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SIMPLIFY MAGAZINE

· A QUARTERLY, DIGITAL PUBLICATION FOR FAMILIES ·



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Letter from the Founder

As humans, we have it within our nature to grow, mature, evolve, and become the best version of ourselves. It is a journey of self-discovery and transformation that allows us to live a more intentional and fulfilling life. And that is why personal development is such an important topic for magazines and bookstores all over the world.

In this issue of Simplify Magazine, we explore aspects of personal development through eight insightful articles written by some of today's leading minds in the field. We cover topics such as building healthy habits, choosing mindset over metrics, strengthening relationships, developing charisma, and the qualities necessary for personal development.

Each author has been personally selected by me as they bring a wealth of knowledge and experience on this topic. Our writers include a Wall Street Journal bestselling writer, a behavioral investigator, a productivity expert, and more.

As always in our magazine, you'll find these experts offer practical advice, unique perspectives, and personal stories to help you navigate your personal growth journey. They share insights on how to overcome limiting beliefs, cultivate positive habits, build stronger relationships, and find inner peace and contentment.

We believe that personal development is a lifelong journey, and this issue of Simplify Magazine is just the beginning. We hope that the articles and resources we provide will inspire and empower you to take control of your life and become the best version of yourself.

With you on this journey,

Joshua Becker

Unlearning to Learn

How It Has Been Essential for My Personal Growth and Development

Ivanna Baron



I joined the Air Force in 1999 at the age of 19. Upon arrival at boot camp, we were required to turn in all of our civilian clothes, jewelry, and accessories in exchange for a uniform. The men had to get a buzz haircut, and the women had to remove any adornments that were out of regulation. We were required to give up everything that made us stand out as an individual.

In addition, we had to (temporarily at least) forget about everything happening in the “outside world” and become a sponge to learn Air Force culture, history, rules, and regulations.

During boot camp, I learned many skills, including time management, professionalism, structure, teamwork, and the importance of being willing to learn. Being willing to learn during boot camp helped me gain knowledge and pass the tests needed to graduate successfully, and being ready to learn in general has been crucial in my growth journey.

As I’ve gotten older, I’ve found that, even though I’m an avid learner and am always willing to learn new things, my perceived knowledge about certain things has kept me from accepting that there are new ways of doing things. This has kept me from growing, and this is where “unlearning” came in.

I first heard about the concept of unlearning to learn on a mental health podcast I listened to last year. I was immediately

intrigued to learn more about the practice. Since then, it has changed my life.

I'd like to share four areas where unlearning to learn has been essential for my personal growth and development. I hope this can also help you.

Unlearning to Learn in My Career

Since implementing the practice of unlearning to learn in my career, I've found that I have become more efficient, creative, and free thinking. I'll use the example of sending emails at work.

I can sometimes be wordy when writing to my colleagues because I want to convey my entire message. But I recently took a writing class at work where I had to unlearn the habit of writing lengthy emails and learn how to remove filler words and jargon to relay my message. I learned that readers typically only scan emails when they first read them to get to the point. By shortening my emails and including only pertinent information, I was saving time for myself and the recipient.

For years I thought long emails were the way to go, but allowing myself to unlearn this to learn something new has helped me grow in this career area.

Although sending an email is a small example of how unlearning to learn has helped me grow in my career, it has opened my

mind to seek other areas at work where I can unlearn to learn something new. It has helped me approach tasks differently and be more attentive during work training and presentations. I find myself more eager than before to learn on my job.

Unlearning to Learn in Marriage

I've been married to my wonderful husband for over 20 years now. If I'm honest, communication wasn't our strong suit initially, and we're still working to improve our communication daily.

In the past, when we had disagreements, I would become defensive, emotional, and easily offended. For example, if I thought that I wasn't getting my point across to my husband about something I felt, I would become frustrated at him, say something like "You just don't get it," shut down, and give him the silent treatment until I was ready to talk again.

I eventually realized that I was only hurting myself by doing this. I still left our disagreements feeling frustrated and unheard, while he felt like a bad husband (which he is the furthest thing from being).

To improve my communication with my husband, I had to unlearn some behaviors I'd learned about communicating throughout my life, even things I learned subconsciously by watching others around me. I took the initiative to learn about

effective communication in marriage by reading relationship books, listening to marriage podcasts, and seeking the advice of other couples who have been married longer than we have.

By doing this, I learned about my communication style and my husband's and have communicated more effectively, which has helped me grow personally and in my marriage.

I have also taken the communication skills I've learned into other relationships, such as with my children, friends, extended family, and coworkers. I find myself listening more to hear what is being said than just listening to respond, which I believe all of us can do more.

Unlearning to Learn in Parenting

My children are no longer really children; they're young adults, 18 and 16. Being their mom has been one of the most rewarding things I've been blessed to do. But as we all know, kids are not born with a handbook—unless you count the *What to Expect When You're Expecting* series, which I probably read a hundred times when my kids were babies. I've had to learn how to be a mom, and be one that my kids can depend on and look up to.

Most of us can say that there are some things we wish our parents had done differently when raising us, and I'm sure our children will say the same. So with this, there are some things I

had to unlearn from my upbringing to become the kind of parent I wanted to be.

For instance, in my days growing up, there wasn't much commentary when I was told to do something; it was more that we were simply instructed to do it because we were meant to do it. As a parent who wants good communication between my children and me, I had to unlearn saying, "Do it because I said so," because I understand that my children's generation is different, more inquisitive, and more knowledgeable (thanks to technology). So when I tell them to do something or not to do something, I also try to communicate with them the why and the benefit.

Another big thing I unlearned is believing that each kid would require the same parenting style, and I learned that I had to parent each one according to their personality, love language, and learning style.

I am still unlearning to learn in my parenting, and I know I always will. I'm amazed at how many things my children teach me about the world, even though I've been around much longer than they have!

Unlearning to Learn for Mental Wellness

I am someone who has suffered from anxiety, and before seeking help through behavioral therapy, I would allow my

thoughts to spiral. I wouldn't do anything to stop the damaging thoughts, because I didn't know I could.

The idea that I couldn't control my thoughts was a belief that I had to unlearn to feel well mentally. Over the years, I've worked hard to reframe my negative thinking. I've learned that I can direct where my mind wanders. Through research, books, and therapy, I realized that, thanks to neural plasticity, my brain can create new neural pathways that help me think more positively, which helps me feel less anxious.

When I find my thoughts heading in a negative direction, I will stop and ask myself if this thought is true, likely to happen, or helpful for me to think about right now. If it's not, I'll immediately focus my attention on something that is.

Unlearning to learn has been an invaluable tool I've picked up during my personal growth and development journey. I hope you can also put this in your toolbox for the journey ahead.

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Ivanna Baron is a writer and encourager who shares her experiences and practical advice for personal growth, wellness, and faith on her website, ivannabaron.com

On Practicing Virtues

David Cain



When my older sister joined the junior high basketball team, my dad bought her Larry Bird's book, *Bird on Basketball*. In it, Bird said he began each day by shooting 500 jump shots. Then he would go to the free-throw line and shoot free throws until he hit 99 in a row.

This blew my nine-year-old mind. I wasn't sure I'd even shot a basketball 500 times in my entire life. How did he do it 500 times a day?

My dad explained that all Larry Bird needed to do in life was play basketball, so he could spend all his time just getting better at it. That's how he lived his life, and that's why we even know who he is.

Ten years later, I was working in a supermarket, shelving jars of pickles and bottles of soya sauce by the caseload. I shelved hundreds of cases a day and soon became an expert in all grocery-stocking motions. I knew how much every type of case weighed just by looking at it. I knew how to cut each one open without damaging the product, how to pull out six mustard bottles at a time, and how to turn the labels outward as I shelved them.

To this day, I can break down any cardboard box in seconds. My hands do it automatically. Just by looking at a cardboard box, I can determine intuitively where the glue or packing tape is

holding it together, how much force is required to pull it apart, and how to twist it into its flattened form in an instant. There's no chance Larry Bird could outdo me in this area.

