

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?

Part Five

Developing Yourself (as a person, as an executive, as a leader)

You Are Responsible

The first priority for the non-profit executive's own development is to **strive for excellence**. That brings satisfaction and self-respect. Workmanship counts, not just because it makes such a difference in the quality of the job done but because it makes such a difference in the person doing the job. Without craftsmanship, there is neither a good job, nor self-respect, nor personal growth. Many years ago I asked the best dentist I ever had, "What do you want to be remembered for?" And he answered, "When they have you on the autopsy slab, I want them to say that fellow really had a first-rate dentist!"

How different that attitude is from the person who does the job to get by, who hopes that nobody will notice.

Self-development is **very deeply meshed** in with the mission of the organization, with commitment and belief that the work done in this church or this school matters. You cannot allow the lack of resources, of money, of people, and of time (always the scarcest) to overwhelm you and become the excuse for shoddy work. Then you begin to blame the world—"they" won't let me do a good job. And that's the first step down a steep, slippery slope. Paying serious attention to self-development—your own and that of everyone in the organization—is not a luxury for non-profit executives. Most people don't continue to work for a non-profit organization if they don't share, at least in part, the vision of the organization. Volunteers, particularly, who don't get a great deal out of working for the organization aren't going to be around very long. They don't get a check, so they have to get even more out of the organization's

work. In fact, you don't want people who stay on with the organization just because that's what they've always done but who don't believe in it anymore. And in a well-run, results oriented organization, you should be making such demands on people for time and work that it's unlikely too many with that jaded outlook would stay on. You want constructive discontent. That may mean that many of the best of the paid staff or volunteers come home exhausted after a big meeting, complaining loudly about how stupid everybody is and how they don't do things that are obvious, and then respond, "But it's so important!" if someone asks why they stay on.

The key to building an organization with such a **spirit** is organizing the work so everyone feels essential to a goal they believe in. One of the church people I work with has a clear goal that in this church of twelve thousand members, there are no parishioners. There are only paid and unpaid ministers everyone is put to work at that level. That's a goal; not yet an accomplishment. Nevertheless, working toward that goal, from fifty to a hundred people a year are added to the force taking on church responsibilities. By now the church has almost no paid staff. Instead of the usual paid, ordained, youth minister, this church has six unpaid and unordained individuals who, together, do the one full-time job. And each of these volunteers sits down twice a year and writes a letter to himself or herself (a copy to the pastor) answering the questions: "What have I learned? What difference to my own life has my work with kids at the church been making?" The pastor has no difficulty attracting volunteers. In fact, his problem is a waiting list.

TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE

From the chief executive of a non-profit on down through the ranks of paid staff and volunteers, the person with the most responsibility for an individual's development is the person himself—not the boss. Everyone involved must be encouraged to ask themselves: **What should I focus**

on so that, if it's done really well, it will make a difference both to the organization and to me? A hospital floor nurse, for example, under terrific pressure of time and money, with doctors demanding more and the paperwork out of control, looks at the thirty-two orthopedic patients and says, "They are my job. All the rest, basically, are impediments. What can I do to concentrate on that job? Maybe it is something procedural. Can we change the way we deliver our services to enable me to be a better nurse?"

You can only make yourself effective—not anyone else. Your first responsibility to the non-profit organization for which you work is to make sure you get the most out of yourself—for yourself. You can work only with what you have.

Creating a **RECORD OF PERFORMANCE** is the only thing that will encourage people to **trust** you and **support** you. Complaining about stupid bosses, a stupid board, and subordinates who sabotage you, *won't create that record.* It's your job and your responsibility to talk to those on whom you depend, and who depend on you, to find out in a systematic way what helps, what hinders, and what needs to be changed.

All the people I've known who have grown review once or twice a year what they have actually done, which part of that work makes sense, and what they should concentrate on. I've been in consulting for almost fifty years now and I've learned to sit down with myself for two weeks in August and review my work over the past year.

- ❑ First, where have I made an impact? Where do my clients need me—not just want me but need me?
- ❑ Then, where have I been wasting their time and mine?
- ❑ Where should I concentrate next year so as not only to give my best but also to get the most out of it?

I'm not saying that I always follow my own plan. Very often something comes in over the transom and I forget all my good intentions. But so far as I have become a better and more effective consultant and have gotten more and more personally out of consulting, it's been because of this practice of focusing on where I can really make a difference.

Only by focusing effort in a thoughtful and organized way can a non-profit executive move to the **BIG STEP** in self-development: how to move beyond simply aligning his or her vision with that of the organization to **making that personal vision productive**. Executives who make a really special contribution enable the organization to see itself as having **A BIGGER MISSION THAN THE ONE IT HAS INHERITED**. To expand both the organization and the people within it in this way, the top executive must ask the key questions of himself—the questions I ask myself each August. Indeed, each member of the staff must do it, and each volunteer. And the senior people must sit down regularly with each other and consider the questions together.

