

Chapter 21

The Basics of Growing

Every decision we make is a statement of how much we value ourselves.

—U. S. Army chaplain N. Alden Brown

Self-esteem is as much a matter of the heart as it is of cognition. This is especially true for the third building block of self-esteem, growing. Other names for growing include:

- Love in Action
- Completing
- Coming to Flower
- The *Even More* Factor

The "*Even More Factor*" derives from my most beloved teacher. Tall and gangly, some would say that he was not particularly handsome. In fact, some would say he was not good looking at all. But he knew his mother loved him, and so everybody liked him. He acquired his first

suit, a blue one, at nineteen years of age. And when he put on that blue suit with a clean white shirt and tie, thinking how he would teach and serve others, he said—and his face lit up as he related this—"I became *even more* handsome!"

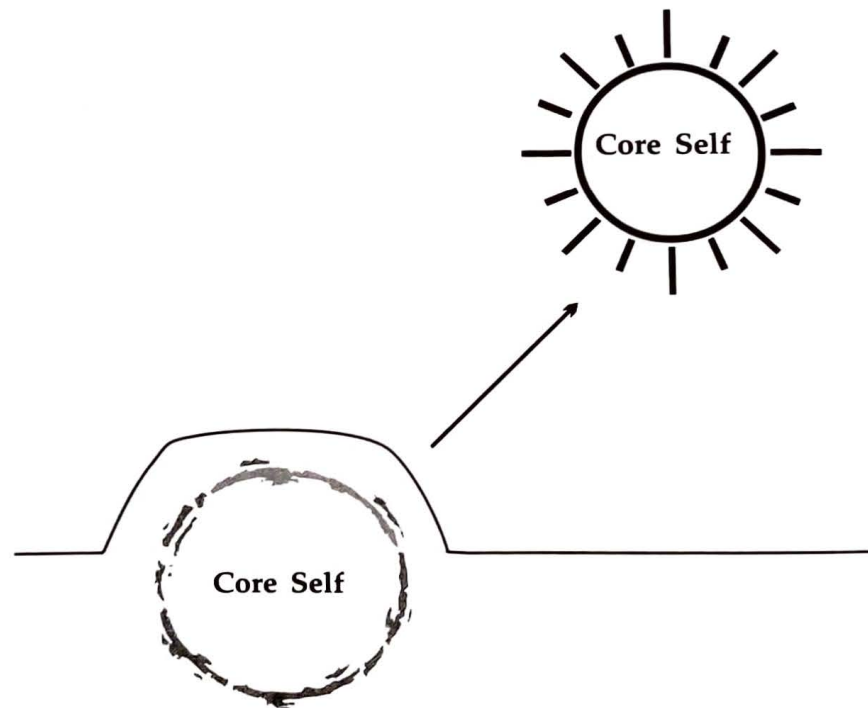
Factor 3, Growing, is the calm feeling of being *even more* of what you are at the core. In other words, Growing is developing the traits that exist in embryo. You feel deeply and quietly glad to be who you are because you know that you are being the best person you can be—at the reasonable and steady pace that is uniquely suited to you.

In short, then, Growing means:

- Developing our capacities and potentialities
- Ascending, moving toward excellence
- Elevating humanity, both others and the self

We have likened the core self to a crystal of infinite, unchanging worth—with every needed attribute in embryo. Factor I, Human Worth, accurately sees this. Factor II, Love, strengthens and shines the core and provides the foundation for Factor III, Growth.

Growing, or completing, involves scrubbing off remaining dirt and lifting the core into the light where it may shine even more brightly.



Love in Action: The Next Steps

Having already removed the cognitive distortions that can camouflage or dirty the core, the next tasks are to:

- Choose behaviors that are loving and self-promoting.
- Remove from around the core behaviors that are not loving because they are not self-promoting. These include any practices that are unhealthy or unkind, including drug use,

excessive anger, sex that objectifies, etc. Unloving behavior also includes sleeping too little, eating too much food, inhaling too much nicotine, etc.

Personal growth is one of life's greatest pleasures. To repeat, self-esteem does not mean complacency. Hafen (1989) notes:

[Some advance] the misleading idea that self-acceptance is the end of therapeutic or personal development rather than the beginning. Counseling can in this way become less concerned with assisting people toward change and more concerned with simply helping them to be more comfortable. That might be an adequate approach for helping someone come to terms with having a terminal illness; but it is unlikely to succeed as well in aiding the process of personal growth and development.

So self-esteem—the realistic, appreciative opinion of oneself—rests on the combination of self-acceptance (Factors I and II) and coming to flower (Factor III).

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"THE BEST THING YOU CAN DO IS TO GET VERY GOOD AT BEING YOU."

