

Praise for *Grow*

I have thoroughly enjoyed reading *Grow* – it is easy-to-read, very clear and personal, and peppered with inspirational quotes, research and case studies. The practical ideas are super. It is an inspirational book to help us think about how we can develop a healthy, flexible, engaging and kind response to relationships in our every changing world, within the core settings of the work place, our homes, communities and our schools. It will be such a useful resource for anyone!

Caro Stroker, Chartered Educational Psychologist

Reading *Grow* is like chatting with a friend. Deceptively straightforward and upbeat, Jackie's narrative demystifies the scientific, philosophical and psychological theories that she believes underpin human happiness, linking ideas, telling stories and ultimately offering readers their own powerful path to positivity: thinking on purpose. Really accessible, fun and thought-provoking, this book is definitely a life changer.

Lisa Stone, Head of Coaching, Professional Tutor
and Teacher of English, Akeley Wood School

Jackie Beere sets out to write a really practical book, full of gentle advice and free from jargon or technical terms: this is exactly what she has done. The most useful research and writing from over the last two decades – from the worlds of education, neuroscience, positive and cognitive psychology – have been woven together in an easy-to-read, down-to-earth book that will appeal to anybody interested in personal change.

Jackie makes an important case for 'growth' becoming the natural extension of 'learning to learn'; that if we understand how our brains work, we can become much more purposeful with our understanding and unlock our true potential. Mindset, emotional intelligence and behavioural science are used to create a simple, yet powerful framework for change. Very compelling is the way, Jackie reframes 'learning' into 'growth'; a minor shift in some respects, but a major paradigm shift for educators in particular. Imagine an

education system where personal growth is the main driver – all of a sudden, knowledge acquisition is no longer enough and young people's mental health matters as much as anything else. Hurray! However, this book is certainly not for educators alone. Aspiring to be happier, healthier and more productive in our relationships is something most of us strive for. This book shines a light on our current behaviours and offers us the choice of a possible new reality that we have the power to shape. Without judgement, and often using personal stories, Jackie offers alternative ways of dealing with very familiar situations, ways which ensure that we learn and grow stronger and more resilient. She also offers us the opportunity not only to affect change in ourselves but to support change in others by using coaching techniques.

Jackie does not pretend to offer anything radically new, but what she does do, with great humility, is offer a much needed, straightforward reminder of some incredibly powerful approaches that all parents, teachers, employees and employers cannot do without. I wish I could give this book to everyone I know!

Manjit Shellis, Director of Learning, University of the First Age

Inspiring and upbeat – felt the positive practical coaching throughout. Full of useful exercises and practical tips that help develop insight into behaviour. The most awesome element is discovering that real change is actually achievable – even I am convinced. I can do this!

Maureen Floyd, Children's Social Work Manager

Reading *Grow* was a turning point for me when I was going through a crisis of meaning in my life. In terms of conventional success – a well-paid professional job, a very happy family, a good social network, fulfilling hobbies – I seemed to have it all. But somehow I felt deeply, profoundly unfulfilled. I struggled with this feeling for many years as I travelled in trains, planes and cars from client to client. I felt ungrateful for the bountiful existence fate had chanced to serve me and that I didn't seem to want. I tried to knuckle down and 'make lemonade from the lemons.' Then it all got too much, and I got to thinking seriously about my life. I realised I was judging 'success' the wrong

way. I was using someone else's definition of success, not my own. I sat down and wrote out what success really meant to me, and what it did not mean. I created my own success manifesto which helped me see that I was judging myself on totally the wrong benchmarks.

Over time I started to reset my life to fit in with my ideas of success, not anyone else's. It was not – and still is not – an easy journey, because we are all hard-wired by society, consumerism and education to define success as certain attributes. We think of success in very specific, limited terms such as our profession, looks, wealth and possessions. We don't stop to think of success in terms of wisdom gained, friendships made or moments experienced. Gradually I have started to loosen the tethers that bind me to one idea of success and align my whole life with another better idea, one that fits with how I feel deep inside. There is no way that I can tell anyone what success really means to them personally, but I do hope you can use *Grow* to help you find your own specific definition of success and, with the help of Jackie's guidance throughout the book, move towards it with confidence and bravery.

Robert Beere, a more contented individual

We all seek happiness, but the question many people never ask themselves is ... what does happiness look like for me? I found the happiness manifesto in Jackie Beere's *Grow* very insightful in helping me to identify what happiness looks like to me. I was able to see the areas in my life which were incongruent and then look to make the changes I needed. It sounds so simple but it has been by far the most effective tool in my personal growth journey.