The skills of shelving condiments and breaking down cardboard boxes have limited market value, but the point is that a human being can become profoundly good at something just by doing it a lot. The body-mind system can't help but master whatever it does frequently. No aspiration to greatness is needed, just a life situation that has you doing a thing many times.

Making Habits on Purpose

This tendency toward frictionless doing isn't always a good thing. You can just as easily become extremely efficient at reflexively pulling out your phone, scowling at other drivers, or reliving arguments in your head. The hands—and the mind—given enough familiarity with a situation, know exactly how to move to find what they're seeking, and that may incline us toward habits we don't want or away from habits we do want.

The lifelong procrastinator, for example, is extremely practiced at reasoning himself out of tackling the day's most important task. "I can do this tomorrow instead of tackling it right now." This or any other move, if performed often enough, can become frictionless, nearly automatic, like Larry Bird's jump shot.

Essentially, we're always practicing *something*. We're always removing friction and strengthening reflexes somewhere.

Practice doesn't simply make us better at thing X and keep everything else the same. It also changes our values and priorities, such that we do thing X more naturally and seldom do thing Y. Using snappy comebacks, for example, can become a reflex for shutting down a debate before it happens.

Inadvertently, you've become someone who always deflects critics and never engages them, creating even more incentive to deflect in the future.

In this sense, what we practice largely determines who we become, whether or not we're doing that practice (and the resulting becoming) on purpose. Personal development boils down to recognizing and leveraging this tendency to become what we practice, by making it a conscious process instead of a haphazard one.

Time Limits

What you're able to practice, and thus what you're able to become, is limited by how much practice time is available to you. If you want to improve your jump shot, for example, you can do that only in specific situations, namely ones in which you have access to a basketball, a hoop, and some time. If you want to improve your carpentry, you need to find a building project

you can participate in. If you want to improve your cooking, you need a decently stocked kitchen.

Just finding the time to develop your skills and qualities can be its own challenge. Getting 500 omelets under your belt isn't something someone can do in a morning. To strengthen most skills, you need to organize your life in such a way that it's largely made of practice opportunities. There are good how-to resources on how to do this with every conceivable skill, from surfing to stunt driving.

However, I want to draw your attention to a more fundamental type of personal development—working on subtle inner skills that apply to virtually any situation. For these, there is no shortage of practice opportunities, and thus no limit on how far you can go with them.

Secret Ally

I have a practice to help me become a kinder and less judgmental person. I credit it for drastically improving my experience of crowds, queues, public spaces, and life among strangers in general. I call it the “secret ally” practice. Essentially, whenever I find myself mildly annoyed at a stranger—for such offenses as poor sidewalk sharing, unfortunate word choice, or questionable shopping cart

placement—I resolve right then to become their secret ally for a few minutes.

My impulse in these situations is to silently grumble or condemn this person, which does nothing but darken my mood, rationalize my judgmental reflex, and reinforce the cynical parts of my mind. So I take that feeling of annoyance as a cue to practice an entirely different program: I voluntarily assume the role of a secret ally of whoever provoked my ire.

For the next minute or two, while I'm still in their vicinity, I will look out for this person and help them should they need it. If they are struggling to reach something on a high shelf, I will offer to get it for them. If their grocery bags tear open, I will help them collect the scattering oranges.

I'd probably do these things anyway, but that's not the point. Unbeknownst to this person, I've gone from silently resenting them to silently looking out for them.

Assuming this role of guardian angel, even on a very small scale, turns off the indignation and resentment parts of my mind and turns on the helpful part. Essentially, I'm training the goodwill reflex, making it more familiar and closer to the surface, while the resentment reflex becomes less familiar, less sensitive.

It also makes for a better subjective experience. It feels good in the moment to contact this helpful part of yourself, just as it feels bad to indulge the indignant part.

What's so wonderful about this practice is that it's portable and self-contained. You don't need a basketball court or a gas range to strengthen the subtle inner skill of goodwill. You can perform countless iterations of this practice just by living daily life, as you'll never run out of small annoyances to work with.

Of course, if you don't opt to practice helpfulness whenever you get mildly annoyed, you're still practicing something. You may be getting better at generating contempt, despair, cynicism, or some other quality nobody needs more of.

Desirable Human Qualities

We can call these subtle inner skills—helpfulness being only one of them—*virtues*. Virtues are practicable traits that, frankly, make you a better person—certainly by your own standards, but probably by those of others as well. There aren't many people who prefer a boastful person to an honest one, or a petty person to a magnanimous one. Practicing virtues, with few exceptions, is only going to help you and the world around you.

People can argue over which virtues are most important, but it's no accident that philosophers throughout history have come up with similar lists of the highest human qualities.

Aristotle listed nine: *wisdom, prudence, justice, fortitude, courage, liberality, magnificence, magnanimity, and temperance.*

Buddhism has its ten “perfections”: *generosity, morality, renunciation, discernment, diligence, forbearance, truthfulness, resolve, loving-kindness, and equanimity.*

Ben Franklin named thirteen essential virtues: *temperance, silence, order, resolution, industriousness, sincerity, justice, moderation, cleanliness, tranquility, chastity, and humility.*

Some words will resonate more than others for any given person. Virtually everyone, however, can recognize the transformative power contained in some of these classical virtues. If your diligence or temperance could be as strong and frictionless as Larry Bird’s jump shot, how would life change?

Virtue Practice

Unlike with external skills, such as shooting a basketball or collapsing cardboard boxes, you can practice virtues all the time. You can practice generosity in virtually every interpersonal situation. You can bring industriousness to your job, but also to your lawn, your cooking, or your fitness goals. You can practice renunciation with respect to social media browsing, biting your nails, or encounters with bowls of potato chips. You have every opportunity to become an expert at these universally valued

qualities, without ever mentioning your intentions to anyone else, although they will undoubtedly notice the changes.

In fact, life can be viewed entirely as an arena for practicing virtues, which is exactly what many religious and philosophical traditions advocate, from the biblical tradition to the Stoics. Many have argued that practicing virtue in daily life is really the *only* thing you need to focus on, because it will result in a more thorough fulfillment of all your other obligations.

This might be true, but it's also a place where a particular danger might sneak in. Making your whole life into a virtue practice can quickly lead to overwhelm, as you find yourself scrambling to fulfill long lists of rules and precepts, and perhaps overlooking the subtle, inner virtues those rules are supposed to be helping you strengthen.

I advocate a more playful approach. Forget perfection, but always be working on *some* aspect of your character.

Here's one way: every time you arrive somewhere—at the grocery store, the boardroom, the airport terminal—choose one of those virtue words and resolve to be a wellspring of this quality while you're here. When you arrive somewhere else, pick a different virtue. Walking through a door is a good cue.

For the most part, this makes every engagement easier anyway. It gives you a private little project that makes you feel good and come off better to others.

If it ever seems tedious, just remember the role of practice: it removes friction and makes the movement feel natural and easy. The more you practice patience, or generosity, or magnanimity, the more these qualities naturally arise in you at the appropriate times, with no prior deliberation or effort.

This is why Larry Bird took 500 jump shots a day—to make the movement so familiar, so natural, that it simply *emerged* from him, at every moment it was needed.

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David Cain writes about navigating the human experience on [Raptitude.com](https://raptitude.com). He is the author of *How to Do Things: Productivity for the Productivity-challenged*.

How to Develop a Habit: 10 Steps to Get You There

Joshua Becker



Helen was a mom of two young boys who decided she wanted to make some changes in her life. In particular, she wanted to start exercising regularly.

Like many of us, Helen struggled to develop the new habit. She knew that making positive changes in her life would be worth the effort, but she still found it difficult to stick with her new routine.

If you're like Helen and looking to develop new habits, you're not alone. Helen's story, in many ways, represents all of us.

Developing new habits can be challenging, but it's also immensely rewarding.

Whether you're looking to start a new fitness routine, keep your home clutterfree, or establish a consistent morning routine, developing positive habits can improve your overall quality of life.