The form for this kind of exchange can be quite flexible. In fact, one of the best examples I've ever heard of was improvised by Bruno Walter, the great conductor, much loved by the musicians he led. At the end of each season, Walter wrote a letter to each member of the orchestra something like this: "My dear [First Trumpet], you taught me quite a bit when we rehearsed the Haydn symphony by the way you handled that difficult passage. But what have you learned this season as a result of our working together?" Probably half the musicians simply sent back a perfunctory postcard. But the other half sat down and wrote serious letters: "I now suddenly understand what I, as a twentieth-century trumpeter, have to do to sound like an eighteenth-century trumpeter in the Haydn symphony." Playing in Bruno Walter's orchestra became a constant developmental challenge for his musicians.

The **critical factor** for achieving this kind of success is **ACCOUNTABILITY**—holding yourself accountable. Everything else flows from that. When you are president or vice-president of the university or the bank, the important thing is not that you have rank, but that **YOU HAVE RESPONSIBILITY**. To be accountable, you must take the job seriously enough to recognize: I've got to **GROW UP TO THE JOB**. Sometimes that means acquiring skills. Even harder, you may find that the skills you worked so hard to acquire over the years **no longer apply**: you spent ten years learning all about computers, but now you have to learn to work with people. By putting accountability first, you build the commitment to mobilize your own resources. You ask: **What do I have to learn and what do I have to do to make a difference?** A wise person I worked with many years ago said to me, "For good performance, we give a raise. But we promote only those people who leave behind a **bigger job** than the one they initially took on."

Self-development seems to me to mean both acquiring **more capacity** and also **more weight** as a person altogether. By focusing on accountability, people take a bigger view of themselves. That's not vanity, not pride, but it is self-respect and self-confidence. It's something that, **ONCE GAINED, CAN'T BE TAKEN AWAY FROM A PERSON. IT'S OUTSIDE OF ME BUT ALSO INSIDE OF ME.**

SETTING AN EXAMPLE

In all human affairs there is a constant relationship between the performance and achievement of the leaders, the record setters, and the rest. In human affairs, **we stand on the shoulders of our predecessors**. The leader sets the vision, the standard. But he or she is not the only one. If one member of an organization does a markedly better job, others challenge themselves.

Leadership is not characterized by stars on your shoulder; an executive leads by example. And the greatest example is precisely the **DEDICATION TO THE MISSION OF THE ORGANIZATION AS A MEANS OF MAKING YOURSELF BIGGER—RESPECTING YOURSELF MORE.**

What Do You Want to Be Remembered For?

To develop yourself, you have to be **doing the right work** in the **right kind of organization**. The basic question is: "Where do I belong as a person?" This requires understanding what kind of work environment you need to do your best. When young people come out of school, they know very little about themselves. They do not know whether they work best in a big organization or a small one. They rarely know whether they like working with people or working alone, whether they prosper in a situation of uncertainty or not, whether they need the pressure of deadlines to perform efficiently, whether they make decisions quickly or need to sleep on them. The first job is a lottery. The chances of being in the right place are not very good. It takes a few years to find out where you belong and to begin **SELF-PLACEMENT**.

We all tend to take temperament and personality for granted. But it's very important to take them seriously and to understand them clearly because they're not too subject to change by training. People who have to understand a decision completely before they can act don't belong on a battlefield: when the right flank suddenly caves in, an officer may have eight seconds to decide whether to fight or retreat. The kind of person who likes to reflect on decisions might force himself to decide—but is very likely to make the wrong decisions.

If the thoughtful answer to the question "Where do I belong?" is that you don't belong where you currently work, the next question is why? Is it because you can't accept the values of the organization? **Is the organization corrupt?** That will certainly damage you, because you become cynical and contemptuous of yourself if you find yourself in a situation where the values are incompatible with your own. Or you might find yourself working for a boss who corrupts because he's a politician or because she's concerned only with her career. Or—most tricky of all—a boss whom you admire fails in

the crucial duty of a boss: to support, foster, and promote capable subordinates.

The right decision is to quit if you are in the wrong place, if it is basically corrupt, or if your performance is not being recognized. Promotion itself is not the important thing. What is important is to be eligible, to be equally considered. If you are not in such a situation, you will all too soon begin to accept a second-rate opinion of yourself.

"REPOTTING" YOURSELF

Sometimes a change—a big change or a small change—is essential in order to stimulate yourself again. Recognizing this need will grow in importance as people live for many more years than they used to and are active so much longer. A great many volunteers, for instance, move on to another organization after ten or twelve years of working for one non-profit. The usual need they feel is to change the routine. An unexpressed need may be that they no longer are learning. Be aware of that touchstone yourself, because when you stop learning in a job, you begin to shrink.

