



Welcoming Growth

In this first issue of OnGrowing, Cyndi and Ellen offer a refresh on the power of intentional growth, especially through the practice of inviting feedback.

If you've worked with Cyndi or Ellen, you have chosen purposeful growth at some point in your life. If you're receiving this newsletter, we are likely aligned on two fundamental beliefs:

- **Growth and change is the way of nature;** it wants to happen.
- Intentional growth is necessary. Conditions of ever-increasing complexity require us to evolve – for the sake of ourselves, others, and the planet.

We've titled our newsletter OnGrowing as a way to honor these beliefs.

Leadership is about Openness and Humility

As former execs and experienced executive coaches, we know that **a key characteristic of successful and mature leadership is having a willingness to learn and grow** – being seriously curious with an **undefended ego**. This means you recognize that there is growth to be had, you are willing to feel uncomfortable, and you are open to discovering what you don't know you don't know.

Yes, leaders need skill and competence to succeed. In our coaching, you may have heard us describe this as “horizontal development.” Yet, no matter how fabulous your skill, without the will to grow, you have likely limited the potential of your impact.

Cyndi remembers meeting a newly-hired Executive Director (ED) at a place where she had been consulting. The ED had lots of experience and had risen as a top candidate through a rigorous interview process. When they met, the ED shared lots of information about past accolades. When Cyndi offered historical details about the organization, the ED was quick to say, “I see. Yes. Got it,” and asked not a single question. Cyndi felt a tickle of worry that this leader had many skills, but wasn’t willing to say, “I don’t know yet,” or “That’s new for me,” or “Tell me more.”

As months unfolded, the worry grew. The organization had a sophisticated culture of feedback, and the leader simply wasn’t open to it. Colleagues were accustomed to providing one another with observations, reflections, and suggestions - every day. Within this kind of environment, despite having a solid resume and honed skills, the ED was gone within a year.

When we trust someone’s honesty about their growth edges, we trust them even more when they assert particular ideas or champion clear direction. We trust their *yes*, their *no*, and their *I don’t know*.

Humility engenders confidence.

Feedback and Growth

Adults at an earlier stage of development believe their value comes from what they do and what they know. They prize expertise and often seek a “right” answer. They usually see feedback as a threat because it questions their expertise – and therefore, their value (in their eyes).

It’s a big move to mature to a place where we seek out feedback, as opposed to shielding and defending ourselves from it. **Welcoming feedback catalyzes a shift.** We can separate our *Self* – our “essence” which remembers our inherent wholeness and value – from *critique*, making us open to input from others without feeling defensive.

Underlying this developmental leap is the realization that the human world is constructed by interpretation, and **seeing the world through others’ eyes helps us collaborate with a broader view of time and success.** It’s the shift from Me to We, allowing for greater impact.

Not everyone chooses to grow. It’s true that life develops us all; new experiences come unbidden throughout our lives. Transitions, losses, and challenges force change. Yet, **welcoming growth is different.** It means you have a vision, a goal, or an awareness of something potent you can sense with your mind’s eye, your heart’s yearning, your body’s knowing wisdom.

Ready to stretch? One specific way to check your willingness to grow is to reflect on your orientation to feedback.

A Practice



Practice: Notice your Orientation to Feedback

Review the following statements. Which sounds the most like you, most of the time?

1. I experience feedback as an attack.
2. I view feedback as disapproval.
3. I usually defend myself in the face of feedback, or I dismiss it.
4. I welcome feedback when it helps me achieve my goals.
5. I welcome feedback because I'm interested in diverse perspectives.
6. I invite and offer feedback regularly.
7. I view feedback as a natural aspect of all living systems rather than as commentary about my worth or value; giving and receiving feedback is a "way of being."

-Developed by [VeDA - Vertical Development Academy](#)

Regardless of which statement sounds most familiar, just notice and let your ego step aside, without giving energy to either self-criticism or pride. And then...

Next steps:

- If you're not sure how you react to feedback, begin to pay attention.
- If statements 1, 2, or 3 resonated, try asking for feedback on something specific, like a meeting, a presentation, or an important communication. Start by asking for feedback from one person, then from two or three.
- If statements 4, 5, or 6 resonated for you, try stretching your perspective to the statement that falls below the one that resonated for you.



Deeper Dive:

A leader's openness to learning and feedback has everything to do with adult development – the journey to deeper self-awareness and a wider perspective that yields more capacity for uncertainty and challenge as well as wisdom and compassion. (What you may have heard us call "Vertical Development.")

If you've got five minutes, watch leadership coach and author Jennifer Garvey Berger's lovely [5-minute video introduction to the "map" of development](#). She describes how we make sense of the world and ourselves from the magical mind of childhood through to the transformational stage of adult development.

You Begin

Margaret Atwood • 1939-

You begin this way:

this is your hand,
this is your eye,
that is a fish, blue and flat
on the paper, almost
the shape of an eye.

This is your mouth, this is an O
or a moon, whichever
you like. This is yellow.

Outside the window
is the rain, green
because it is summer, and beyond that
the trees and then the world,
which is round and has only
the colors of these nine crayons.

This is the world, which is fuller
and more difficult to learn than I have said.
You are right to smudge it that way
with the red and then
the orange: the world burns.

Once you have learned these words
you will learn that there are more
words than you can ever learn.
The word hand floats above your hand

like a small cloud over a lake.

The word hand anchors
your hand to this table,
your hand is a warm stone
I hold between two words.

This is your hand, these are my hands, this is
the world,
which is round but not flat and has more colors
than we can see.

It begins, it has an end,
this is what you will
come back to, this is your hand.

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ONLY TO GROW


CUSTOMIZED LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT