



DOING THE HARD WORK

The hardest work of leadership is often the work within.

When Striving Stops Working

Personal growth sometimes requires moving from proving yourself, through losing what worked, toward discovering what actually matters

Most successful people learned how to strive for a reason. You wanted to build the farm, grow the company, earn the degree, provide for your family, create security, prove you could do it, or make a difference. So you worked. Effort produced results. Discipline mattered. Achievement opened doors. For a long time, it worked.

Then sometimes something changes. Achievement feels less satisfying. Working harder does not solve the problem. Something falls apart. Or you simply begin asking, **'Is this really what all of this was for?'** Drawing on ideas from Janet O. Hagberg's *The Critical Journey*, this piece considers disruption, questioning, and rebuilding as parts of deeper personal growth. **Maybe the objective is not to get back to the person you were, but to discover who you are becoming.**

1 Desire - I want something

Growth often begins with desire: success, security, recognition, freedom, influence, belonging, impact, or a better life for your family. Desire creates movement. It gets us out of bed, causes us to learn, and gives us courage to attempt difficult things. The important question eventually becomes what is underneath what we want. A goal may contain ambition, but underneath it may also be security, significance, curiosity, stewardship, freedom, or a desire to prove something.

ASK YOURSELF: What have I spent much of my life trying to create, achieve, prove, or secure - and what did I believe getting it would give me?

2 Striving - I can make it happen

Then we discover agency. Work harder. Learn. Solve the problem. Take responsibility. Push through. Get better. Successful people often become very good here because **striving works**. Effort becomes competence, competence produces results, and results reinforce the formula. Eventually what began as something you do becomes part of who you believe you are: the provider, entrepreneur, farmer, problem solver, strong one, or person everyone calls. Striving also builds intuition - thousands of experiences teach you when to push, plan, solve, control, and make the future happen.

ASK YOURSELF: How much of my sense of worth - and my instinct for what to do next - has become connected to what I can accomplish, fix, provide, control, or produce?

3 The fall - what used to work is not working

Eventually life can present something striving cannot solve. A business fails. A relationship changes. You lose money. Your health changes. Or nothing dramatic happens and achievement simply stops producing what it used to produce inside you. So you use the tool that always worked: work harder, think harder, fix it, create another goal, regain control. But this time the old formula does not answer the deeper problem. For a striving person, this can feel less like growth and more like failure. **What if the inability to strive your way out is exposing something striving was never capable of answering?**

ASK YOURSELF: Where am I trying harder and harder to make an old way of operating produce something it can no longer give me?

4 Between maps - when your old intuition stops working

This may be the most disorienting part. Your old intuition was built through years of success: scan the future, anticipate risk, work backward, plan, execute, measure, correct, push. You did not have to think through it anymore. You just knew. Then the old operating system stops producing confidence or direction. **Your old intuition may stop feeling trustworthy before your new intuition has enough experience to become trustworthy.** You are between maps. The old voice says push harder and regain control. A quieter voice begins asking: What is true now? What matters? What am I forcing? What is mine to do in this moment?

ASK YOURSELF: Am I actually lost - or has the way I used to know where I was going stopped being adequate for where I am now?



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5 Rebuild - learn to live without the old map

Rebuilding is not simply choosing better goals. It is developing a different way of knowing what to do. Striving intuition often begins with 'Where do I need to get?' and then works backward. A purpose-oriented intuition begins closer to the present: **What is true right now? What does this situation require? What responsibility belongs to me? What am I being invited to learn? What is the next faithful thing to do?** At first, this can feel terribly uncertain because the new intuition has little history behind it. You take a step, reality gives you information, you listen again, and slowly a new intuition forms.

ASK YOURSELF: Can I make a good decision from what I know and value today without requiring certainty about where that decision eventually leads?

6 Purpose - I know more clearly what is mine to do

Purpose is different from ambition. Ambition often asks, 'What can I accomplish?' Purpose increasingly asks, 'What is mine to do?' This does not mean playing small. You may still build companies, take risks, make money, lead people, forecast cash, and develop strategy. But the relationship changes. The future becomes something you prepare for rather than something you must control to feel secure. Purpose becomes less of a destination and more of an orientation - building from the present with greater clarity about who you are, what matters, and what you have been entrusted to steward.

ASK YOURSELF: What feels worth doing even if it does not prove anything about me or guarantee where it will lead?

The Space Between the Old Map and the New One

The fall can do more than disrupt goals. It can **implode an intuition built for striving**. For a time, the old way no longer works and the new way has almost no track record. That uncertainty is not necessarily a defect in the process. It may be part of the process.

DESIRE	STRIVING	IDENTITY	THE FALL	REBUILD	PURPOSE
I want something	I can make it happen	I know how to make it happen	The old map stops working	Listen, choose, act, learn	What is mine to do?

Striving asks you to build today around the future you are trying to create. Purpose increasingly allows you to build the future out of the way you choose to live today.

Personal growth rarely moves in a straight line. We revisit these questions in different parts of life and often at deeper levels. Purpose is not another achievement ladder. It is a growing capacity to inhabit the present, listen well, act faithfully, and allow the future to emerge from those choices.

WHERE ARE YOU IN THE JOURNEY?

DESIRE - What have I wanted? What have I spent years pursuing, building, proving, or securing?

STRIVING - What worked? What abilities, disciplines, and instincts helped me become successful?

IDENTITY - What became attached to it? Who have I needed to be in order to feel valuable, secure, respected, or needed?

FALL - What is not working anymore? Where is more effort no longer producing the answer?

INTUITION - Which internal compass am I using? Am I still automatically planning, pushing, and controlling because that is how I learned to create safety and success?

REBUILD - What is true right now? What is the next good, faithful, or responsible thing I can do without knowing the whole road?

PURPOSE - What remains? When I remove proving, pleasing, fear, and expectation, what still feels deeply worth doing?

Am I trying to get back to the person I was - or becoming curious about the person I might be becoming?

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If striving helped you build the life you have, the next stage may require something different: enough humility to examine what you built, enough courage to release what no longer fits, and enough patience to develop a new intuition around purpose, presence, and stewardship.

AgStrat works with founders and leaders navigating both organizational transitions and the personal transitions that often accompany them. To begin a confidential conversation, contact AgStrat at virgil@agstratsolutions.com.

Desire | Growth | Identity | Purpose | Stewardship