The switch doesn't have to be to something far a field. Richard Schubert, for instance, for many years president of the American Red Cross, came up as a labor lawyer and human resources manager in private industry. In his forties, he switched to government and then back to private industry—and then to the Red Cross. He is so effective precisely because he has worked with a wide variety of different people in quite different work cultures.

When you begin to fall into a pleasant routine, it is time to force yourself to do something different. "Burnout," much of the time, is a cop-out for being bored.

**NOTHING CREATES MORE FATIGUE THAN
HAVING TO FORCE YOURSELF TO GO TO WORK**

IN THE MORNING WHEN YOU DON'T GIVE A DAMN.

Perhaps all that is needed is a small shift—the school principal who accepts a few invitations to visit other school districts and talk over problems with other principals and teachers. The other possibility is to take on a volunteer job with another organization. That might seem impossible to non-profit executives who are already working sixty to seventy hours a week; but three hours a week spent in an entirely different activity might do the trick. Precisely because you are overworked, you need the extra and different stimulus to put different parts of yourself to work, both physically and mentally. The Girl Scouts now have many more volunteers than they ever had in their history because they discovered that busy women working as lawyers and accountants and bank officers also need the challenge of working hard in an entirely different environment.

Most work is doing the same thing again and again. The **EXCITEMENT IS NOT THE JOB—IT IS THE RESULT**. Nose to the grindstone, **EYES ON THE HILLS**. If you allow a job to bore you, you have stopped working for results. Your eyes, as well as your nose, are then on the grindstone.

To build learning into your work, and keep it there, build in organized feedback from results to expectations. Identify the key activities in your work—perhaps even in your life. When you engage in such activities, write down what you expect to happen. Nine months or a year later, compare your expectations to what actually happened. From that you will learn what you do well, what skills and knowledge you need to acquire, what bad habits you have (which might be the most important discovery). Or you may find out, as I did, that you stopped too soon in your push for results. I soon realized that I'm terribly impatient. You may also realize that, again and again, your

best intentions do not produce results because you don't listen—the most common bad habit.

You're certainly not limited to learning only from your own activities. Look at the people in your own organization, your own environment, your own set of acquaintances. What do they do really well—and how do they do it? In other words, **look for successes**. What does Joe do that seems so hard for the rest of us to do? Then try to do it yourself.

It's up to you to manage your job and your career.

- ❑ To understand where you best belong.
- ❑ To make high demands on yourself by way of contribution to the work of the organization itself.
- ❑ To practice what I call preventive hygiene so as not to allow yourself to become bored.
- ❑ To build in challenges.

DOING THE RIGHT THINGS WELL

Most of us who work in organizations work at a surprisingly **low yield of effectiveness**. I've been working with executives for close to fifty years and most of them work hard and know a great deal. But **FULLY EFFECTIVE ONES ARE RARE**. The difference between the performers and non-performers is not a matter of talent. Effectiveness is more a matter of habits of behavior, and of a few elementary rules. But the human race is not too good at it yet because organizations are pretty recent inventions. The **rules for effectiveness** are different in an organization from what they were in the one-man craft shop. In solo work, the job organizes the performer; in an organization, **the performer organizes the job**.

The first step toward effectiveness is to decide **what are the right things to do**. Efficiency, which is doing things right, is irrelevant until you work on the right things. Decide your priorities, where to concentrate.

WORK WITH YOUR OWN STRENGTHS. The road to effectiveness is not to mimic the behavior of the successful boss you so admire, or to follow the program of a book (even mine). You can only be effective by working with your own set of strengths, a set of strengths that are as distinctive as your fingerprints. Your job is to make effective what you have—not what you don't have.

You identify strengths by performance. There is some correlation between what you and I like to do and what we do well. There is a strong correlation between what we hate to do and what we do poorly simply because we try to get it out of the way as fast as possible, with minimum effort and postpone, postpone, postpone working on it at all. Albert Einstein said he would have given everything, including the Nobel Prize, for the ability to play the fiddle well enough to play in a symphony orchestra. But he simply didn't have the coordination between his two arms and hands that are the prerequisite for being a master string instrument player. He loved playing—he practiced four hours a day and enjoyed it. But it wasn't his strength. He always said he hated doing math. He was only a genius at math.

Strengths are not skills, they are capacities. The question is not, can you read, but are you a reader or a listener, for instance? This particular characteristic is almost as strongly determined as handedness. Franklin D. Roosevelt and Harry S. Truman were listeners. Roosevelt rarely read anything; he had it read to him. Eisenhower was a reader but didn't know it. When he was Commander-in-Chief in Europe his press conferences were widely admired. His aide insisted that journalists hand in their questions written-up to a few minutes before the conference. Ike read them and his responses were superb. Then he became president, following Roosevelt and Truman, who had set the style of taking questions from the press from the floor (as listeners, they were good at it). Ike, however, performed poorly;

the press disliked him because they said he never answered the question. His eyes glazed over. He didn't even really hear the questions.