If you see yourself in the example of Helen, I want to share with you what I have learned—both personally from creating new habits in my life as well as through some of the latest research on habit creation. And, as always, I will provide practical steps that you can take along the way.

While there is probably no one-size-fits-all approach to habit change, following these ten steps will put you well on your way

to forming positive habits that will enrich your life for years to come.

Step 1: Choose a Habit and the Rationale Behind It

The first step to developing a new habit is to not just pick the habit but to get clear on the deeper rationale behind it as well.

Think about what you hope to achieve by developing this habit. By understanding the “why” behind your habit, you’ll be more likely to stick with it over the long term. And the more meaningful the rationale, the more likely you’ll put in the effort to make it a reality.

A friend of mind recently picked up a morning gym routine. His motivation? His daughter born only six months ago. As he explained to me, “Everything has changed. I want to be there for her graduation and her wedding. I’ve got to start taking care of my health.”

If you want to start a daily meditation practice, move beyond “This is all the rage, so I’m going to start one too.” Find a deeper rationale. “I want to reduce stress so I can be the best mother or friend that I can be. I want to increase mindfulness so that I can show up for the people in my life.” By reminding yourself of these benefits, you’ll be more motivated to stick with your practice even on days when it feels challenging.

Getting clear on your motivation for the change you want to make won't automatically create a new habit, but it's an important first step that you shouldn't overlook.

Step 2: Commit for an Extended Period

Research has shown that it takes an average of 66 days to develop a new habit. At least that's the generally accepted number.

Different studies produce different results to this question. In fact, it can take anywhere from 18 to 254 days, depending on the person and the habit in question.

As someone once explained to me, "It might take just one day to start a habit of eating a bowl of ice cream every night, but getting into the habit of going for a run every day might take a bit longer." True.

Regardless of how long your habit change is going to take to stick, it's important to commit to your new habit for an extended period at first.

I always recommend 29 days. That period is long enough to see if the habit is making a positive change in your life, but it's still a doable goal if the habit is difficult at first.

The time I first tried this time frame was when I was learning to get up early in the morning. I committed to waking up at five am every day for 29 days. The experiment didn't require me to commit the rest of my life to getting up that early, but it did provide a long enough experiment to see if I liked it.

One way to do this is to use the “don't break the chain” method popularized by comedian Jerry Seinfeld. Simply mark each day on a calendar that you successfully complete your habit and aim to not break the chain for your entire 29-day experiment. This creates a sense of momentum and helps you stay motivated.

Step 3: Make It Easy and Specific

B. J. Fogg, a leading expert on habit formation, has developed a formula for creating new habits called the “tiny habits” method. The idea behind this method is to make your habit as easy and specific as possible. This increases the likelihood that you'll actually do it and helps build momentum over time.

Instead of aiming to write for an hour every day, you might start with something as small as writing for five minutes each day.

The key is to make it something so easy that you can't say no.

A woman wanted to develop the habit of running. Her goal was to run to the end of her driveway as a bare minimum each day. Of course, once she reached the end of her driveway, she usually

went much farther. But in her mind, keeping the goal easy and specific was the needed step to keep her motivation high enough to lace up her shoes each day.

Step 4: Use Positive Self-Talk

The way we talk to ourselves can have a big impact on our ability to form new habits. Using positive self-talk can help us stay motivated and increase our belief in our ability to succeed.

For example, instead of telling yourself “I’m not good at this” or “I can’t do this,” try reframing your thoughts in a more positive light. Instead, say, “I’m getting better at this every day” or “I can do this if I keep practicing.” This helps to build a growth mindset and increases your chances of success.

Step 5: Tell a Friend

Sharing your new habit with a friend can help keep you accountable and provide a source of support and encouragement. It can also make the process of habit formation more fun and social.

It’s one thing to go on a diet. It’s something completely different to tell all your friends that you’re going on a diet!

If you’re trying to start a new fitness routine, find a workout buddy who shares your goals and commit to working out

together a few times a week. Even if you don't find someone to embrace the same habit as you, just explaining to someone why you are making the change can remind you of your motivation.

Sharing your new habit with others can make the process of habit formation more enjoyable and increase your chances of success.

Step 6: Create a Cue-Based Path

Habits are triggered by cues, which can be anything from a time of day to a specific location or even an emotion. By creating a cue-based path, you can make it easier to establish your new habit and stick with it over time.

For example, if you want to start a morning workout routine, you might set out your workout clothes the night before as a visual cue. You could also choose a specific time each day to work out, such as right after you wake up or right before breakfast.

Another way to create a cue-based plan is to tie your new habit to an existing routine in your life. B. J. Fogg claims he started getting into better physical shape by committing to doing at least one push-up every time he went to the bathroom. His might be an almost comical scenario, but the method is brilliant.

What is something you already do every day? And how can you add this new habit into that already existing routine with a helpful cue?

Step 7: Celebrate Successes

It's important to celebrate your successes along the way to building a new habit. This helps to reinforce the behavior and provides a sense of accomplishment.

If you've successfully completed your new habit for a week straight, treat yourself to something rewarding, like a cup of your favorite coffee or a movie night at home. This helps to create a positive association with your new habit and encourages you to keep going.

Step 8: Extend Compassion to Yourself When Needed

Developing a new habit can be challenging, and it's important to extend compassion to yourself along the way. If you slip up or miss a day, don't beat yourself up. Instead, use it as an opportunity to learn and recommit to your habit.

The only way to fail is to quit entirely. So don't let one missed day derail your entire experiment. Give yourself some grace.

After all, "Pobody's nerfect."

Step 9: Evaluate, Assess, Adjust

After your 29-day habit-building experiment, evaluate and assess your progress, and adjust as needed. This allows you to course-correct if your habit isn't working or if you need to make changes to better support your success.

For example, if you've been working on a new habit for a few weeks and you're not seeing progress, take some time to evaluate what's working and what's not. Then adjust your approach as needed. This might involve changing your cue, making your habit more specific, or seeking out additional support.

Or maybe you'll want to change the habit entirely.

I mentioned earlier that I spent 29 days waking up at five am as a habit-building experiment. After the 29 days, I decided five am was too early for me (mostly because I found myself needing to go to bed earlier than the rest of my family). Most days now, I wake up at six am—which is still earlier than I've ever consistently woken up in my life and fits better into the life I'm trying to build.

Step 10: Build on Your Successes

Once you've successfully developed a new habit, congratulations! Use the momentum to build confidence and

motivation to make other changes in your life if they would be beneficial. Intentionality brings about intentionality. And one positive change tends to lead to another.

Developing a new habit takes time and effort, but it's worth it in the end.

By following these ten steps, you'll be well on your way to forming positive habits that will serve you well for years to come. Remember to be patient with yourself, celebrate your successes, and extend compassion to yourself along the way.

With commitment and dedication, you can achieve your goals and develop the habits you need to live the life you want.

The key is to find the approach that works best for you and stick with it. With time and focused effort, you can achieve your goals and develop the habits you need to live your best life.

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Joshua Becker is the founder of [Becoming Minimalist](#), author of *Things That Matter*, and creator of *Simplify Magazine*.

How to Be Charismatic (and Develop Warmth and Competence)

Vanessa Van Edwards



Charisma is a quality that draws people in and makes them want to be around you. It can open doors in your personal and professional life, helping you to build relationships, win friends, and influence others. But what exactly is charisma, and how can you develop it?