Sangeeta Sami, Digital Marketing Consultant

This is a great book which offers a practical and realistic approach to self-development. It proves an inspiring, insightful and intelligent approach to personal learning, which explains what holds us back and how to get on with the journey. Well worth a read.

Steph Coleman, IT and Customer Experience Director, Microlease

A well-judged balance between the academic, the informative and the anecdotal makes this an engaging, absorbing and accessible read. A book that brings together a plethora of current thinking and delivers a strong central message about our ability to grow as people – full of practical advice, tools for self-testing, excellent summaries and a clever device to answer the sceptics' questions. A book to make you think, but so full of optimism and positivity it's hard not to smile as well!

Rhona MacDonald, Accountant and Management Consultant

Grow is a treasure-trove of ideas and insights into why we think, react and interpret the world in the ways we do. This fantastic book unpacks findings from the fields of cognitive psychology, personal development and self-help and gives us immediate and practical ways to use them in our own lives. With *Grow*, everything is gathered in one place, drawing together great ideas and valuable lessons from leading thinkers, scientists and business gurus, all focused on helping the reader set their own path and fulfil their goals.

With helpful self-reflection questionnaires, real-life stories and practical advice, *Grow* is a book for everyone with an interest in learning more about themselves, their colleagues, family, partners and society. *Grow* will help any interested reader to take their next steps, set their next goals and face their next challenges.

Zoë Elder, Executive Director, Clevedon Learning Hub,
Independent Education Consultant and author of *Full On Learning*

GROW

Change your mindset, change your life

A practical guide to thinking on purpose

JACKIE BEERE



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Chapter I

Why we need to grow

‘Once you stop learning, you may as well stop living.’

Derrick Beere¹

‘We must continually remind ourselves that there is a difference between what is natural and what is actually good for us.’

Sam Harris²

GROW: Produce, mature, expand, sprout, cultivate, flourish, thrive, develop, raise, nurture

I have discovered that the most important strategy for being happy and successful in work and in life is to consciously decide to be open-minded and flexible enough to grow through learning. In this book I use the term ‘grow’ to mean developing a mindset³ (attitude, outlook, way of thinking) that will help you navigate through the trials and tribulations of life, and still maintain your desire and ability to keep learning.

1 This was one of my father’s favourite sayings.

2 S. Harris, *The Moral Landscape* (London: Bantam Press, 2010), p. 101.

3 See Dweck, *Mindset*.

Choosing to grow is learning, in the widest sense of the word. It means developing new skills and knowledge, but also finding out about yourself and how you can communicate more effectively and manage your emotions. By doing this, I suggest, you are far more likely to feel happy and contented, achieve your potential and do things you never thought possible.

Choosing to grow ensures that everything we learn makes us stronger, wiser, more emotionally intelligent, and happier, healthier members of society. What's not to like?

If we are good at learning, we can be more capable and comfortable with change – which, in our uncertain world, seems like a no-brainer. However, it is a lifelong challenge to keep learning from your good and bad experiences and then adapt your behaviour when you need to. Too often, we end up repeating the same mistakes, or find ourselves in a spiral of unhelpful habits that holds us back. For example, you may have a habit of arriving late wherever you go. You want to get there on time, but somehow there is always a last-minute distraction, phone call, email to check, or mascara that gets smudged. You promise yourself you will change and allow yourself more time, but at the same time there is another part of you that thinks, 'Oh well, that's just me – I'm a "late" person – everyone knows that and understands.' So you get later and later until, one day, you miss a plane, interview or date – one that really matters.

To change unhelpful habits and beliefs takes hard work – but doing the work becomes increasingly satisfying. To *choose* to work out why you are stuck and how to better move forward with the big, important stuff as well as the minutiae of life – that is part of the process of growing. It is not a once-and-for-all thing, but a lifelong challenge in which you constantly learn from your mistakes and change behaviours that are not working.

Learning applies across the board: at work, in relationships, in families – wherever we encounter frustrations and difficulties which,

unattended, can gnaw away at and undermine our contentment. When all our instincts, beliefs and emotions are urging us to do what we have always done, to stick to what feels safe and familiar, then we can find ourselves trapped by those bad habits or limiting beliefs. We know from looking around us that, despite our material wealth, many of us aren't very happy or mentally healthy – and this starts when we are young.

