I.M. at your potential, growth is nearly inevitable. In addition to pastors, there are a number of ministries that offer helpful coaching. Organizations like CourageToLead.com, Vanderbloemen.com, AGCoaching.org, and UnstuckGroup.com provide great coaching for ministry leaders. Does it require an investment? Certainly. But it will be worth it.

Reflect and Discuss

1. Why do you think coaching is so underutilized in leadership?
2. If you ever had a coach help you grow as a leader, how was it helpful?
3. How can you serve as a coach to develop other leaders?

Apply

Identify a leadership area where you need coaching. To help you find a coach, list the names of other leaders you know who might be willing to meet with you (don’t assume anyone is too busy).

Request a coffee or lunch with them in the next two weeks if their schedule allows. Honor their time, buy their lunch, and bless them any way you can.

If you don’t have any coaching options, ask a fellow pastor or leader for a recommendation. Sometimes the best coaching relationships begin through a friend’s introduction.

Pursue Coaching Relationships

Assess: Who do you meet with regularly to help you grow as a leader?

Proverbs 27:17: “As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another.”

Coaches take A.I.M. at your leadership potential by offering three things:

1. _____.
2. _____.
3. _____.

Reflect and Discuss

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Welcome Candid Feedback

Team Review: Whom have you asked to coach you?

Assess: On a scale from 1 to 10, how open are you to receiving candid feedback from others?

Insights and Ideas

Candor is a difficult but essential part of a leader's growth. Candor is the process of welcoming brutally honest feedback into your life, leadership and ministry without getting defensive. Every leader has blind spots, and without candid feedback, these blind spots will undermine your performance and growth.

Too many churches and organizations let bureaucratic red tape and an overwhelming fear of conflict paralyze them. In the end, the organization calcifies. The same thing can happen personally. An unwillingness to hear the truth, face the facts, and adjust our sails lead to a personal plateau and eventual decline. Here are four keys to receiving candid feedback in a healthy way.

Seek out trusted advisors. Many people will give you their two cents on any issue you present to them. That's not what you're looking for. You need trusted advisors who have your back and believe in you. At the same time, you're not looking for "yes" men or women. You need people you trust to speak hard truths into your life.

Ask for feedback. Most people don't offer candid feedback until two things happen.

First, they must feel a sense of safety in the environment. If the culture is toxic, people will keep their mouths shut for fear of having an embarrassing exchange in front of their peers — or losing their job.

Second, you must ask for feedback. When a leader humbly seeks honest feedback — the good, the bad and the ugly — it gives the team permission to offer important insights and perspective. What are you doing to give that permission?

Don't get defensive. If you ask for feedback and then respond with a defensive posture, it's game over. Candid feedback requires tough skin. If you can't take it, don't ask for it. Just remember if you don't ask for it, you'll never maximize your leadership potential. An unwillingness to receive feedback will always drive leaders into a false reality.

Balance candor and care. People have feelings. When providing candor, balance it with genuine care. This tension is easy to get wrong. I've made my fair share of mistakes. Work hard not to cross the line, and if you go too far, quickly and sincerely apologize. Do everything you can to protect the relationship in a healthy way.

Facts are ultimately your friends. Even when those facts are difficult, they are the starting place for change and growth. They define our reality. Welcome the feedback. Go searching for it.

Reflect and Discuss

1. How do you typically respond when people give you candid feedback?
2. Would your spouse, co-workers or friends agree with your assessment?
3. What can we do to create a more trusting environment that balances candor and care?

Apply

Take a few minutes to consider two questions. First, how will you create an environment of candor and care in your area of ministry? Second, from whom do you need to seek honest feedback, and when will you do this? Candid feedback is essential to your growth as a leader. Embrace it.

Study
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TEAM GUIDE

8 KEYS TO MAXIMIZE YOUR GROWTH AS A LEADER

Welcome Candid Feedback

Assess: On a scale from 1 to 10, how open are you to receiving candid feedback from others?

Candor is the process of welcoming _____ into your life, leadership and ministry without getting defensive.

Four keys to receiving candid feedback in a healthy way:

1. **Seek out** _____ **advisors.**
2. _____ **for feedback.**
3. **Don't get** _____ .
4. **Balance** _____ **and** _____ .

Reflect and Discuss

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Apply

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Expand Your Vision

Team Review: From whom did you seek candid feedback last week, and what did it reveal about potential growth areas in your life?

Assess: How passionate do you feel right now about your vision for your area of ministry?

Insights and Ideas

We've been talking about important steps to growing as a leader. Each one plays a critical role, and each one will expand your thinking. However, there's one strategy that really ups the ante: expanding your vision.

Between you and your vision is a gap, and the only way to close that gap is to grow from the person you are today into the person you need to become. Until you close your "growth gap," the dream will remain trapped in your imagination.