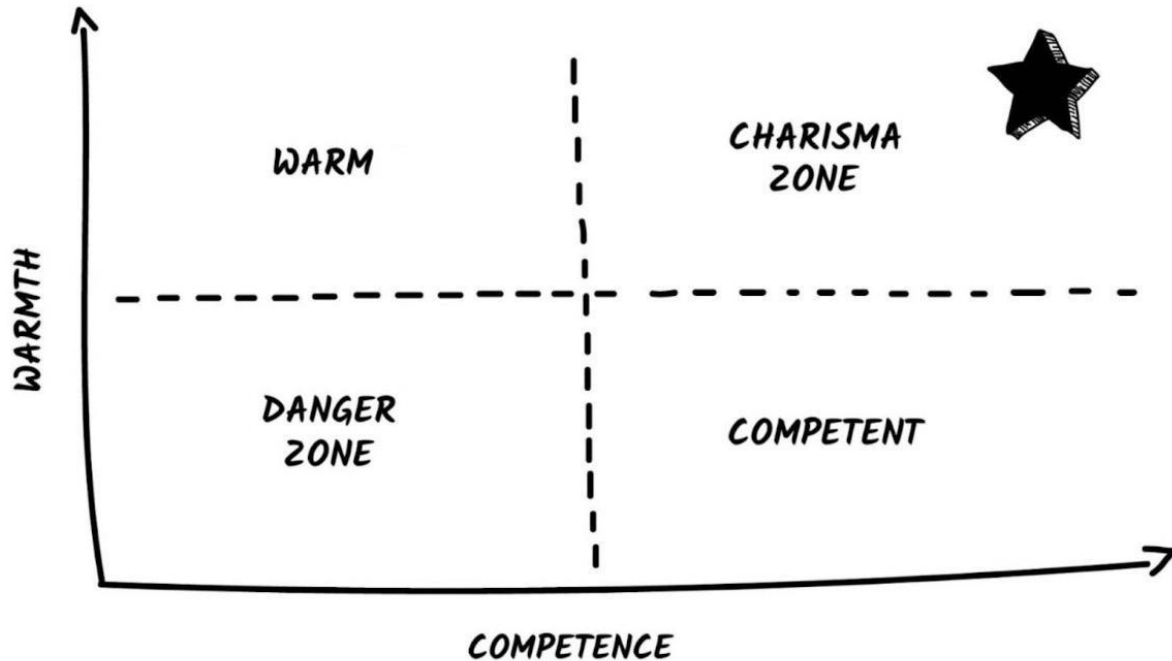
In this article, we'll explore the two key elements of charisma: warmth and competence. We'll also provide actionable tips on how to be charismatic so that you can become better in both work and everyday life.

Defining Charisma

Charisma is a soft skill composed of qualities that make people want to be around you. For example, you might consider Dwayne Johnson as charismatic with his use of “smoldering.” Or, you might be won over by Barack Obama’s vocal authority cues.

Either way, these charismatic leaders have two distinct traits that charisma is made of: warmth and competence.

Charisma = Warmth + Competence



Warmth is the level of friendliness, kindness, and empathy that a person exhibits. People who are perceived as warm are often seen as approachable, trustworthy, and likable.

Competence is the level of skill, knowledge, and ability that a person has, and it is closely linked to expertise, intelligence, and capability. People who are perceived as competent are often seen as credible, confident, and influential, which can help them to build trust and authority in their personal and professional relationships.

By having both warmth and competence, you'll be in the Charisma Zone, the most charismatic quadrant possible.

Let's take a look at warmth and competence in more detail.

How to Harness Warmth

Warmth is about making someone feel welcome. This might mean being calm and serene for someone who is very stressed. Or bringing out the excitement for someone who's enthused. Or being contemplative and empathetic for someone who needs advice. Researcher Susan Fiske even found that "competence without warmth is likely to leave us feeling suspicious."[\[1\]](#)

Here are some tips for developing warmth.

1. *Use vocal cues:* The way you speak can convey a lot about your level of warmth. For example, using a warm tone of voice, speaking in a friendly manner, and using your happy hello can all boost your perceived levels of warmth. Sound interested in what the other person is saying and show empathy to boost warmth.
2. *Use nonverbal cues:* Nonverbal cues, such as smiling, making eye contact, and using open body language, can also help to convey warmth. When you smile and make the appropriate amount of eye contact, you're showing that you're friendly and approachable. When you use an open body language, such as uncrossed arms and legs, you're signaling that you're open to conversation.
3. *Listen actively:* Listening actively involves paying close attention to what the other person is saying and

responding in a way that shows you're engaged in the conversation. You can show warmth by nodding, using verbal affirmations (such as "I see," "Uh-huh," or "That's interesting"), and asking follow-up questions.

When we think of people who embody warmth, Oprah Winfrey is one individual who comes to mind. She has built her career on being relatable, friendly, and approachable. She is known for her ability to connect with people from all walks of life.

Oprah exhibits warmth through her nonverbal body language cues. She smiles frequently, maintains eye contact, and uses open and relaxed body language. These nonverbal cues help to put others at ease and create a comfortable environment. She also uses vocal cues to convey warmth. She speaks with a friendly and upbeat tone, and she uses empathy and active listening skills to show that she is genuinely interested in what others have to say.

How to Develop Competence

Competence is another key element of charisma. When you convey competence, people respect you and trust your judgment. Competence involves showing expertise in a particular area, being confident in your abilities, and communicating your ideas clearly.

Here are some tips for developing competence.

1. *Build your skills:* Competence is often the result of hard work and expertise in a particular area. If you want to be perceived as competent, you need to develop your skills and knowledge in that area. Read books, take classes, and practice your skills as much as possible, and definitely check out our guide on goal setting.
2. *Communicate confidently:* Confident communication is being able to communicate your ideas clearly and effectively. Use simple language, avoid jargon, and be concise—and most importantly, practice with this guide on sounding confident.
3. *Be confident:* Confidence is an important aspect of competence. If you're confident in your abilities, others will be more likely to trust you and take you seriously. Practice self-affirmations and visualization exercises to build your confidence.

Steve Jobs was a master at creating products that people didn't even know they wanted. He was the co-founder of Apple and is responsible for some of the most iconic products of our time, including the iPod, iPhone, and iPad. His attention to detail and ability to anticipate consumer needs made him a highly competent leader in the tech industry.

And he even mastered the pause—take a look at how many times he pauses for effect in just the first minute of introducing the iPhone:

You can watch that video here: <https://bit.ly/43egeKa>

Charisma = Balancing Warmth and Competence

So, which should you be more of? Warm or competent?

The answer is both!

Being too warm without enough competence can make you appear overly friendly but lacking in expertise, while being too competent without enough warmth can make you seem aloof or unapproachable.

Having both warmth and competence is key to charisma. Warmth establishes a connection with others, making them feel comfortable and open, while competence inspires respect and confidence in your abilities.

Practicing and Refining Charisma

Remember, charisma is not something that you are born with—it is a skill that can be developed and improved upon! There are many ways to practice and refine your charisma, from attending

networking events to participating in public speaking opportunities.

Networking events are a great way to practice your charisma because they provide opportunities to meet new people and build connections. When attending a networking event, focus on these tips:

- Review the conference agenda and prioritize the sessions you want to attend ahead of time. Get a map of the conference venue if it's large.
- Choose at least one session that is completely out of your comfort zone to expand your learning.
- Be mindful of spending too much time with a conference buddy. Challenge yourself to network with new people during some parts of the conference.
- Remember that you're never really "off" at a conference. Behave professionally and avoid excessive drinking.
- Check out our networking guide for more!

Public speaking is also a good platform to practice and refine your charisma. When speaking in public, focus on these tips:

- Avoid self-blocking by holding a clicker or microphone.

- Consolidate your bags and avoid carrying more than one thing.
- Avoid nervous body language cues like self-touch gestures.
- Reframe nervous energy as excitement and channel it into passionate gestures.
- Purposefully move instead of pacing to engage the audience.
- Check out our public speaking guide for more tips.

Finally, it is important to get feedback and adjust your approach in order to become more charismatic. Always use feedback from others in a constructive manner and explore options rather than closing yourself to external recommendations.

Warmth and Competence Are Key

As the great leadership expert John C. Maxwell once said, “People may hear your words, but they feel your attitude.” So let your attitude be one of warmth and competence, and watch as your charisma and success soar!

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Vanessa Van Edwards is the bestselling author of *Captivate: The Science of Succeeding with People* and *Cues: Master the Secret Language of Charismatic Communication*. Millions visit [her website](#) monthly for her methods that turn “soft skills” into actionable, masterable frameworks that can be applied daily. More than 50 million people watch her engaging YouTube tutorials and TEDx Talk. She has been featured on CNN, BBC, CBS Mornings, Fast Company, Inc. Magazine, Entrepreneur Magazine, USA Today, The Today Show, and many more.