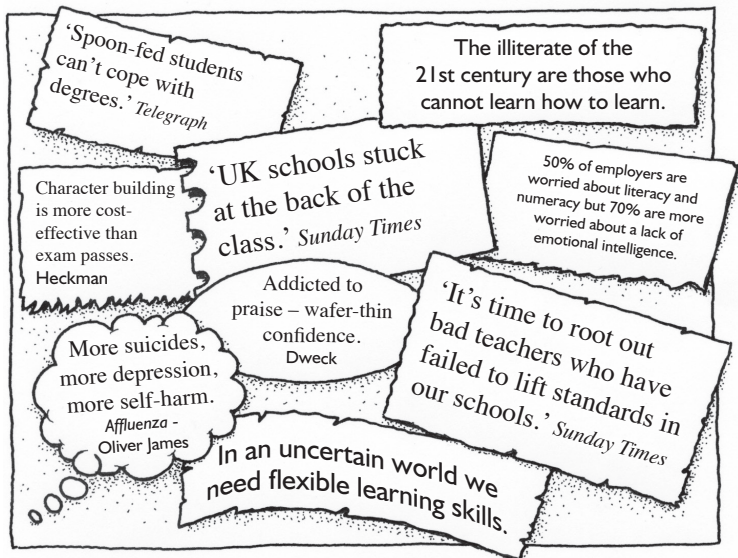


Figure 1.1: What are our schools teaching?

I've shown the snippets of newspaper headlines in Figure 1.1 many times when I've been training teachers and leaders, to encourage discussion about the need to develop a culture for growth in our schools and organisations. It seems obvious to me that our success is linked to our ability to continue learning and growing our social and emotional skills, so why isn't it absolutely endemic in our society or taught in our

schools? What is stopping us from fulfilling our potential? Why are so many people unhappy, mentally ill, see threats everywhere, or are just plain scared of what might happen next?

Our world seems to be full of stories of children who self-harm by cutting, using drugs or starving themselves. There are adults who drink, eat and smoke too much. There are people and groups who hate others, who maintain old enmities over decades – even centuries. It is no wonder that our view of the world can be somewhat depressing.

Yet I remain an unrelenting optimist. Despite all the evidence that suggests human beings are wretched, I believe that things will turn out well. I know that awful things are happening, but I am also familiar with the other side: the children who work tirelessly to raise money for good causes, the people who survive appalling abuse or injury and are determined to lead productive lives, and the groups who cooperate and collaborate to build their communities. Seeing the good in other people and the world is part of my habitual, unconscious outlook, so it's not too difficult for me to wake up in the morning, pull the curtains back with a cheery smile, and feel happy about the day ahead. Most of the time this is a virtuous circle, and I get my positive outlook reflected back to me.

One of the most important challenges I ever had was given to me at a training event when I was in my early twenties. I was told to 'Try and make sure that everyone you come into contact with walks away from you feeling a little bit happier.' So have I learned to be an optimist through years of self-coaching? Did I have to put in the effort and the practice, or was I born with this predisposition? Is it my own default setting, programmed through my genes?

I would say that my mindset is due to a mixture of these things. Although there could be a genetic influence, this still doesn't mean

that anyone's mindset is fixed for life. Recent research into epigenetics⁴ has shown that there are aspects of our genetic make-up that are only triggered given the right conditions. In other words, the possibility of change and adaptation is built in, whoever you started life as. As Oliver James says in his recent book *Not in Your Genes*, there is a case for nurture overcoming nature in determining how your personality develops throughout your life.⁵

If I didn't believe you can change, whatever you think your default setting might be, then I wouldn't be writing this book.

For many people, even in affluent, peaceful Western societies, times have been tough over the last few years. But, relatively speaking, life, for almost everyone, is better than it ever has been. Compared to life one hundred years ago, or to the suffering in war-torn countries, people in these societies have never had it so good. Can you remember the days before mobile phones, Facebook and the internet? Was life better or worse without social media, online shopping, and video on demand? It was certainly different. Given all these aids to better communication and connectedness, we need to ask *why* more and more people feel isolated, depressed, anxious and unhappy. Suicide is the biggest killer of men under fifty. Our prisons are full of people with mental health issues – in a Ministry of Justice study, 49% of female and 23% of male prisoners were assessed as suffering from anxiety and depression⁶ – and stress is often cited as a cause of employment difficulties. In *Affluenza* (2007), Oliver James says that many societies with less material wealth than ours have happier citizens, so a lack of money does not guarantee unhappiness.⁷ In fact, some of the wealthiest people seem distinctly unable to use their money to make themselves happy. Imagine you won the lottery. What would you care about?

