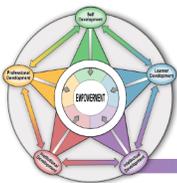




# Self-Growth Paper

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The step that is needed to be taken in order to be truly successful, not only in school, but in life as a whole, is knowing how to learn and improve upon yourself. It is being able to take full control over your life and being able to form yourself into the person you want to be — setting your priorities where you want them to be, making decisions you want to make, and ultimately becoming the person you want to become. Over the course of the past week, I have come to understand this process which is known as being a self-grower. I have come to realize that I am the one in control of my own life. I am in control of what motivates me.

I am also ultimately in control of how I perform and how I respond and learn from each performance. But this step toward self-actualization did not happen all at once; it took a complete sense of being broken down and then being remolded to teach me to think this way.

The most important transformation that came from the self-growth process is related to where my sense of motivation comes from. In the beginning, the community as a whole was out for the approval of the faculty and facilitators. We weren't looking at what we wanted to get out of the program, nor were we looking at what we wanted to learn; instead, we were looking at what the faculty wanted out of us. We set our goals and expressed what we wanted to work on and develop, but we deviated from our goals in order to please the faculty.

From the start of our education, we are trained to work for “the grade.” We are trained to work to achieve a certain level of performance which is determined by another individual — a teacher, coach, instructor, etc. — with our success or failure based on **their** set of standards. We took this programmed mindset and applied it the Scholars Institute curriculum. Unfortunately, we soon realized that this approach wouldn't work for us due to the fact that even with our best effort, we would still be unable to complete the tasks set before us. This resulted in an immediate sense of failure within us. We weren't going to be able to “pass,” let alone ace, the Scholar's Institute as we were so obviously accustomed to. As a result, we put an enormous amount of stress on ourselves, converted to an unhealthy lifestyle to maintain a high level of performance, and eventually, to some extent, crashed.

At this point, we began to analyze the situation. We decided that the process was inadequate and what was being asked of us was ridiculous. We began to criticize the system because it completely destroyed our sense of the “Comfort Zone.” For example, we were told we were able to pick and choose our activities, yet we were still being encouraged to do everything. This created an inner conflict of intrinsic achievement versus extrinsic achievement. What we slowly began to realize is that we were the controllers of our own destiny. The expectations were not going to go away, but it was up to us to decide which of those expectations needed to be met in order to improve on what **we** wanted to improve upon.

Now, I understand that we are not meant to look to others to see what we need to do, but instead look to ourselves to see what we want to come away with from a situation. This new sense of motivation was the turning point for me. No longer did I need to do something for the sake of another person, but instead do it for the sake of self-improvement. This was really our first step to understanding ourselves and understanding how we need to take charge of our growth (self-growth).

This new sense of motivation led to the next important breakthrough: self-assessment. Before stepping into the realm of self-assessment, I need to first explain what we previously thought assessment meant. Throughout high school, we are taught to look for the bad in what we do and improve upon those things and leave the good as is. While this provides an easy sense of gratification if you got a good grade, the concept of growth through the use of assessment was missing. Assessment is not about what you do wrong, but what you can improve upon and how you can facilitate that improvement. We learned that it is not weakness we must analyze, but instead the product as a whole. By understanding our strengths, areas of improvement, and insights we can truly grow from the experience.

Now back to what it took to implement that self-assessment in ourselves. In the beginning of the Institute, we looked to the faculty to assess our work and tell us how we did. As I mentioned before, we were looking for their approval. But as we developed this new sense of motivation we needed to come to a new realization on how we were to assess the effort we were putting in. This came in the form of self-assessment. We learned that we cannot grow from what we produced unless we analyze the final product. Without truly understanding our strengths, areas of improvement, and the insights we gained from the process, there was no way for us to grow from said process.

The strengths show where we have improved from where we were before; the areas for improvement help show where we could work to improve the quality of work next time; and finally the insights are what help us understand how to apply what we have taken from the whole process and how we might apply it to a new situation. Through doing this we began to no longer need the approval of another; we could assess ourselves and grow from ourselves, not from the endorsement of another person. This became a liberating factor: We no longer needed another person in order to grow, but instead could independently monitor and facilitate our own growth.

Another aspect of self-improvement came through learning the value of collaboration. While we are now better self-growers, the growth we can attain through others is tremendous. Through cooperation, we develop a new perspective. Through using others as tools we can arrive at new approaches and solutions to problems that we would have never conceptualized alone. With cooperation in play we can arrive at solutions much quicker and more efficiently than ever before. One potential setback in team performance is not understanding how to make a team a successful entity. The roles of the individuals are truly what make the team work. Everyone has their strengths and their areas for improvement. What playing each individual's roles does is keep the process moving in a positive direction. I have learned that without understanding and following this, the team is doomed to failure and frustration.

Another aspect to a successful team is the effective use of communication, both written and verbal. Without each individual having the ability to successfully convey their idea or opinion, the group, again, fails. This is because when working in a group, each individual's perspective is crucial to understanding and then solving the problem at hand. Without being able to effectively communicate that perspective the team falls apart. When a team truly collaborates, there is a transformation from a set of individuals to a single entity that works efficiently to

solve a problem. This became very apparent through the use of the problem solving simulation known as the “Fish Bowl.” This test of team problem solving allowed us to really examine the concept of collaboration and teamwork. What we found was that initially we functioned as independent entities, working through the problem in our heads and trying to come up with a solution to the problem independently. We found that when the synergy became noticeable, we began to become more effective workers and transform from this team of individuals into elements of a single team. We became more efficient and effective, and given more time, would have eventually been successful at the problem at hand.

The final aspect of self-growth I am going to touch on is the role of perspective. Not the perspective previously spoken about that is gathered from other individuals, but rather, the perspective that connects what we just learned with the application of that learning in a completely unrelated context. Having and experiencing this perspective is what makes being a self-grower worth it. I can now take something that I just learned and apply that same methodology to something completely unrelated, but get positive results due to knowing how the process generally works. While this was possibly one of the more difficult concepts to grasp, it is also one of the most rewarding and valuable tools I achieved through the process of becoming a self-grower. The realization that you can take any learned process and apply it to many other contexts successfully is empowering. It gives the sense of self-actualization that I can be successful at anything just by applying what I know to the problem and learning to grow from the process.

The process of becoming a self-grower is a long, painful process that brings about the most empowering sensation that one can experience. The liberation achieved by knowing that I can stand on my own two feet, independent of the rest of the world, and take my destiny into my own hands is an incredible feeling. I can now go into the world of the Honor’s College and know I am prepared to take on anything it has to throw at me. And not only can I take it on, but I can use what I learn to apply that knowledge to every aspect of my everyday life. I can now make the connections between my school life and the rest of my life and continue pushing myself to be a better version of me without needing to wait and work for the approval and consent of another person. This process allows me to now not only improve myself, but to also gain a greater understanding about what makes me who I am today and where I will be going tomorrow.