You can find her helpful guides on her website: [Goal Setting](#), [Sounding Confident](#), [Networking](#), [Public Speaking](#).

The Path to Productiveness: Choosing a Mindset Over Metrics

Mike Vardy



In today's fast-paced world, productivity has become the gold standard for measuring success. The quest for maximum output has driven individuals and organizations to adopt various techniques and strategies to get more done within a shorter time frame.

This obsession with productivity has, however, given rise to an unhealthy culture of overworking, burnout, and diminishing returns on our efforts. The pursuit of more productivity has led to a life of less fulfillment.

Productivity is, essentially, broken.

I've studied productivity for the better part of the last 15 years. From my beginnings as a productivity parodist (poking fun at the absurdity of hacking our lives to death), to actually becoming the very thing I was parodying, to landing somewhere in between. I don't find the pursuit of productivity as funny as I used to and have focused my efforts on shifting the mindset of those obsessed with checking off as many boxes as possible to helping them figure out what boxes needed to be checked off at all.

While I've taken up this challenge in recent years, I know that it's a daunting one. That's because quantitative productivity overrides qualitative productivity by a pretty wide margin. It's

far simpler to understand numbers over nuance and metrics over mindset.

Is the author who writes one book in their lifetime any less productive than the one who writes one hundred? It depends. Harper Lee's only book was *To Kill a Mockingbird*, while Suzanne Collins has written quite a few more than that.

How do we find balance between the amount we do and the quality of what we do? I believe it lies in reframing—no, eliminating—the word *productivity* from our collective lexicon. I propose a step back in time to an era when productivity wasn't the way. Productiveness was.

Productivity vs. Productiveness

Productivity refers to the ability to produce a large quantity of work within a given time frame. This concept has evolved from the industrial age, where the efficiency of assembly lines was key to a company's success. With the rise of the knowledge economy, productivity has shifted to measuring how effectively we use our mental faculties and resources to create value.

Productiveness, on the other hand, is a more holistic approach to work and personal growth. It emphasizes a balance between quantity and quality, with the goal of achieving sustainable, long-term results. A productive person focuses on their overall well-being, personal growth, and the value they bring to their

work and relationships. This mindset enables individuals to be more intentional with their time and energy, ensuring that they are not only efficient but also effective in their pursuits.

It's interesting to me that the word *productiveness* predates *productivity*. According to the *Online Etymology Dictionary*, the word *productivity* was first used in 1809. Prior to that, *productiveness* was commonly used instead, starting in 1727. And what's more is that productivity is technically defined as "quality of being productive" while productiveness is defined as "state of being productive." But in 1899 things started to take a turn for "productivity" as we know it today.

Productivity took over from productiveness around midway through the Industrial Revolution. Around this time things started to speed up a bit, leading to more activity around being productive than being in a productive state.

Quality could, however, still be top of mind through activity. The world wasn't yet at a point where doing and making more was the primary goal. But it was on its way as the turn of the century approached faster than the previous turn.

In 1899 there was an additional definition applied to productivity, one with an economic sense at top of mind. This secondary definition—"rate of output per unit"—started the shift from a qualitative slant to a quantitative one.

There was merit to adding a quantitative element to the concept of being productive for sure, but the problem is that the shift has gone too far in the other direction. That's where we are today. An imbalance between quantity and quality, with quantity winning out more often than not.

Interestingly, the quantitative aspect of productivity was added to the definition at the midway mark of the Technological Revolution, which occurred in the late 1800s into the early 1900s. Humans had the tools to make more at scale for the first time, and so we did.

Let me be clear: to suggest quantity doesn't matter is foolish. But to make it the measuring stick while forsaking quality is also foolish.

It would also be foolish to think that society hasn't advanced enough in the ages that followed the Industrial Revolution and the Technological Revolution (which includes The Information Age and The Imagination Age that was introduced in the 1993 essay "The Age of Imagination" by Charlie Magee) that we cannot mesh quantity and quality now more than ever before. But it'll take embracing a productiveness mindset to do it.

The Limitations of Metrics

Paradoxically, focusing on numbers alone when determining how productive one is does have its limitations. Here are just three for you to contemplate:

1. *The illusion of efficiency:* Productivity metrics often focus on measuring the efficiency of our work, which can create an illusion of progress. While these metrics can help us track our performance and identify areas for improvement, they can also lead to an unhealthy obsession with numbers. This can result in sacrificing the quality of our work or neglecting other important aspects of our lives.
2. *Burnout and diminishing returns:* The relentless pursuit of productivity can lead to burnout, a state of emotional, physical, and mental exhaustion caused by excessive and prolonged stress. As we push ourselves to the limits, we may experience diminishing returns on our efforts. This is because our bodies and minds are not designed to function optimally under constant pressure, and restorative periods of rest are crucial for long-term performance and well-being.
3. *Neglecting personal growth and relationships:* A narrow focus on productivity metrics can also cause us to neglect essential aspects of personal growth and relationship building. By prioritizing tasks that yield immediate, quantifiable results, we may overlook opportunities to

develop new skills, nurture our passions, or forge meaningful connections with others. Over time, this can lead to a lack of fulfillment and an imbalance in our lives.

Embracing a Productiveness Mindset

The shift from a productivity mindset to a productiveness mindset, as I've already mentioned, isn't an easy one. There's no quick fix or silver bullet. Embracing a productiveness mindset involves a number of factors:

1. *Fostering self-awareness and reflection:* To cultivate a mindset of productiveness, we must first develop self-awareness and engage in regular reflection. By understanding our values, strengths, and weaknesses, we can make more informed decisions about where to invest our time and energy. Reflecting on our experiences can also help us recognize patterns in our behavior, allowing us to identify areas where we can improve and grow. This introspective process can lead to more intentional choices and a greater sense of fulfillment.
2. *Setting meaningful goals:* Instead of focusing solely on productivity metrics, we should set meaningful goals that align with our values and aspirations. These goals should encompass not only our work-related objectives but also

personal development and relationship building. By pursuing goals that are intrinsically motivating and aligned with our values, we are more likely to remain committed and engaged in our endeavors.

3. *Balancing quantity and quality:* In a productiveness mindset, we recognize the importance of balancing quantity and quality in our work. While it is essential to meet deadlines and produce results, it is equally important to ensure that our work is of high quality and adds value to our projects and relationships. By being mindful of this balance, we can avoid the pitfalls of overworking and the diminishing returns that come with it.
4. *Prioritizing well-being and personal growth:* A key aspect of productiveness is prioritizing our well-being and personal growth. This includes taking care of our physical and mental health through regular exercise, proper nutrition, and adequate rest. Additionally, we should invest time in nurturing our passions, learning new skills, and fostering meaningful relationships with others. By doing so, we can maintain a healthy balance in our lives and remain energized and engaged in our pursuits.
5. *Developing resilience and adaptability:* A productiveness mindset also emphasizes the importance of resilience and adaptability in the face of challenges and setbacks. By

cultivating these qualities, we can learn from our experiences, adjust our strategies, and bounce back more effectively when faced with obstacles. This enables us to maintain a positive outlook and continue making progress, even when circumstances are less than ideal.

Practical Strategies for Cultivating Productiveness

Productiveness and *productivity* have similar roots, so it's not surprising that strategies can be adopted to cultivate productiveness, just like we've done over the years to improve productivity. These strategies, when employed in a measured and mindful way, will help ease the shift from a productivity mindset to a productiveness one in a consistent and sustainable way:

1. *Time management techniques:* Incorporating effective time management techniques can help us strike a balance between productivity and productiveness. By identifying and prioritizing our most important tasks, we can allocate our time and energy more intentionally, ensuring that we are working on tasks that align with our values and goals.
2. *Mindfulness and meditation:* Practicing mindfulness and meditation can help us develop greater self-awareness, focus, and emotional regulation. These practices enable us

to be more present and engaged in our tasks, leading to higher quality work and a greater sense of fulfillment.

