

## ***Growing Great Employees Readers' Guide***

In talking with clients and other readers, we've found that they've been using *Growing Great Employees* as the basis for a homegrown management practicum. They've bought copies of the book for their teams, or for a group of their peers, and then held a meeting or series of meetings focusing on how to make best use of the book's contents.

I *love* that people are doing this—making *Growing Great Employees* real for themselves, their colleagues, and their employees—so I've created this readers' guide as a support for you, should you care to create your own discussion group.

I suggest dividing the book into six “chunks” of content, which I've noted below. You might want to have a relatively brief meeting (45–60 minutes) about each one. Or, you might want to have two longer meetings—the first focusing on topics 1–3, and the second on topics 4–6. I wouldn't advise that you try to cover all the topics in a single sitting—that would probably be neither engaging nor practical!

For each topic, I've suggested some discussion questions and some activities to do as a group. Feel free to try them all, or simply pick and choose.

Good luck, and may this help you become the kind of manager you always wanted to have!

### **1) Where Do You Begin? (Chapter 1, Listening)**

#### *Discussion questions:*

What makes it difficult for us, as managers, to listen—and how can we overcome those obstacles?

Who in my life has modeled truly effective listening, and what impact has that had on me?

What legitimate requests for listening have I ignored recently—and what can I do differently going forward?

How might listening make me a more effective leader?

#### *Activities:*

- 1) **Restating** (this is generally the listening skill that's newest for people): Break into pairs and try this: Have one person talk for a few minutes about a project he or she is working on (leaving some pauses for his or her partner to restate!). Then have the other person listen and make one or two summary restatements to capture his or her partner's main points. Then switch. Once everyone has practiced, return to the group and debrief by having each person say one thing he

or she liked about what he or she did and one thing he or she wants to work to improve.

- 2) **Listening for feelings:** When employees have strong feeling, many managers tend to either ignore them or try to convince them not to feel that way. Unfortunately, this usually sends the feelings underground in the form of resentment, gossip, or loss of focus or productivity. To practice using listening to respond to strong feelings, try this: Have one person in your group talk about something about which he or she has strong negative feelings. Let the rest of the group practice simply restating the feelings they see and hear expressed.
- 3) **Curiosity-based questions:** It's often hardest to get curious about familiar topics. Break into groups of three and try this: Have one person talk about something the other two people know a lot about. Their task is to ask genuinely curiosity-based questions (you may want to refer to pp. 8–9). Switch twice, so everyone gets two chances to practice questioning. In the large group, debrief by having each person say one thing he or she learned—about the speaker, the topic...or themselves!

## 2) What—and Who—Do You Want? (Chapters 2 and 3; Core Competencies, Job Descriptions, and Interviewing)

### *Discussion questions:*

What core competencies would I like to define for my team and why?

In what ways is the “DNA” of my current company different from what I want, and what can I do about that?

How would I define the key responsibilities of my job?

What can I do differently to conduct more useful interviews?

### *Activities:*

- 1) **Core competencies:** Often, the most challenging aspect of creating core competencies is defining them behaviorally. Ask one person in your group to share a core competency he or she wants to establish for his or her team. Work as a group, referring to pp. 25–26, to create three or four behavioral descriptors, pushing each other to be truly behavioral. (For instance, if the core competency is team-focused, and someone says “is respectful,” ask, “What does that look like?” or “How would ‘respectful’ show up on tape?” in order to find the behaviors that make up “respect.”)
- 2) **Job descriptions:** A good job description is a clear and focused “map” to a particular job. Have everyone in your group bring a job description (their own or

that of someone who works for them) they want to improve. Work in trios, using the template on pp. 31–33, to help each other clearly and simply define relationships, responsibilities, and abilities in the job descriptions each person brought.

- 3) **Interviewing:** Asking questions without “right” or “wrong” answers tends to be challenging for most interviewers. Break into pairs and have one person start by suggesting a topic he or she wants to explore in the next interview he or she does. The topic can be focused on either a responsibility or an ability. Then work together to decide how to establish the scenario and ask a “what if” question in a way that will elicit the interviewee’s mindset, experience, and skills.

### 3) How Do You Get Them Started? (Chapters 4 and 5; Onboarding and Mindset of a Coach)

#### *Discussion questions:*

Is my tendency to “plant too deep” (overload new employees with information or expectations) or to “plant too shallow” (not provide enough information or resources to get started well)—and what can I do to shift?

How can I improve my company’s onboarding process?

Is there anyone I manage about whom I don’t have the “mindset of a coach”—and what can I do about that?

