

REAP what you SOW

It's finally spring, which brings longer days, warmer climates, and more outdoor activities. For those of us who have a green thumb, you're probably in the midst of cultivating a garden to enjoy in the months to come. Enjoying beautifully landscaped yards and a rich harvest isn't something that merely appears. If only it were as simple as just throwing a seed in the ground somewhere! It requires planning, deliberate preparation, and nourishment. Hence the age-old proverb, "You reap what you sow"; in other words, you'll enjoy a harvest based on the work and preparation you've put in.

When you think about it, any desired result requires a similar approach of planning, preparation, and cultivation. My life's passion has become helping others realize, maximize, and leverage their ability to communicate, listen, and lead successfully. From fundamental public speaking strategies to increasing emotional intelligence, the professionals and students I teach all grow leaps and bounds when they dedicate the time and effort to make those strides.

GROWING A GARDEN OF NEW SKILLS

In the spirit of "spring fever" and fruitful harvests—for both tomatoes and personal development—here are four major steps to consider when cultivating a successful garden or personal goal:

1. Pick a spot.

Sounds simple enough, right? Not necessarily. In fact, this step may seem a bit overwhelming. Where do you start? In some instances, you have limited options, so that may help the decision process. However, deciding the best place to start requires an understanding of what it is you want to accomplish. Do you want corn

or herbs? Are you looking to feed just yourself or a family of ten? Your desired outcome will determine what is needed space-wise and where to start. The same goes for your personal development; determine what you want to grow, the results you want to see. Do you want to be a more effective speaker? Do you want to be a better manager? Work back from there and pick a spot to cultivate that desired result. Doing so will make your efforts more deliberate and successful.

2. Till your soil.

You've picked the spot, now it's time to plant! Not quite. Even if that spot has been used to plant things before, it will require preparation. Perhaps a gardener's tilling a spot for the first time. In either case, the ground you're working with needs some work before anything can successfully grow. Perhaps there's rocks, weeds, or troublesome roots; these need to be taken out and the existing soil should be turned over to integrate fresher, more nutrient-rich soil. Can you see the correlation in the cultivation of new personal habits or behaviors? We need to root out the things getting in our way. We often need to start fresh—revealing the rocks, weeds, etc. that may make it difficult to plant new ideas, habits, and growth. Perhaps its negative self-talk, bad personal experiences, or a lack of understanding in general. Whatever it is, till it up—turn it over with a fresh, new perspectives.

3. Plant your seeds.

At this point you typically know what you want to grow. You've determined your desired outcome, now it's time to plant the seeds that will create that outcome. When it comes to plants, vegetables, and fruits, you can simply run to the local hardware store to find specific packets for whatever you're looking for. Personal development isn't always so clearly packaged.

Look to targeted books, seminars, coaches, etc. These are all excellent sources to help plant new ideas and methods. To reiterate step one, *where* you plant seeds matters. You need to allocate space for growth or else your fruits, flowers, and vegetables will either not reach their potential, or not grow at all. The same can be said for new habits and behaviors; don't plant all your desired "seeds" on top of each other. Give each one enough space to properly develop. You may be trying to plant several at a time, and perhaps that can make sense in some instances. Regardless, always remember to give enough room so you can reach your potential.

4. Nourish your garden.

You've picked the appropriate spot, tilled the soil (making sure it has the right conditions for growth), and you've planted the seeds. Now just sit back and watch it grow. Nope, not that simple! We all know the answer to this from basic elementary school science: plants need sunlight (which should have been considered when picking your spot), water, and photosynthesis to grow. Now, I haven't addressed a number of detailed actions to help with that growth, whether it be fortified soil, mulch, pesticides, etc. I can refer you to any number of other experts for that! However, provided you have good soil and sunlight, your responsibility is to make sure those seeds receive enough water throughout the entire process. It's not a once-in-a-while type of thing, but rather a daily commitment. The same goes for your new skills: continued nourishment is key to actual growth. New goals are exciting to talk about. For many, getting

started is manageable (when they know what they want). It's the maintenance, consistency, and daily nourishment that can be overlooked, but that are absolutely critical for growth.

IT STARTS AND ENDS WITH YOU

Leo Tolstoy, the Russian novelist, famously wrote, "Everyone thinks of changing the world, but no one thinks of changing himself." Tolstoy's pronouncement is a useful starting point for any professional committed to growing new skills in order to continue their climb to the top.

This gardening analogy is no different than the climbing metaphor that I use most often due to my own personal experiences climbing. Like climbing a mountain, growing new skills takes planning, preparation, work, and patience. By identifying, planting, and nourishing any number of skills—from public speaking to effective leadership—you're making a conscious decision to invest in yourself and those around you. When opportunity knocks and it's time to stand and deliver, it's also time for self-development. We grow new skills not because it's easy, but because it's necessary to achieve our potential.

Get start on your growth today—take the necessary steps for a successful result.



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He is also a mountaineer and has climbed some of the world's tallest peaks, including Mount Kilimanjaro, Mount Elbrus, the Matterhorn, as well as mountains in Alaska and the Andes.