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Perspectives on Growing

Factor III—the healthy growing process—rests on the following ten principles:

1. We are designed/created to develop physically, mentally, socially, emotionally, and spiritually—and will do so when our capacities are nourished and exercised. The nourishment is love.
2. Developing our capacities is a way of loving ourselves. Sharing them is a way of loving others.
3. Growing is an *outgrowth* of Unconditional Worth and Unconditional Love, not a *condition* for these. Love provides the soil for growth. In the absence of a sense of Unconditional Worth and Love, success/performance/producing rarely lead to self-esteem. Therefore, the decision to develop is best preceded by Factors I and II.
4. Growing does not mean a high degree of competence, since:
 - The research indicates that competence does not predict global self-esteem.
 - Competence, as it is usually used, implies an outcome (i.e., accomplished, finished, perfected).
 Rather, Growing is a perception that says:
 - “I can” (i.e., I am capable and have ability.)
 - “I am on track and moving in a desired direction.”
 So Growing is a *direction* and a *process*, not an outcome. Thus, one can feel good about progress, even if one falls short of a desired goal (e.g., perfection).
5. Developing our capacities does not change, increase, or prove worth (worth exists at birth, already infinite and unchanging). Rather, as we grow: we express our worth; change our perceptions of self; experience ourselves with more joy, appreciation, and satisfaction; see our true, core selves more clearly; put ourselves in the sunlight where the core self shines more brightly.
6. Over time, good experiences with a friend solidify our trust and favorable opinions with that friend. Similarly, good experiences with self fix and enhance self-appreciation.
7. Growing is an ongoing process. Unlike the rose, which blooms and then dies, the core self can continue to grow even as the outer shell ages.
8. Growth is not completed in isolation, but is accomplished interdependently (e.g., with the help of others, nature, or grace).
9. Growing consists simply of cultivating *integrity* (moral conduct and character) and *wholesome pleasure* (i.e., pleasure that re-creates without compromising conscience, including: art, beauty, hobbies, learning, developing talents, serving, cleaning and beautifying surroundings, playing, working, and loving).
10. People choose to develop in order that they can be happier. As we are happier, we tend to enjoy life and ourselves more.

Questions Regarding Growth

Are Integrity and Pleasure Somehow Incompatible?

Integrity implies integration or wholeness. It implies that there is no division between one's behavior and one's values. When we develop integrity, we experience ourselves with more peace, and can say, with Winslow Homer, “All is lovely outside my house and inside my house”

and myself." Moral behavior becalms, and is kind, peaceable, and honest. Integrity is developed by starting the day with the decision, "Today I will put integrity first."

Although some have argued that pleasure is somehow incompatible with integrity, recall that the canonized Catholic saint, Francis of Assisi, said: "No man can live without delight, and that is why a man deprived of joy of spirit [i.e., joy of living, joie de vivre] goes over into carnal pleasures."

Gandhi further explained that it is not pleasure that corrupts the consciousness, but pleasure without conscience (e.g., pleasures that exploit, abuse, or violate trust). *Wholesome* pleasure is re-creative and necessary. Only the pleasures that degrade the human consciousness are to be avoided. In this sense, the pursuit of wholesome pleasure is consistent with the pursuit of integrity.

To Have Self-Esteem, Must I Have Perfect Integrity?

Inner peace requires that one is doing the best that one knows how. One can do no more than one knows how and/or is capable. Since everyone is fallible, each person falls short of perfection. However, we can still experience our worth if we try our best to be on course and to be moving in the desired direction.

When Is Growing Not Fun?

Growing is not fun when the outcome becomes a dire necessity. If, for example, one *must* develop into a successful salesperson as a condition of worth or happiness, then one will likely feel driven, not joyful. Again, we return to the fact that wholesome Growing assumes that Unconditional Worth and Love are first in place, so that one can enjoy the *process* of Growing without fear of failure or preoccupation with the outcome. Outcome preoccupation and fear of failure both derive from the same roots: *conditional* worth and *conditional* love.

Growing is climbing the staircase, not arriving. Thus, one can enjoy the progress and the direction without frustration for failing to arrive at perfection.

Reflections on Elevating Humanity and the Self

Factor III is a pleasant, satisfying reaching—reaching beyond one's present level of development, and reaching out to others—as these reflections suggest. Please take the time now to ponder them.

*Once you have a self [i.e., are secure in your own worth],
then it is easier to lose yourself in selfless service.*

—Anonymous

If I am not for myself, who will be for me? But if I am only for myself, what am I?

—Hillel, *Wisdom of Our Fathers*

*I discovered that if I worked always and only
for all humanity, I would be optimally effective.*

—Buckminster Fuller

*The great failure of education is that it has made
people tribe-conscious rather than species-conscious.*

—Norman Cousins

The great use of life is to spend it for something that will outlast it.

—William James

*One knows from daily life that one exists for others . . .
A hundred times each day I remind myself.*

—Albert Einstein

*He could have added fortune to fame, but caring for neither,
he found happiness and honor in being helpful to the world.*

—Written as George Washington Carver's
epitaph

*The desire to elevate humanity—the self, another person, all others—is what in everyday
language we call love. Love is wanting the very best for the object of our love.*

—John Burt

*If you have weaknesses, try to overcome them: If you fail, try again,
and if you then fail, keep trying, for God is merciful to his children,
a good deal kinder to us than we are to ourselves.*

—J. Golden Kimball

*If all else fails, try doing something nice for someone who doesn't expect it.
You'll be surprised how good you'll feel.*

—George Burns

*If you could follow this . . . rule [your mild depression] would be cured in fourteen
days. It is—to consider from time to time how you can give another person
pleasure . . . You would feel yourself to be useful and worthwhile.*

—Alfred Adler

No man need fear death, he need fear only that he may die without having known his greatest power—the power of his free will to give his life for others.

—Albert Schweitzer

[We are all] craftsmen, investing our talents.

—Laura Benet

As we see what we can do we more fully appreciate who we are.

—Anonymous

Service is an eye toward others' lasting development.

—Dallin H. Oaks

The only way the magic [i.e., growth] works is by hard work. But hard work can be fun.

—Jim Henson, Muppets Creator

*Some say principles are constraining. I say they are liberating.
Some say service is subservience. But I say it is ennobling.*

—Anonymous