How can I change the pattern of negative assumption that most impedes my success?

#### *Activities:*

- 1) **Onboarding process:** As a group, review your company’s onboarding process and decide how you can customize it, if needed, to make sure it answers the “who, what, and how” onboarding questions. (You can use the process suggested on pp. 72–75 to spark your thinking.)
- 2) **Deep or shallow:** It’s often helpful to learn from people whose strengths are complementary to yours. Pair up with someone whose tendency in onboarding is opposite to yours (e.g., if you tend to “plant too deep,” find someone who tends to “plant too shallow”). Then pick a specific instance in the past when you feel you haven’t “planted at the right depth,” and ask your partner how he or she might have handled it.
- 3) **Mindset:** Helping someone else work through a process can be a great way to understand it for yourself. Ask one (brave) member of your group to volunteer to be helped by the group. This person will share with the group a belief that he or she would like to question, ideally one about an employee. The entire group can

help the volunteer work through his or her situation, using the activity that begins on p. 85.

#### **4) How Do You Keep Them Growing? (Chapters 6, 7, 8, and 9; Social Style, Agreements and Feedback, Delegation and Coaching)**

##### *Discussion questions:*

How can I work more effectively with people of styles different from mine?

What performance agreement do I most need to make that I haven't yet made?

If I were to improve one thing about the way I give corrective feedback, what would it be?

Thinking of an employee I really want to "grow," what's a responsibility I could delegate to him or her or a developmental area for coaching?

##### *Activities:*

- 1) **Social style:** Working as a group, use the style-reading clues on p. 109 to assess the style of someone known to everyone in the group. Then discuss what each of you can do to take better advantage of this person's style-based strengths and create better relationships with him or her.
- 2) **Feedback:** Giving corrective feedback is one of the most difficult and necessary aspects of management. Break into trios and select one of the "non-camera check" feedback statements on p. 154 (or pick one of your own). Then work together to find "camera check" statements that express the behaviors within that statement.
- 3) **Delegation:** Many managers tend to do "one size fits all" delegation. Break into pairs and discuss whether you tend to "over-delegate" (give more autonomy than is useful) or "under-delegate" (give less-than-useful autonomy). Then decide what you can do to rebalance your delegation approach.

#### **5) Where Do You Draw the Line? (Chapters 10 and 11; Employee Responsibilities and Termination)**

##### *Discussion questions:*

How can I make clearer agreements with my employees about fulfilling their "employee responsibilities"?

Is there a point in the management decision tree where I tend to get "stuck"?

What's the most difficult thing for me about terminating someone—and how can I get better at that?

How can I make best use of my strengths in dealing with difficult employees?

*Activities:*

- 1) **Employee responsibilities:** Employees who are good performers but “poor company citizens” can be very challenging. Ask one person in your group, who has this issue with a current employee, to give the specifics of the situation (without sharing the employee's name or job). Work together as a group to help this person come up with possible solutions.
- 2) **Management decision tree:** Having a path to follow is always helpful. Break into trios and have each person pick a difficult employee issue with which he or she is currently dealing. Use the management decision tree (p. 225) to find out where you are with your issue, and get your partners' help in figuring out how to keep moving in the right direction.
- 3) **Termination:** This is the most difficult thing for a manager, bar none. As a group, using chapter 11 as a resource, agree on the key things you want to focus on doing impeccably when you're faced with the situation of having to let someone go.

## 6) How Does the Gardener Grow? (Chapter 12; Mastery)

*Discussion questions:*

Where in my life do I feel most passionate about attaining mastery?

What would be the benefits to my employees if I were to become a “master manager”?

How do I “stop myself” when it comes to achieving mastery—and how can I move past that?

How do I learn best?

*Activities:*

- 1) **Not stopping:** It's far too easy to talk yourself out of becoming an excellent manager. Break into trios and help each other complete the activity on p. 257, using your own experiences as managers and leaders.
- 2) **Growing as a manager:** Part of achieving mastery is planning your own growth. Working with a partner, decide the management skills you each want to focus on

improving, using the activity on pp. 262–263 as a basis for figuring out both what you’ll learn and how.

- 3) **Staying focused:** When you want to do something new, it’s helpful to remind yourself why. As a group, discuss and agree on why it’s important to each of you to become an excellent manager of people. You may want to end by going around the group and having each person state his or her core motivation: why it’s meaningful for them to manage well. (You can also have each member of your group write this core “why” in the box provided on p. 269.)

Have fun, be honest, and let yourselves grow.

Warmly,

Erika Andersen