4 N. Carey, *The Epigenetics Revolution* (London: Icon Books, 2011).

5 O. James, *Not in Your Genes* (London: Vermilion, 2016).

6 See www.prisonreformtrust.org.uk/projectsresearch/mentalhealth.

7 O. James, *Affluenza* (London: Vermilion, 2007).

Preserving your fortune? Would you fret about what to spend it on? Or would you increase it by making investments? All of these issues are great opportunities for worrying, and can be seen as burdens.

So what is the secret of happiness?

As a child I was outgoing, gregarious, a little bit naughty and ‘alternative’, and also an introspective extrovert. I did crazy, loud things then spent hours thinking over what I had said or done – often regretting it. That tension between our public and private selves I will explore later, but I think this conflict is what led to my first trauma, a fear of public speaking which hit me like a hammer in my late teens. At first my main coping strategies were avoidance, denial and escape – ‘I don’t want to do it and I won’t do it’. Privately, I read up about anxiety, mind management and positive thinking. Eventually I attended courses on NLP, paid for hypnotherapy, and joined a public speaking support group. Unknowingly, I had set out on a lifelong quest to grow the mindset that would make me happy, and able to learn from my mistakes, and find out what works for me.

The secret, I found, was to *choose to grow*. By this I mean I chose to keep challenging myself to do things that were outside my comfort zone. To do something that scared me every day. To learn new skills and knowledge, find new ways to do things, explore ideas, invent solutions, create art and music, rise to challenges, either on my own or alongside others. It’s hard to be gloomy when you’re in a learning state of mind. Why? Because your focus is not on yourself or your emotional state, but on what you are doing. Your attention is outwards, not inwards.

So is it easy to ‘just get learning’ and grow? No, because it exposes our weaknesses and makes us feel vulnerable, or even stupid.

All too often our experiences at school made learning feel more like pain than pleasure. Consequently, some of us developed limiting beliefs at an early age about our potential to rise to learning challenges. Even now, many of us don’t consider ourselves to be great learners

– think back to the time you decided to try to learn to speak a new language or learn to play a musical instrument. We often feel reluctant to leave our comfort zone and become the lifelong learners we need to be. We would rather think we can't do something, rather than choose to think 'I can't do that – yet!'

Connect to your inner baby

Who are naturally the happiest people on the planet, as long as their basic needs are met? Young children. Picture a one-year-old discovering how to stack bricks and then watching them fall over time after time. Or toddlers taking their first tentative steps, delighted to be upright and on the brink of freedom. One of the things that makes young children so happy is the intrinsic joy of overcoming learning challenges. They haven't yet learned to become sensitive to the judgement of others, or aware of what success and failure mean. Adults see this early learning and think of the child creating new neural pathways; connecting knowledge to gain an understanding of how things work. For the child, it is pure enjoyment.

Children in their early years are generally wired to be avid, relentless learners, driven by curiosity to learn through play. Provided they are healthy and experience emotional connection with another they have no hang-ups about falling over, making mistakes, getting it wrong, looking foolish or being judged inadequate. They may feel frustrated, feel pain and have preferences, but their basic desires in life are to be loved, make emotional connections with others, and to learn. Curiosity about how things work makes them explore or stare. Determination makes them practise things over and over again and take huge risks – often without considering risk assessment procedures! Just watch a two-year-old fearlessly launch herself at a flight of stairs. Three-year-olds ask endless questions, but by the time children

are older, often around eleven or twelve, they may have lost their curiosity or become too self-conscious to ask.

Being good at change and adapting to new challenges is all about learning new approaches and strategies. This is what healthy, happy babies instinctively and endlessly do all the time. We – and our growing children – need to keep in touch with our ‘inner baby’ aptitude for learning if we are to thrive (Figure 1.2).