However, some leaders have already reached their dream, and now they're living in maintenance mode. They're coasting. The key to breaking out of this holding pattern is to dream bigger dreams that require bigger growth. When you expand your vision, you'll simultaneously discover a new growth gap. You'll suddenly realize what you must change, how you must grow, and who you must become for your new dream to come true.

If you find yourself in a growth slump, maybe it's because your dream is too small. Perhaps you're coasting, able to get by on who you've become, and how you've already grown. The only way you're going to bump up the level of your leadership is to bump up the level of your vision. Higher dreams demand higher leadership capacity.

Proverbs 29:18 says, "Where there is no vision, the people perish" (KJV).

But so does the leader. Leaders without vision — or with easy, tiny or comfortable visions — drift into mediocrity and never rise to their God-given potential.

Don't let yourself go there. Dream big. Stretch. Put yourself in a place that demands that you grow. God called you and prepared you to lead boldly. See beyond where your church is today, and begin leading to the place God is calling you to go.

Let the words God spoke to Joshua stir your soul and inspire you to go further. "Be strong and courageous, because you will lead these people to inherit the land I swore to their ancestors to give them. ... Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go" (Joshua 1:6,9).

Reflect and Discuss

1. How much growth is your current vision demanding of you as a leader?
2. If your leadership has outpaced your vision, what do you need to do to expand your vision?
3. How does God's command to Joshua to be strong and courageous inspire you?

Apply

Spend this week in prayer, inviting the Holy Spirit to expand your vision. As He begins birthing new vision within you, ask Him to reveal how you must grow as a leader to realize the vision. Then make those growth steps part of your Growth TRAC.



Expand Your Vision

Assess: How passionate do you feel right now about your vision for your area of ministry?

If you find yourself in a growth _____, maybe it's because your _____ is too small.

Proverbs 29:18: "Where there is no vision, the people perish" (KJV). But so does the leader.

Joshua 1:6,9: "Be strong and courageous, because you will lead these people to inherit the land I swore to their ancestors to give them. ... Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go."

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Raise Your Pain Threshold

Team Review: What fresh vision has God started stirring in your soul? How must you grow as a leader to see that vision realized?

Assess: What kind of pain in leadership causes you to pull back, stop leading or stop growing?

Insights and Ideas

S amuel R. Chand observes in his book *Leadership Pain* that when your leadership doesn't produce pain, you're likely in a season of "unusual blessing," or you're not making a difference. According to Chand, growth equals change, change equals loss, and loss equals pain; therefore, growth equals pain.

Pain is part of the price you pay to lead. When you can no longer handle the pain, you'll stop growing. You will hit a ceiling in your leadership, and your church will stop moving forward. Your pain threshold must increase concurrently with your organization's growth. As Chand notes, "You'll grow only to the threshold of your pain."

Growing your vision demands that you grow your leadership. But it simultaneously demands that you grow your pain threshold. Bigger vision is painful. It hurts. It requires harder, more painful decisions. It produces more stress. It increases conflict. And even though the vision is from God, not everyone will be excited about it. Instead of retreating or searching for a path of least resistance, you must decide to grow through the pain.

In Matthew 17:21, Jesus clearly noted that prayer and fasting are crucial for winning the greatest spiritual battles in life. In other words, the greatest spiritual breakthroughs come at a higher price.

The biggest victories require the highest pain threshold. How do you need to grow as a leader so you can handle the pain that comes with a growing organization? Growing through pain thresholds requires four types of reserves.

Spiritual reserves. Spend time with God, take spiritual retreats and observe Sabbaths.

Mental reserves. Seek out training, resources and coaching.

Emotional reserves. Develop a network of support from counseling, coaching, friends and family.

Physical reserves. Exercise, and eat a healthy diet.

What are you doing to develop your spiritual, mental, emotional and physical reserves so you can navigate the struggles of leadership? Reaching your full potential and accomplishing the fresh vision God deposited in your soul will demand more from you. Grow your reserves so you can grow through your pain threshold.

Reflect and Discuss

1. What is the most painful part of leadership for you?
2. What can we do as a team to provide more support and encouragement so we can successfully navigate the pressures and pains of leadership?
3. What personal practices and disciplines do we need to embrace to raise our own pain thresholds?

Apply

Develop a plan to raise your pain threshold. Determine what you need to do personally to build spiritual, mental, emotional and physical reserves. Relationships will be an important part of this process. Whatever the case, don't ignore your pain threshold; otherwise, it will become the lid on your leadership. Choose to grow through it.



8 KEYS TO MAXIMIZE YOUR GROWTH AS A LEADER

Raise Your Pain Threshold

Assess: What kind of pain in leadership causes you to pull back, stop leading or stop growing?

According to Samuel R. Chand in his book *Leadership Pain*:

Growth = _____

Change = _____

Loss = _____

Therefore:

Growth= _____

The biggest _____ require the highest pain _____ .

Growing through pain thresholds requires four types of reserves:

_____ reserves.

_____ reserves.

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Apply

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