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LIFE | LEARNING | LEADERSHIP

# Perspective Guides Growth

*"If you desire to be a leader then remember that your higher calling is to serve others, find your value in contributing their successes."*

You only need three things to be successful when faced with an obstacle: **Attitude, Gratitude, and Willpower**. These skills form a powerful combination to provide us with a growth mindset.

This may seem simple to achieve until we are placed into an uncomfortable situation that presents us with unexpected challenges. We tend to see the situation as an undesirable circumstance with no benefit, only negativity from which we seek to escape the discomfort. No matter how we arrived at this moment in our lives we need to choose to face it rather than fight it. So, let's talk about the challenges that come with being "planted" somewhere we do not wish to be.



**Many of us have heard "grow where you are planted" so many times it is cliché, perhaps even meaningless.** In fact, more often than not we might wonder how genuine the sentiment is when our leaders utter the phrase, as if to be saying "embrace the suck" or "shut up and color" instead. While I cannot speak for the intent of any particular leader when they speak this proverb, I can offer some advice and insights on how you can truly take advantage and find the riches within.

**"If you don't like something, change it. If you can't change it, change your attitude about it"**  
**Maya Angelou**

Your **ATTITUDE** becomes your foundation for growth. It anchors us and gives us the strength we need to face hardship and a place where we can firmly stand tall; much like soil for a plant.

I can recall that every "undesirable" position that I have taken on, produced more growth than I could have foreseen. **The truth that I personally discovered is that when we adapt our attitude to accept our environment and its conditions, we can be successful.** Here is the hard truth. You don't know what you don't know. It can be difficult to trust the process and, at times, difficult to trust the wisdom (perhaps the intent) of the leaders who placed us into these positions. Maybe we feel as if our growth is being intentionally throttled or feel like we are being pigeon-holed, effectively limiting our growth. Just know and abide by this principle...control what you can control. All else is not up to you and worrying about it bears zero value.

Perhaps you feel as if the place you are at does not provide the ideal conditions for you to grow and develop. Why? Bad supervisor, trouble-making subordinates, disorganized team, competitive peers, etc. **While the best place to grow might be in fertile ground in a meadow or field, there are times when we find ourselves in a desert or a toxic environment.**

These are places where the soil is depleted of any nutrients, or there is an abundance of weeds crowded around you, competing for limited resources. Or, we find ourselves isolated and alone, like a flower planted in a crack in the concrete. **Do these factors drain us and deprive us of the energy we need for growth?**

What if I told you that these harsh circumstances are exactly what we need for growth? **Do not resist your circumstances, embrace them.** In David and Goliath, Malcolm Gladwell details how those who face significant disadvantages can develop unique strengths that later provide them advantages.

**Such circumstances could lead you to get in touch with your emotions, learn to listen to your body, strengthen friendships or give you valuable insights.** We can learn what not to do from a bad supervisor. We can learn how to better regulate our emotions from a difficult situation. We can learn how to be a better counselor from a difficult employee, and we can learn how to be more

adaptive in a resource constrained environment. Know that these intangibles are seldom taught and more often learned through experience. These are the ingredients to growth and effective leadership.

**“Don’t be overheard complaining...Not even to yourself.” - Marcus Aurelius**

**GRATITUDE** is the routine care taken to increase our effectiveness. **Like watering a plant, expressing gratitude daily for the position and opportunity rather than harvesting negative emotions is how we refresh ourselves and reinvigorate our actions.** This can be reinforced through many mediums like training, mentorship, and social connections just to name a few.

Seek to discover value in the opportunity that lies before you and find the good in what is seemingly undesirable, and then take the time to appreciate it. Alternatively, if we work to continuously change our circumstances, but fail to change our perspective then it does not matter where we go or what we do, because our well-being is dependent on our perspective more than the situation, and it is our perspective which carries the greatest influence. **We can choose to make the best of what we have been given or live in constant displeasure.**

**“Everything hangs on one’s thinking...A man is as unhappy as he has convinced himself he is.” - Seneca**

**By working to shift your perspective and learning to appreciate the opportunity rather than dismissing it, we can realize the long-term potential for the skills we are set to gain and develop in the position we are in.** Find fulfillment through positive emotions and accomplish meaningful goals. Doing so will help you move beyond being dependent on any circumstance and provide you with the ability to skillfully traverse the unknown.

Instead of asking ourselves “what could be different?” we should ask “how can I be different?” or “how can I respond differently?” We need to ask ourselves “what lesson does this experience have to teach me?”