3. *Establishing boundaries:* Setting boundaries between work and personal life is crucial for maintaining a healthy balance. This includes setting aside dedicated time for rest, leisure, and social activities, as well as managing our digital devices and communication channels to minimize distractions and promote a sense of presence.
4. *Seeking feedback and mentorship:* By actively seeking feedback and mentorship from others, we can gain valuable insights into our strengths and areas for improvement. This can help us refine our approach and develop new skills, ultimately leading to greater productiveness and personal growth.
5. *Embracing a growth mindset:* Adopting a growth mindset, where we view challenges as opportunities for learning and growth, can further enhance our productiveness. By embracing this mindset, we can become more open to feedback, willing to take risks, and motivated to continually develop our skills and abilities.

The pursuit of productivity has led many of us to prioritize metrics over personal development, often at the expense of our well-being and long-term success. By shifting our focus to

productiveness, we can embrace a more holistic approach that nurtures a balance between quantity and quality. In turn, we can become more intentional, present, and fulfilled. And I believe that shift is a productive one worth pursuing.

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Mike Vardy is a writer and productivity strategist. He is the founder of [Productivityist](#), a company designed to help people stop “doing” productive and start “being” productive. He has served as the managing editor at Lifehack, and contributed articles on productivity to media outlets all around the world. He is the author of *The Front Nine: How to Start the Year You Want Anytime You Want* (published by Diversion Books). Mike has delivered talks on the topic of task and time management at events like New Media Expo, TEDx Victoria, and SXSW.

Breaking the Cycle of Pain

6 Essentials for Facing Our Triggers and Strengthening Our Relationships

Lori Deschene



It's been said that relationships are containers for growth and that, while we're hurt in relationships, we heal in relationships too. But it's a lot easier to accept this concept as true than it is to embrace it in real life.

It's hard to feel triggered by behavior that activates our childhood wounds—when someone ignores our needs or minimizes our feelings, for example—and create space to recognize that our pain goes deeper than that one individual encounter.

It's hard to identify our habitual negative reactions—being passive-aggressive or defensive, for example—and consciously choose a different path.

It's even harder to do these things without blaming and or shaming ourselves for struggling—or feeling resentful toward other people, who are likely struggling with these things too (if they're even self-aware enough to recognize and work on them).

But these are the things we need to do to not only heal from the past but also prevent it from repeating itself. This is how we break the cycle of pain instead of becoming hurt people who hurt people in an endless chain of trauma.

Said the woman who yelled at her boyfriend, A, for acting like a...male appendage...the other day.

The Incident of the Crying Kid

To be fair, I'm not this immature often, heated words were exchanged on both sides, and we were both battling the type of extreme exhaustion common to parents of young kids, without a village nearby to help.

But this was one of many moments when I've had to ask myself: What's really going on here? Knowing "if you're hysterical, it's historical," what's this moment triggering for me? What do I need to own so I can see A more clearly, apologize for my part, and move on, with as little damage to our relationship as possible?

To an outsider, it probably looked like he'd done right by me, initially at least. He'd put our screaming toddler down to turn on the heat after I'd asked him to raise it, thinking he could do it while holding him.

But he'd done it with a panicked energy that mirrored my anxiety, which had been triggered by our son's wails. I often go into fight-or-flight mode when our sons cry, both because biology has wired us to respond intensely to a child's cries (so that we'll protect them and meet their needs) and because crying triggers my own childhood trauma, when I often sobbed in a state of helplessness.

In a split second, without conscious awareness, I concluded that A was actually mocking my anxiety and had put down our crying son, causing him to melt down further, *on purpose*, to punish me for asking too much of him. This isn't his personality. He's not cruel or abusive, though he *can* be passive-aggressive at times.

I made this massive mental leap because someone in my past treated me this way—mocking my emotions and doing spiteful, petty things to punish me for voicing my feelings or needs.

I don't know if I would have recognized this as quickly if I hadn't said something my brain immediately labeled as immature and wrong. If I hadn't, the situation might have escalated into repeated back-and-forth triggers and jabs, leaving us both angry, ashamed, and conflicted.

Choose These Positive Responses

I'm thankful for moments when I'm able to own my feelings and reactions swiftly because I don't want to hurt unnecessarily—or hurt other people. But there have been many times when it's taken me far longer to step back and see a painful situation objectively.

So this got me thinking: What do we need to work on so we can own our reactions to emotional triggers and avoid hurting ourselves and the people we love? I came up with six things.

1. Self-awareness

First, we need to be willing to identify our patterns and recognize that *we* are the common denominator.

If you always feel invalidated, it might not be that no one else cares about your feelings. It might be that you interpret other people's actions to mean that your feelings don't matter, whether they actually think that or not.

If you often feel judged, it might not be that everyone is looking down on you, but that you hear all criticism, even constructive, through the voice of someone who did.

2. Courage

Next, we need to have the courage to face the pain of our original wounds. If you're someone who often feels invalidated (hand raised right here), it could be because someone in your past denied your feelings, called you too sensitive when you challenged their mistreatment, or gaslit you to make you question not only your emotions but also your experience and perceptions.

It hurts to face the pain of the past; that's why most of us don't do it. It can bring up feelings of anger, helplessness, shame, and unworthiness. It's much easier to blame your insensitive co-worker for "making" you feel unimportant than it is to

acknowledge that you spent your whole childhood thinking your father didn't love you—and believing it was your fault.

3. Humility

Once we've self-reflected and identified our original wound, we then need the humility to acknowledge that our reaction wasn't (entirely) warranted or caused by situation. That the other person—who seemed to be the sole source of our anger mere moments ago—didn't *make* us feel anything. And that they didn't deserve our outrage.

This can be challenging for most of us, not only because we have to swallow our pride and admit we made a mistake, but also because it can evoke deep shame.

When I realize I've overreacted to a situation, I often feel bad about myself. Because that's not the kind of person I want to be, and I think I should know better by now. I think I should be perfect. But I'm not. No one is.

4. Self-compassion

This is where self-compassion comes in. If we're going to head into the basement of our trauma, shining a spotlight on all the negative behaviors and coping mechanisms we picked up as a result, we need to also shine a light on our basic goodness. We

need to consider that anyone with our unique combination of past experiences might struggle in the same way we do.

We also need to remember that we don't react in anger, judgment, or defensiveness because we're weak or bad people. We do it because we're human, we've been hurt, and this is what everyone does until they're ready to do the work to heal.

5. Compassion

Beyond self-compassion, we need compassion for other people. Because owning our triggers doesn't mean that they're blameless. Other people still do hurtful things sometimes. They act from their triggers too, often at the same time we're acting from ours.

We need to be willing to own our part while accepting that they've made mistakes too. And they might not yet have the self-awareness, courage, humility, or self-compassion required to look deeply at their own trauma and responses.

Please know I'm not suggesting that we should accept or condone abuse; I'm referring to the many minor hurts we inflict upon each other in otherwise healthy relationships. We need to have compassion for the pain behind the behavior and the difficulty in acknowledging and addressing it.

6. Patience

And last, we need to have patience—with others and ourselves.

The best and hardest part of working through triggers is that we have abundant opportunities to practice responding to them wisely. Most of us are triggered in some way, small or large, *every day*. If we were to go through this process every time, we'd need to confront pain from the past nearly constantly. And that isn't easy, for anyone.

It's totally understandable that we don't always instantly recognize when we've reacted habitually, from a place of deep-seated pain. And given the extent of some of our trauma, it's also understandable why we have these triggers in the first place.

Give a Little Grace

I don't always do all of this perfectly, and I used to see that as proof that I wasn't the person I claimed to be and—even sadder—wasn't worthy of love and acceptance. That just triggered more shame, which then bled into my interactions with other people. It caused me to hide, physically or emotionally. And I because I judged myself harshly, I also judged other people for being flawed and responding imperfectly.

I now try to remember we're all only human. We've all been hurt. We're all doing our best with our current level of awareness and coping skills. And we all deserve a little grace in

those difficult moments when we're facing ourselves and our deepest pains.

