

This last year, I have had opportunities at work to learn and grow.

The need to learn and grow is a natural human instinct. This element measures the degree to which an employee feels he or she is given opportunities to learn and grow. One way employees can learn and grow is to find more efficient ways to do their jobs. The best managers know an organization's growth depends on employees' capacity to learn and grow. The best teams are never quite satisfied with current ways of doing things. They always strive to find better, more efficient ways to work. Where there is growth, there is innovation.

The following summary is a brief excerpt on this Q¹² element from Rodd Wagner and James K. Harter's *12: The Elements of Great Managing* (Gallup Press, December 2006).

For many people, it is progress that distinguishes a career from employment that is "just a job." Employees who have an opportunity to learn and grow at work are twice as likely as those on the other end of the scale to say they will spend their career with their company.

"The fullest representations of humanity show people to be curious, vital, and self-motivated," wrote University of Rochester professors Richard Ryan and Edward Deci. "At their best, they are (self-directed) and inspired, striving to learn; extend themselves; master new skills; and apply their talents responsibly. That most people show considerable effort, agency and commitment in their lives appears, in fact, to be more normative than exceptional, suggesting some very positive and persistent features of human nature...."

Because each person is unique in her talents, strengths, situation, hopes, and personality, it is incumbent upon the employee and her manager to chart her future progress. Whatever those decisions — whether they include formal training, a mentor, chances to assume new responsibilities or simply informal opportunities to learn the nuances of a job — it is imperative they create that feeling of personal improvement.

When employees feel they are learning and growing, they work harder and more efficiently. This element, while linked to nearly every important outcome

Gallup has studied, has a particularly strong connection to customer engagement and profitability. On average, business units in the top quartile on the Twelfth Element surpass their bottom-quartile counterparts by 9 percent on customer engagement and loyalty measures, and by 10 percent on profitability. These superior customer relationships and profits may occur because employees who are learning and genuinely interested in their work have better ideas — which is another demonstrated correlation to the Twelfth Element.

The importance of the learning and growing may be best appreciated when they are not there, when — as Seuss called them — "Bang-ups" and "Hang-ups" leave a person stalled short of his goal. Something about human nature hates to be stuck in one place. During the commute to work, a driver's level of frustration has less to do with the amount of time it takes than with how frequently she ends up just sitting in traffic. The same is true once she arrives at the office. Getting stuck in one place — George Orwell called it being "smothered under drudgery" — is as unnatural for adults as it is for children. •

James K. Harter, Ph.D., is Chief Scientist — Workplace Management and Well-Being for The Gallup Organization. He is coauthor of the *New York Times* bestseller *12: The Elements of Great Managing* (Gallup Press, December 2006).

Rodd Wagner is a Principal for The Gallup Organization. He is coauthor of the *New York Times* bestseller *12: The Elements of Great Managing* (Gallup Press, December 2006).