People have become more understanding in recent years of how strengths vary from person to person that there are morning people, or perceptive people, or conceptual people. What many people do not know about their strengths and weaknesses, however, is whether they are comfortable with other people or have to learn how to work with them. Too many think they are wonderful with people because they talk well. They don't realize that being wonderful with people means listening well.

SELF-RENEWAL

Expect the job to provide stimulus only if you work on your own self-renewal, only if you **create the excitement, the challenge, the transformation that makes an old job enriching over and over again.** Seeing both yourself and the task in a new dimension can sometimes expand this capacity. There is an old story about the great clarinetist in an orchestra who was asked by the conductor to sit in the audience and listen to the orchestra play. For the first time, he heard music. He wasn't simply playing the clarinet expertly, he was making music. That's self-renewal. Not doing anything differently but **giving it new meaning.**

The most effective road to self-renewal is to look for the **UNEXPECTED SUCCESS AND RUN WITH IT.** Most people brush the evidence of success aside because they are so problem-focused. The reports executives usually work with are also problem-focused—with a front page that summarizes all the areas in which the organization underperformed during the past period. Non-profit executives should make the first page show the areas where the organization overperformed against plan or budget, because that is where the first signs of unexpected success begin to appear. The first few times you will brush it aside: Leave me alone, I'm busy solving

problems. Eventually, though, a suspicion may begin to surface that some of the problems would work themselves out if we **paid more attention to the things that were working exceptionally well**. I know a very able woman who runs a small community service agency. She began to notice that her Visiting Nurses were putting in steadily increasing claims for overtime. First, like all of us, she tried to control the increase. She met with the nurses, asked them why their overtime bills were climbing, and discovered that they were treating more people after 6:00 p.m., when they came home from work. As a result of improved medical care, the caseload was shifting from invalids and shut-ins to people who functioned but who needed help with services such as insulin therapy, physical rehabilitation, injections. Now she is in a new field. She is a missionary to meet this new need—and she has become a newly vigorous and effective person.

The three most common **forcing tools for sustaining the process of self-renewal** are teaching, going outside the organization, and serving down in the ranks. When an individual is asked to explain to a group of colleagues how she did something that worked very well, she learns, and so do the listeners. Spending time doing volunteer work in another organization also opens up alternatives. And one of the oldest techniques for keeping executives alive to the realities of implementing an organization's mission is for them to work once or twice a year at the level where service is delivered to the organization's clients. One well-trained medical bureaucrat I know was forced by a strike or some sudden epidemic years ago to work as a floor nurse for a week. Suddenly he was down where the heartbreaks and the successes were played out. It forced him to learn and, as he admitted to me, "It forced me to be honest with myself." Now the hospital's rule (and it is one of the finest hospitals I know) is that he and all his administrators spend one week a year working

on the floor with the people who take care of the patients.

All the individuals who have the greatest ability for self-renewal focus their efforts. In a way, they are self-centered, and **see the whole world as nourishment for their growth.**

WHAT DO YOU WANT TO BE REMEMBERED FOR?

When I was thirteen, I had an inspiring teacher of religion, who one day went right through the class of boys asking each one, "What do you want to be remembered for?" None of us, of course, could give an answer. So, he chuckled and said, "I didn't expect you to be able to answer it. But if you still can't answer it **BY THE TIME YOU'RE FIFTY**, you will have wasted your life." We eventually had a sixtieth reunion of that high school class. Most of us were still alive, but we hadn't seen each other since we graduated, and so the talk at first was a little stilted. Then one of the fellows asked, "Do you remember Father Pfliegler and that question?" We all remembered it. And each one said it had made **all the difference** to him, although they **didn't really understand that until they were in their forties.**

At twenty-five, some of us began trying to answer it and, by and large, answered it foolishly. Joseph Schumpeter, one of the greatest economists of this century, claimed at twenty-five that he wanted to be remembered as the best horseman in Europe, the greatest lover in Europe, and as a great economist. By age sixty, just before he died, he was asked the question again. He no longer talked of horsemanship and he no longer talked of women. He said he wanted to be remembered as the man who had given an early warning of the dangers of inflation. That is what he is remembered for—and it's **worthwhile** being remembered for. Asking that question changed him, even though the answer he gave at twenty-five was singularly stupid, even for a young man of twenty-five.

I'm always asking that question: What do you want to be remembered for? It is a question that **induces you to renew yourself**, because it pushes you to **see yourself as a different person**—the person you can become. If you are fortunate, someone with the moral authority of a Father Pfliegler will ask you that question **EARLY ENOUGH IN YOUR LIFE** so that you will **continue to ask it as you go through life**.