It's one of the most emotionally trying things most of us will ever have to do. It can trigger immense feelings of weakness when we look back at the times when we felt the most vulnerable. But it's only in facing our weakness that we can get strong. And the quality of our relationships depends on our willingness to do this work—because it's only in growing together that we can ensure we don't grow apart.

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Lori Deschene is the founder of [Tiny Buddha](#), an online community, focused on growth and healing, that reaches more than 7 million followers across various platforms. Lori is the author of six books, including three journals—*Tiny Buddha's Gratitude Journal*, *Tiny Buddha's Worry Journal*, and *Tiny Buddha's Inner Strength Journal*—and co-creator of the popular online course [Recreate Your Life Story](#).

Building Your Family to Last

A Four-Part Process That Can Guide Family Decisions

Colleen Mariotti



Our family is not a democracy, where the majority prevails against the wishes of the minority, and that is the foundation of our strength. We never make big decisions until we have a unanimous vote. We keep discussing paths until we have a vision everyone is excited about.

We have moved around the world this way through 30+ countries. The accountability we all feel for the path we are on is key to our joy and fulfillment and our ability to overcome obstacles.

Have you experienced complete alignment with a family decision and the path forward felt easy?

I would like to share our framework and the process we use to make conscious family decisions, inspired by the book *Built to Last* by Collins and Porras. This book is dedicated to corporate leadership, but we knew there was wisdom in it for families when we first came across this text many years ago.

The elements central to our decision-making framework are ...

- Shared purpose
- Core values
- Big, Hairy, Audacious Goal (BHAG, a term coined in *Built to Last*)

- Envisioned future

After you walk through this process once, you can weigh all decisions and goals against this framework forever. Having this common language will improve communication between family members and strengthen the quality of daily dialogue for all decisions, large and small.

Once you create this framework, life moves in the direction of your dreams quickly. Are you ready?

The Importance of Shared Purpose

In Japanese, the word *Ikigai* describes our reason to wake up in the morning. Numerous articles have been written about how individuals who have a defined purpose are happier, healthier, and have more meaningful relationships.

Defining a shared purpose is central to building a decision-making framework. It gives family members a shared language to check in with each other when a decision that affects everyone feels out of alignment.

Unlike goals and strategies, purpose—once defined—is unchanging. It is the deepest “why” we share with those around us. It is our North Star when everything around us changes.

A Process for Defining Purpose

A popular method used in problem solving is called the *5 Whys*. I advise using it in a slightly different way to facilitate discovering a family's shared purpose.

Begin with the question "What are we on this earth to do together?"

After brainstorming some answers and determining a statement that represents the views of everyone in the family, ask why? Keep asking why until you arrive at a purpose that creates excitement and momentum for all family members. (Remember, you only have to do this once for your shared purpose and it will serve you for years to come.)

Below is the Q&A from our family purpose conversation.

Q: What are we on this earth to do as a family?

A: To help each other and support each other.

Q: Why does that matter?

A: So we can spend more time learning together and contributing to our community.

Q: Why does that matter?

A: So we can make the world a better place by being the best versions of ourselves.

Q: Why does that matter?

A: Because we are stronger together.

Q: Why is that important to us as a family?

A: “We are here to inspire growth for the benefit of future generations.”

We knew it as soon as we got there. This was our shared family purpose long before we defined it. And it has never changed, even though we change our homes, the countries we live in, the languages we speak, and the continents we inhabit. Our purpose is our why, and it is alive in each of us.

For you, it could take you anywhere from 3 to 15 why’s to get to your purpose, but as I like to say, *go until you know*. Then, once the purpose is clear, it is time to identify core values.

The Importance of Shared Core Values

Values drive our decision making and behavior every day whether we articulate them or not. We each have our own set of individual values—we have our workplace values, religious values, team values, etc. We also have family values.

It is critical to articulate common core values as a family so that you build your capacity to dialogue when someone is not in alignment. It is important to not simply pass values down or take them from how you were raised but rather to uncover them together.

A Process for Articulating Core Values

Your core values are five to seven common beliefs that are not aspirational; they are present today and have always been central to who you are as a family, whether you have named them or not. These are words (or images with younger kids) that capture what, at the core of who you are, has always driven your decision making.

Here is how to discover five to seven core values as a family:

There are hundreds of lists of core values on the internet. Find a list that works for you and use that as the foundation for your family conversation. Together, pare the list down to ten.

From there, talk through each value and nest those that can be encompassed by another, until you have a list of three to five shared values. Identify your number-one family value, based on your history of decision making.

Think of a time as a family when you had to make an important decision together to live your highest value.

- What was the situation?
- What were the competing priorities?
- Why did you choose to do what you did?
- What was the cost/benefit of aligning with your highest value?

Our shared core values are family, freedom, citizenship, adventure, and well-being. We have conversations daily about whether our decisions, big and small, align with these values. We also talk about evolving definitions of our core values as our kids grow. Freedom, for example, means something different to our teenagers than it does to younger children.

The conversations you have about values will breathe life into your family and strengthen your foundation.

The Importance of a BHAG

Now that you have a shared purpose and core values from which to make decisions, you need a goal to organize around. This is not just any goal but a Big, Hairy, Audacious Goal.

A BHAG ignites your sense of purpose and values-driven decisions by giving you a mountain to climb as a family. It is a goal statement so big others may balk at it or doubt your

success. These are not your average goals. They are Big, Hairy, and Audacious...and they *work*!

A Process to Develop a Family BHAG

For your family, what is a common, barely attainable, one- to three-year goal that gets everyone in a state of excited anticipation?

Brainstorm your big dreams. Set guidelines for this conversation so that no ideas are shut down.

Look at the list, find themes, and make a new list with nested BHAGs.

Some of our past BHAGs were:

- Sell all of our belongings and become a nomadic family.
- Achieve Italian citizenship so our children have two passports and can live, work, and study in 30+ countries.
- Volunteer around the world as a family before the kids turn 18.

Some of our BHAGs we have achieved, some we are working on now, and *all* were barely attainable and made us want to jump out of bed and take inspired action.

Once you have what you think is your family's BHAG, do a litmus test by asking this question: *Is our BHAG clear and compelling, and does it serve as a unifying direction, with a clear finish line, so we know when we have achieved the goal?*

Finally, look at your BHAG and make sure it aligns with your purpose and values. You will know you are ready to move on to the next step when everyone is talking excitedly about your BHAG and the positive energy is palpable.

The Importance of an Envisioned Future

It is no secret that creating a picture in our minds of something we hope to achieve contributes to our likelihood of success. As a family, we have found this is one of the most engaging steps in the decision-making framework.

Have you ever shocked yourself by imagining how something will go and then watching it exceed your expectations as it unfolds? It is a testament to the power of a vision, and it creates unified family momentum.

A Process for Envisioning a Future

If you are guided by your core purpose and work toward your BHAG, demonstrating your values and behaviors as a family, describe the benefits that will be created as a result. Use all your senses to build this picture.

- With whom are we celebrating our success?
- Where in the world are we sitting and reflecting on what led to this moment?
- What kinds of things are we saying to each other?
- And most importantly, how do we feel as a result of achieving our BHAG?

Write a vivid description based on questions like these. That's it!

Your Legacy

While the framework takes some energy and effort upfront, once you have defined the shared purpose and unearthed the core values, the only things that change are the BHAG and envisioned future. It is not uncommon for one of our kids to say, "We need a new BHAG" or "Can you help me build an envisioned future for university?" This is when we know that this framework is more than just about decision making. It is our legacy.

We are a family that owns only what we can fit in one carry-on bag each. Our legacy is not monetary or tangible. We have built something lasting by creating a shared language that has led us to places we never thought we would discover in ourselves, in

our children, and in the world. Having the words to speak from a place of purpose and shared values every day while working toward a goal that excites us all is something that has simplified our life to the core of what matters most every day.

We believe the experiences of everyday interactions with family leave a lasting impression. It is not the things that come into our experience, but the time we spend together, that is precious. This framework enriches those experiences in a way that has truly *built our family to last*, and our greatest hope is that it adds something new to conversations with those who matter most to you.