**“Most of our obstacles would melt away if, instead of cowering before them, we should make up our minds to walk boldly through them.” – Orison Swett Marden**

The final piece is **WILLPOWER**. This factor is more than having the courage to face an obstacle, it is the inner fortitude required to overcome challenges through grit and toughness. Willpower is your intrinsic motivation that drives you to succeed. It is your strength to persevere powered by your attitude and fueled by your gratitude. Similarly, a plant’s photosynthesis process can be described as how one absorbs energy and that which transforms your internal energy into external results. Willpower is dependent on the conscious mind. Our attitudes control our conscious mind. Any conflict will be excruciating. **Willpower cannot force a change in our attitude, it will lose.**

Willpower must be nurtured to keep it strong. Tend to it through the discipline of positive habits and accomplishing them day in and day out. Once established, you will strive to finish those tasks routinely. You can strengthen your habit with a strong motivating factor, something that pulls you towards your goals.

Think about your motivations. Are you seeking development, promotion, money, recognition? Consider what happens when you vacate your previous position. Did you adequately prepare the next generation of leaders to take on the role seamlessly or will they undoubtedly flounder in your absence? If so, have you truly earned the next higher position that you desire? **Even if your motivation is simply, “to prove them all wrong”, find the motivation you need to be successful.** Internalize it and drive through the finish.

Most importantly, be yourself, and be passionate about what you do. It is much easier to self-motivate when you are being authentic about the work you are doing. **Find your purpose, define what success looks like, and relentlessly pursue your goals.** If you desire to be a leader then remember that your higher calling is to serve others, find your value in contributing their successes.

**So, remember, if you want to grow, seek it, face your obstacle, and accept the challenge.** Know that the hardship can help you develop a sense of meaning and adjust your perspective to match. The value of hard work comes from resistance. Challenge and discomfort are immensely valuable to personal growth. Invest in the attitude it takes to work hard to overcome it, while being thankful for the challenge every day. And energize your willpower by pursuing your goals with purpose and persistence.

This is what a growth mindset looks like, and it lets you control everything you need to conquer the obstacle. Your only competition is you, and if you wake up every morning and strive to be your best self, even incrementally better than you were yesterday, you will be successful.

## ADAM BOUBEDE

Adam Boubede is a senior enlisted leader in the United States Air Force. He has led multiple large organizations and currently serves as the Chief Enlisted Manager at the 786th Civil Engineer Squadron, Ramstein Air Base, Germany.



## Fail Often. Fail Fiercely.

**I am proud of my failures and you should be proud of yours.** Wait, what? Let me quantify and give some context as to why I would say this by starting with a recent example.



In my workplace, as in many others, you must display breadth of experience and exposure in order to promote. Sometimes that breadth of experience can be found in volunteering for special projects, and often it comes from working in different areas in an organization. **Earlier this year, I applied for a promotion to a position that I felt was tailor made for me.** I had several years working in the materials inspection and testing division and had developed expertise and specialized knowledge in steel fabrication and welding that I was sure set me apart from others. I knew I had a damn good shot, and I studied and prepared hard for the interviews. I made it through the first two interviews and was in the running for the final 3. Alas, it was not to be. During my post interview feedback, a common theme was my lack of experience outside of the

division. They were looking for someone who had worked in other engineering areas.

I took that feedback to heart and started to look for other openings within the organization that I could also apply for. I applied for positions in maintenance engineering throughout the state, in traffic operations, and in construction. I applied for promotional positions as well as lateral positions. **I was throwing a LOT of spaghetti on the wall, seeing if anything would stick.** I've gone through a lot of pasta. I've probably applied for and interviewed for a half dozen to a dozen positions in the last 6 months (I've kind of lost count), and to date have not yet been picked up. Ironically, the feedback from those of those interviews were my lack of specific expertise for the particular position! I surely don't find it convenient to fill out multiple applications, and it can be time consuming to write my statement of qualifications to cater to the different requirements that each hiring manager may have. But I still do it and continue to do so, because I have found opportunities to learn more about the organization and expand my network with each failure. **I have learned to fail often, and to fail fiercely.**

So, what does it mean to say fail often and to fail fiercely? Society often gives us negative messages about failure, so much so, that failure, for many of us, carries with it a stigma of shame and embarrassment. **Failure is not typically seen to be advantageous.** We often

hear phrases such as: "Failure is not an option", "Second place is the first loser", or perhaps, as scarred children and adults, we have been told by trusted authority figures that "You are such a failure". It's no wonder that so many of us, despite our minds telling us otherwise, still associate failure negatively. Human nature has wired us for the negative bias, and we have an uncanny and self-sabotaging way of focusing on failure as a negative. It takes an immense amount of self-reflection and resiliency to flip this way of thinking. Increasing our ability to self-reflect and be resilient is an exercise like any other. **We have to use it, we have to do it often, or we don't get better at it.** What I'm saying is, the more we fail, the more opportunity we have to self-reflect and build our resilience. We get "better" at failing.

