



Phase of Life to Way of Life

Marti was driving through her neighborhood to work one morning when a genie suddenly appeared in the passenger seat and asked, "And what will your third wish be?"

Marti was so startled; she almost hit a lamp post. After pulling over to the curb and stopping the car, Marti glared angrily at the genie and practically shouted, "How can I be getting a third wish when I haven't had a first or second wish yet?"

"You have had two wishes already," the genie calmly replied, "but your second wish was for me to put everything back the way it was before you made your first wish. So, you remember nothing, because everything is the way it was before you made any wishes. You have one wish left."

Already late for work, Marti thought about her hectic life and blurted, "Okay, I don't believe this, but why not. I wish my world would slow down and stop moving so fast. I wish we lived on easy street. I wish there was more stability and security at work, at home, and here in our community. I wish life was more predictable and things didn't keep changing."

"Funny," said the genie as it granted Marti's wish and disappeared forever, "that was your first wish, too."

We do need to be careful about what we wish for — we just might get it. The popular goals of security, stability, and predictability are deadly. The closer we get to these dangerous goals, the more our growth is stunted and learning reduced. In today's fast-changing world, if we fail to change, it means we will be changed. "Job security" is a good example of an appealing idea that can draw us into the poisonous swamps of rot and decay. The more secure I become in my job, the more likely I am to become stagnant and stuck in a rut. High job security means I feel less and less urgency to grow, develop, and build new skills. That sets me up to be a victim of the inevitable changes that will eventually hit my job. Ironically, job security generally leads down the slippery slope to less security.

True and lasting security comes from constant growth and development. We can't manage change, but we can be change opportunists. The higher our rate of personal growth and development, the more likely we are to master the opportunities change unexpectedly throws in front of us. To master change and build a life of ever-deeper growth, we need to make learning a way of life rather than a phase of life.

Leaders are constantly on the grow. Like the financial planning principle of paying yourself first, they devote **at least** 10 percent of their time to personal growth and development. The first step to growth and development is the wish to grow and develop. Many people (and organizations) want to harvest the benefits of growth and development without planting the seeds of a personal growth plan fertilized by strong learning habits.

Fundamental to leading others is helping them to grow and develop. This is both an issue of skills (doing) and a set of values (being). The more we value (love) others, the more we care about their growth and development. But we can't make them into something we're not. Parents with stunted personal growth have a tough time developing learning and growing kids. Managers or team leaders with stunted personal growth aren't likely to develop learning and growing teams or organizations. Developing them involves developing me.

Greek Mathematician, Euclid, was hired to teach geometry to a young, impatient Egyptian heir to the throne. The prince was an unmotivated student. He especially resisted learning basic formulas and theories before getting into practical applications. "Is there no simpler way you can get to the point?" he asked. "As the crown prince I should not be expected to deal with such trivial and useless details." Euclid's response gave teachers through the ages that unforgettable phrase, "I am sorry, but there is no royal road to learning."

It's easy to see learning as an end result rather than an ongoing process. Once I get my diploma, certification, job, or through this crazy period, it's all too natural to relax and feel like I should now enjoy the fruits of my labors. Therein lies the deadly trap of viewing learning or change as a phase of life. Constant growth, development, and adaptability to change comes through life-long learning. The 19th century British theologian and essayist, John Henry Newman once said, "Growth is the only evidence of life." If we're not growing, we're like a dying tree; eventually the winds of change will snap off our rotting trunks and blow us over.

As with a few dollars a day going into an investment fund, learning is a habit that accumulates little by little each day. How much we invest in that fund and where we invest it will determine how wealthy we eventually become. Scottish author, Samuel Smiles, founded the modern self-help field with his 19th century bestseller, *Self Help*. In it he writes, "Men of business are accustomed to quote the maxim that 'time is money' — but it is more; the proper improvement of it is self-culture, self-improvement, and growth of character. An hour wasted daily on trifles or in indolence, would, if devoted to self-improvement, make an ignorant man wise in a few years, and employed in good works, would make his life fruitful, and death a harvest of worthy deeds.

Fifteen minutes a day devoted to self-improvement will be felt at the end of the year."

Resource: Jim Clemmer (jim.clemmer@clemmer.net) is a keynote speaker, workshop/retreat leader, and management team developer on leadership, change, customer focus, culture, teams, and personal growth. His web site is www.clemmer.net.