

This self-development material came from part five of [Peter Drucker's *Managing the Nonprofit Organization*](#). It begins with the final chapter and then moves to the first two chapters of part five

Self-development Summary: The Action Implications

The best way for me to start this summary on self-development is to tell you about the man who first made me **aware** of what that **means** as a **LIFELONG PROCESS**. He was a Jewish rabbi whom I first met in the early 1950s on a mountain trail. We became hiking companions for many years because we both spent vacations in the same summer resort and liked hiking. Joshua Abrams had been in law school when World War II broke out, went into the Navy and was badly wounded. In fact, he never fully recovered, and the injuries eventually caused his death thirty-five years later.

He went into a seminary when he came out of the service and, when I first met him, he had just begun to build—from scratch—a synagogue and Jewish community center in a major Midwestern city. Just ten years later it was one of the largest Reformed Jewish synagogues in the country, with four to five thousand members.

So, I was very surprised on a walk one day when he said, "By the way, Peter, I've decided to leave the synagogue and **start all over again**." I looked at him, clearly without understanding, and he continued, "**I don't learn anything anymore**." A year later, he told me he had decided to go into youth ministry and take over the chaplainship at a major Midwestern university. This was about 1964-65. Joshua explained: "I'm still young enough so that I understand what troubles the kids and I'm old enough to have experience with most of the things that they are going through. They're going to be in trouble." Sure enough,

the student unrest started not too long afterward and my friend was a tower of strength. Through the years I've met people who say, "I understand you know Josh Abrams? He saved my life when I was twenty years old and about to destroy myself by going into drugs ... or by doing this, that or the other stupid thing."

Then, around 1973-74, Josh surprised me again during one of our walks: "I think I've done all I can do as a university chaplain. I'm no longer young enough to be in tune with the kids. **I've been thinking about it and have decided that the need now** is for a ministry for old people. That's [where the population growth is](#)." He quit the university [a year or two later](#), moved to one of the retirement cities in Arizona, and started all over again building from scratch. By the time he died, his new community of retired people was three to four thousand strong. [He looked for](#) people who were lonely who had lost their spouses, who were sick, and he not only brought them spiritual comfort but helped meet their physical needs as well as he could.

Joshua was the first person who explained something to me that I have, in turn, repeated to many, many people: "**YOU ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR ALLOCATING YOUR LIFE. NOBODY ELSE WILL DO IT FOR YOU.**" And the pattern of his life makes clear that when we talk of self-development, we mean **two things**: developing the person, and developing the skill, competence, and ability to [contribute](#). These are **two quite different tasks**.

Developing yourself begins by serving, by striving toward an **idea outside of yourself**—not by leading. Leaders are not born, nor are they made—they are self-made.

To do this, a person needs **focus**. Michael Kami, our leading authority on business strategy today, draws a square on the blackboard and asks: "Tell me what to put in there. Jesus? Or money? I can help you [develop](#)

a strategy for either one, but you have to decide which is the master."

I do it by asking people what they **want to be remembered for**—that's "the beginning of adulthood," according to St. Augustine. The answer changes as we mature—as it should. *But unless that question is asked, a person works without focus, without direction, and, as a result, does not develop.* You start by **developing your own strengths**, adding skills and putting them to productive work. There is much a boss can do to contribute to this development. But no matter how much a boss drives you—or ignores you—**ultimately it is the individual's own responsibility to work on his or her own development**.

Developing your strengths does not mean ignoring your weaknesses. On the contrary, one is always conscious of them. But one can only overcome weakness by developing strengths. Don't take shortcuts. You don't have to be a perfectionist but you certainly should refuse to accept your own shoddy work. Above all, workmanship builds your own self-respect as it builds your own competence.

Next, you work on the **tasks to be done**, the **opportunities to be explored**. And you start with the task, not with yourself. **ACHIEVEMENT** comes from matching need and opportunity on the outside with competence and strength on the inside. **The two have to meet—and the two have to match**.

Effective self-development must proceed along **two parallel streams**. One is improvement—to do better what you already do reasonably well. The second is change—to do something different. Both are essential. It is mistake to focus only on change and forget what you already do well. One works constantly on doing a little better, identifying the little step that will make the next step possible. But it is equally foolish to focus only on improvement and forget that the time will

inevitably come to do **something new and quite different**.

Listening for the signal that it is time to change is an essential skill for self-development. Change when you are successful—not when you're in trouble. Look carefully at your daily work, your daily tasks, and ask: "*Would I go into this today knowing what I know today? Am I producing results or just relaxing in a comfortable routine, spending effort on something that no longer produces results?*"

Self-development becomes **self-renewal** when you walk a different path, become aware of a different horizon, move toward a different destination. This is a time when outside help, a [mentor](#), can provide useful help. The more achievement-minded and successful you are, the more likely you are to be immersed in the task at hand, immersed, above all, in the urgent. A wise outsider who knows what you are trying to do, who has often been doing similar things, is the one who can ask you: "Does it still make sense? Are you still getting the most out of yourself?"

The **means for self-development** are not obscure. Many achievers have discovered that [teaching](#) is one of the most successful tools. The teacher usually learns far more than the student. Not everybody is in a situation where the opportunity to teach opens up, nor is everyone good at teaching or enjoying it. But everyone has an associated opportunity—the [opportunity to help develop others](#). Everyone who has sat down with subordinates or associates in an honest effort to improve their performance and results understands what a potent tool the process is for self-development.

Probably the best of the nuts and bolts of self-development is the practice of **keeping score on yourself**. It's also the best lesson in humility, as I can tell you from personal experience. It is always painful for me to see how great the gap is between what I

should have done and what I did do. But, slowly, I improve **both** in **setting goals** and in **achieving results**. Keeping score helps me focus my efforts in areas where I have impact and to slough off projects where nothing is happening, where I'm wasting not only my own resources but also those of my clients or students.

Self-development is neither a philosophy nor good intentions. Self-renewal is not a warm glow. **Both are action**. You become a **bigger person**, yes; but, most of all, you become a **MORE EFFECTIVE AND COMMITTED PERSON**.

So, I conclude by asking you to ask yourself, what will you do tomorrow as a result of reading this book? And what will you stop doing?
