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**Growth Edge Reflection and Case Study**

Human beings are brilliant storytellers. We tell stories about everything, from how the world works to what we, as individuals, are allowed to be and do. My coaching practice is based on a foundational belief that any story can be retold from a different perspective. When I work with clients, I encourage them to step momentarily into another perspective to try telling their stories differently. Growth edge coaching offers many tools for doing this, drawing out the best of adult development theory to furnish those of us who use it with tools for facilitating subject-object shifts wherever they are possible. I came to this method with a background in anthropology, and the idea of a subject-object shift helping people untangle knotted issues in their own lives made intuitive sense. Anthropology, with its commitment to 'making the familiar strange', encourages a similar sort of shift: by carefully watching the ways that human beings create an environment where some things are normal and some are unusual, we learn to see that environment as constructed rather than inevitable. I draw on both approaches to help my clients become more skilled in spotting opportunities for flexibility and creativity in their own everyday lives.

I find the tools of Growth Edge Coaching, including the map of adult development and the Growth Edge Interview, speak most to clients who are consciously looking for a new way of approaching their personal growth. I teach these tools to coachees in a one-on-one setting and to groups who are looking for new ways to work together. Whether people encounter this material in a coaching relationship or in a group context, the progression is often the same: when we have new tools for understanding what is happening inside us, we start to see others and the world around us in fresh ways. Movement starts to happen, slowly, in places where we have been stuck.

**Case study:**

Catherine, an ambitious young woman working in a bank, was on a clear program of self-improvement. She seized every opportunity to take on more responsibility in her job and to be more visible in the organization. Coaching appealed to her because it fit in with what she already loved to do: look inward, learn about herself, and work on improving. She was already comfortable with self-analysis and keen to add more tools to her repertoire. We began our coaching relationship with a Growth Edge Interview, where Catherine narrated the easy way she moved in the self-authored space as well as an aversion, bordering on fear, to the interdependence that characterizes the socialized space. She saw herself as effective when she could self-direct, make her own decisions, and adhere to her own rules for conduct; when other people interfered in these agendas, she felt frustrated, judgemental, and stuck.

Our debrief brought this challenge into view for her. Accustomed to seeing herself as a top performer, she was gratified to see that she was further along the development scale and satisfied with the degree to which her own values corresponded with those of the self-authored space generally. She was initially sceptical of the notion implied in the adult development map, namely, that there are skills outside the self-authored space that also had value. Catherine and I spent some time with her questions: how could it be a bad thing

to have strong values? How could it be wrong to work on oneself? When did holding others to high standards take away from doing good work?

By thinking through these seemingly paradoxical ways of looking at her own deeply held beliefs, Catherine ventured into new spaces in her relationship with herself. By thinking with the adult development map, she was able to expand her sense of what was possible to include ways of being other than the one she had crafted for herself, where she was focused in a linear way on continuous self-improvement. She had new language for recognizing the value in what she already did well, and a new opening for compassion toward ways of doing things that were different, whether they appeared in her own way of doing things or in others'.

As she worked with this opening, Catherine began to look back at past versions of herself with more compassion. She remembered periods of intense self-restriction in her younger years with a mixture of curiosity and relief, expressing gratitude that she had been able to make a shift into different ways of being disciplined. A question remained with her, though, no matter how much time we spent on it: how could it not be good to work on yourself?

As our coaching work evolved to take on other sorts of questions, Catherine occasionally referred back to this one that had vexed her, wondering aloud whether she was feeding her need to improve in the best way or whether she wanted to redefine improvement for herself. She continued to hold this value close to her heart while introducing a bit more flexibility into the way she held it and a bit more freedom for herself in how to define it.