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Colleen Mariotti is an author, teacher, leadership coach, and co-founder of [Livology](#). In 2013 Colleen and her husband hit the road with their three young children and five carry-on bags. After traveling to over 30 countries, 20 states, and counting, the real adventure continues to be following their inspiration and being mindful about appreciating each day together as it unfolds.

Built to Last, which inspired parts of this article, was written by Jim Collins and published by Harper Business.

What My Dad Taught Me The Best Personal Development Is Found in Two Qualities

John P. Weiss



Many years ago, an elderly man named Ted Strollo stepped off a curb in downtown Los Gatos, California, unaware of the vehicle that failed to stop for a red light. The vehicle struck Ted with such force that bystanders heard the sickening impact, followed by the screams of horrified pedestrians who witnessed the accident.

Ted flew 20 feet, his body bouncing down the street like a rag doll before resting in a tangled mass of bleeding limbs. He lay motionless as an onlooker said, “He must be dead.”

Witnesses stood frozen in horror, and no one checked on Ted. Then a man in an old truck who observed the accident pulled over, jumped out, and ran to render aid.

That man was my father.

The Mystery Tree of Life

Ted Strollo was an Italian immigrant and master wood carver who came to California for a better life. He had few possessions, no family, and no job. He built and lived in a dilapidated cabin in the woods above Los Gatos. He drank acorn coffee, treated people kindly, and mostly kept to himself.

His prized possession was a five-foot-tall wooden sculpture he carved from a single piece of wood. Its ornate surface carvings

cradled perfect cylindrical balls in the middle. He called his work of art “The Mystery Tree of Life.”

Dad rode with Ted in the ambulance to the hospital, holding his hand and reassuring him. It was the beginning of a long friendship.

Ted spent over a month in our home recuperating. He stayed in our guest room. My mother prepared his meals and did his laundry. When Ted recovered, my father (an attorney) found him an affordable apartment and secured some state benefits.

We visited Ted on weekends and every Thanksgiving and Christmas. Dad would buy him Stella D’oro cookies and new socks. Ted would regale us with stories of his youth and the old country.

Dad once told me, “Johnny, the elderly are often forgotten and overlooked. They have much to teach us if we take the time and listen.”

I never forgot that.

Before Ted passed away, he gave my father his prized “Mystery Tree of Life” sculpture. We kept it in our family for many years before Dad donated it to an Italian cultural society.

I did not realize it back then, but my parents were teaching me an invaluable life lesson about helping others and what kind of person I should aspire to be.

But then, there were other lessons when I was in grade school.

The Emotions of Youth

I attended a small private school for my elementary education. The students' parents formed carpools as transportation to and from school.

One day after school, a student named Melinda (who had a mild intellectual disability) needed a ride home because her mother had experienced car trouble. The principal asked my father if he would drive Melinda home, since she lived near our house.

I felt mortified. I knew my friends would tease me later about taking Melinda home, and I looked at my dad with pleading eyes. "Maybe someone else can give her a ride?" I suggested.

He bent down and said, "What if you were her, Johnny? Wouldn't you want someone to take you home?"

Dad smiled reassuringly at me, but I still felt resistant. The emotions of youth can blur your conscience.

The first day Melinda walked into our fifth-grade class, we knew she was different. She had a pale complexion, unsteady gait, and a slight lisp when she spoke. She took a moment to form thoughts and words.

Melinda seemed awkward in her school uniform and cardigan sweater. And since children are cruel, spit wads were sometimes flung her way in class. Other times, the kids snickered at her and uttered mean jokes.

Regrettably, I joined in on a few occasions.

Dad and I took Melinda home, and when we got to her house, he asked me to walk her, like a gentleman, to the front door. Halfway up the walkway, she turned to me with a sweet smile, looked into my eyes, and said, “Thank you, J-J-Johnny, for being so nice to me.”

The moment is burned into my memory. It stripped away my selfish pride and made me see her sweetness. Her humanity. Maybe even her pain and vulnerability.

When I got back into the car, Dad patted me on the knee and said, “I know you didn’t want to take her home, Johnny, but it was the right thing to do. Thank you for walking her to the door.”

“It’s okay,” I told my dad, “I guess she’s alright.”

The next day at school my friends didn't waste any time. "How's your girlfriend, John?" one of the boys asked with a goading grin.

"She's not my girlfriend," I said. "We just helped her out."

The teasing continued for a few days but eventually leveled off. As for me, something changed inside. Suddenly, my friends didn't seem cool anymore. In a way, they were kind of ugly. Always making fun of the weaker and awkward kids.

Over time, I started to distance myself from those friends. Melinda, perhaps sensing the shift in me, began talking to me more. I found her to be consistently pleasant. She never had a negative thing to say about anyone.

All these years later, I still think about Melinda and those early school days. I barely remember the names of the boys I hung out with back then, but I still remember Melinda. For a child with an intellectual disability, she seemed much wiser than my grade school friends.

Grace in others has a way of doing that. It stays with you through the years. My father's kindness was another kind of grace, and the many life lessons my parents taught me.

Virtue and Character

A tremendous amount of self-help and personal development content is available today. I have written my fair share, because I believe in self-improvement. But over the years, I grew tired of all the articles about morning routines and six-pack abs—so derivative. Also, once you achieve those things, they seldom feel like enough.

Personal development is an endless continuum. We focus on health and especially appearance. We celebrate money, status, attention, and fame.

But these things rarely feed our souls.

There is nothing wrong with chasing good health and success, but human beings have deeper needs. We know that, sooner or later, our bodies betray us. Money comes and goes. Status and fame lose their luster.

If we truly listen to the whispers of our souls, we find that the best personal development centers around two life-changing and enduring qualities: virtue and character.

Little did I realize it as a boy, but the life lessons and personal development my father taught me had nothing to do with looks, money, or status in life. They had everything to do with virtue and character.

Dad knew that helping others and doing the right thing create a sense of peace within us, and a kind of grace in the world. These things sustain and fulfill us more deeply than building up our egos.

The Second Mountain

In his book *The Second Mountain: The Quest for a Moral Life*, David Brooks argues that the first mountain we climb in life is all about our appearance, career, success, status, and ego. This is the mountain that our culture promotes. But when we reach the top of our first mountain and look around, we're not fulfilled. "Is this all there is?" we think.

And so we begin a new journey, through the valley, to our second mountain. On the second mountain, our lives move from self-centered to other-centered.

Brooks tells the story of the literary master Fyodor Dostoyevsky's near execution. The imprisoned Dostoyevsky and several other revolutionaries, sentenced to die in Saint Petersburg, were marched out in front of a firing squad. They were all wearing their burial shrouds. Drums sounded. Death beckoned.

But then, at the last minute, by cruel prearrangement, a messenger arrived on horseback to announce that the czar

granted clemency. They reverted to their original sentences of hard labor.

All the petty concerns of life evaporated for Dostoyevsky. He immediately wrote to his brother: “When I look back on my past and think how much time I wasted on nothing, how much time has been lost in futilities, errors, laziness, incapacity to live; how little I appreciated it, how many times I sinned against my heart and soul—then my heart bleeds.”

In his book, Brooks notes: “The lesson is that the things we had thought were most important—achievement, affirmation, intelligence—are actually less important, and the things we had undervalued—heart and soul—are actually most important.”

The Summit

In today’s world of instant gratification, greed, and social media superficiality, there’s plenty to distract us from pursuing virtue and character. Fortunately, we don’t have to face a firing squad like Dostoyevsky to wake up and begin the journey toward our second mountain. We must simply listen to our hearts and follow the voice calling us to something bigger than ourselves.

When my father helped Ted Stollo, and drove Melinda home after school, he taught me about virtue and character. He showed me the importance of helping others. In a way, he was guiding me toward my second mountain.

Six-pack abs and perfect morning routines are nice, but the best personal development is found in virtue and character. It's found on your second mountain.

And once you reach the summit, you will love the view.

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