"Failing often" means we put ourselves out there for opportunities. We don't move forward without effort, and it's a fallacy to think that good things will happen to those who wait. When we wait, life passes us by. **History favors those that go for broke.** If we want something, we have to make it happen and can't play it safe. "Failing fiercely" means knowing that those opportunities which we have put ourselves out there for may not always work out in our favor but doing so regardless. Failing fiercely means using the outcomes to our advantage and as learning opportunities. **It means squeezing every bit of knowledge that we can out of the experience so we can use it in the future.** Failing fiercely does not mean that we accept the outcome as status quo and as an excuse for our lot in life, but to use failure as fuel to keep going until we achieve our objective.

To date, after each one of these interviews I have received a call back, the voice on the other line will say "We would like to thank you for taking the time, but we regret to inform you that you were not selected". There is that initial feeling of deflation, but because I believe in failing fiercely, my response is "Thank you for the opportunity. When you have some time, I'd like to schedule time with you to get some feedback on my interview and get your thoughts on what I can improve on in the future." These feedback sessions have helped me fill many gaps in my knowledge, that I find I now am able to better strategize going forward. Failing fiercely means not giving in to your disappointment and feeling sorry for yourself. **It means picking yourself up and turning your failure into a tool that you can use to fuel your future endeavors.**

This example is merely a drop in the bucket that is history of my many failures, some astronomical, and some mere pebbles. But the lessons here are still applicable. Failing often and failing fiercely has taught me grace. It has taught me empathy. It has taught me humility. **It has taught me grit, and it has made me wiser and stronger.**

We all experience failure in our lives, both professionally and personally. Some failures are small, and some profoundly alter our lives. **Failure is nothing to be ashamed of, we all experience it.** But when we learn to fail fiercely, we learn to overcome any shame that can be associated with failure. **When we own our failures, they no longer own us. They no longer have the power to hold us hostage.** Every failure leaves a scar. Wear those scars proudly like a badge of honor. They are a reminder for us, and a sign to others, of the effort, the blood, sweat and tears that went into it. You know who has scars? Warriors have scars.

**Failure does not make you weak. It makes you a warrior.**

## NINA CHOY-ROHMILLER

Nina Choy-Rohmiller is an Air Force Veteran. She is the Vice Chair of the American Welding Society Bridge Welding Committee, and Chief of the Office of Structure Quality Management at the California Department of Transportation.



# The Llama Lounge

A Dialogue on all things Life, Learning, and Leadership!

Episode 78

## LIVING BEYOND YOUR 10 MINUTES

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### [Listen to the Episode Here](#)

In this episode, Jose and Joe welcomed John Levitow Jr. to the lounge. John is the son of the Air Force legend who was awarded the Medal of Honor for his acts of heroism while serving on board a Douglas AC-47 Spooky gunship of the 3d Special Operations Squadron on February 24, 1969. During their discussion, John shared his experiences with his father, how his father's leadership perspectives shaped the man he has become, and John also shared some of his own leadership views.

### **John's Book Recommendations:**

*The Motive* - Patrick Lencioni | [purchase here](#)

### **Follow John here:**

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*E-Mail:* [jleelj@gmail.com](mailto:jleelj@gmail.com)

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# The Llama Lounge

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In this episode Scott and Joe catch up with longtime Llama friend, Bob Young. Bob is a retired United States Air Force Senior Enlisted Leader and currently serves as Chief, Network Operations Branch, Air Force Research Labs, at Kirtland AFB in Albuquerque New Mexico. Bob shares the story of his recovery from cancer, the importance of compassion and empathy, and the leadership perspectives he has developed throughout his journey. Enjoy!

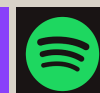
## **Scott's Book Recommendations:**

The Shawshank Redemption – Stephen King | [purchase here](#)

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