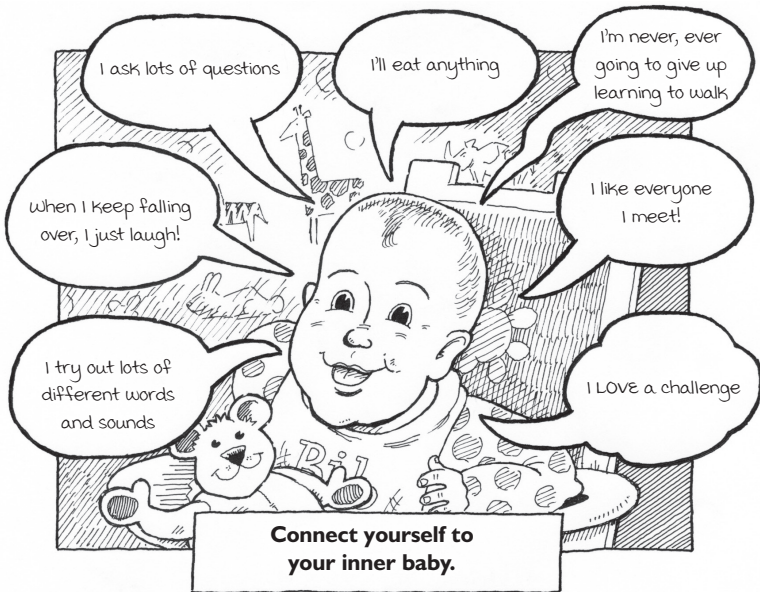


Figure 1.2: Connect to your inner baby.

What happens to this natural inclination to love learning? If we all have that basic instinct to learn and grow, then why do some of us lose our instinctive enjoyment of, and enthusiasm for, learning? What happens? What gets in the way?

The pressures of education and work mean that life can be stressful and demanding. As children become aware of the judgement of others they develop beliefs which lead to habits that will help or hinder their future as learners. Suddenly the frustrations that we inevitably experience as learners – making mistakes, getting it wrong, falling down – are witnessed, and judged, by others around us. Our teachers and classmates can see, and give us feedback: ‘Well done, Jemmy, a good try’, ‘You got that wrong’, ‘What a nice picture’, ‘You speak funny’, ‘I choose you for my team’, ‘You need to work harder’, ‘I don’t want to be your friend’, ‘Can you catch this?’, ‘Make your numbers clearer’, ‘Think of a better story’, ‘That’s the wrong answer’, ‘Speak up’, ‘Be good’. And so it goes, endlessly.

In this way, we develop a view of the world and of ourselves which creates a framework of values and beliefs about our potential to be successful in life. Children and adults are exquisitely sensitive to the feedback they get. Praise can become addictive, and we strive to get more of it. On the other hand, criticism can feed doubts about our self-efficacy which linger in our unconscious and put limits on what we are willing to do – unless we reframe the criticism and see it instead as useful feedback, which can help us along the path to mastery. It’s this feedback that has an influence right from the start of life.

When I was at school I didn’t even really think that what I was doing *was* learning. It just felt like trying to remember stuff for exams and trying to avoid getting it wrong. I now feel as if all the valuable stuff I have learned has happened since leaving school and going to work.

Many of us don’t consider ourselves to be great learners. Learning that is associated with exams and testing, being judged and experiencing

failure, skews the way we perceive it. Instead of perceiving learning as 'growing', we often begin to think of learning as a method by which we, and others, judge our intelligence and self-worth. If we can reframe that thinking so that learning comes to mean exponential discovery and exciting personal development, it suddenly becomes more attractive and engaging. Put simply, learning will then become the lifelong project of growing your brain.

Children also become adept at picking up on social hierarchies, and soon learn the pecking order of the groups they are in. And these distinctions get more powerful the older children get. Eventually, learning isn't as important as appearing cool or streetwise and fitting in.

Our education system and the process of growing up can mean we lose touch with our inner baby and being learners for life. We become so used to comparing ourselves with other people that we forget that *real* growth is about our own journey and development. Instead of thinking, 'She's more knowledgeable, clever, successful than I am', it's more profitable to think in terms of how you are growing and changing. Do you ask how *you* are doing? What progress have you made compared to yesterday or last week? Are you more knowledgeable, clever and successful now? And do you ask where you need to direct your attention so you can take steps towards becoming who you want to be?

Think of the last time you proactively learned something. Maybe you cooked something new, using unfamiliar ingredients, or learned how to use your new mobile phone or tablet. Perhaps someone taught you how to play chords on the guitar or solve a computer problem. Was it easy or frustrating? Did you feel like giving up at times? What made you stick at it? When you cracked it, how did that feel? Did you want to do more? What really motivated you to grow that particular new neural pathway? Was it to impress someone else, or was it because you love to challenge yourself?

Would you choose to think in a different way if it would help you to be more successful, resilient or content with life?

GROW will show you how it is possible to manage your thinking so that you can learn more and challenge any limiting beliefs.

Reading *Grow* is like chatting with a friend. Deceptively straightforward and upbeat ... this book is definitely a life changer.

Lisa Stone, Head of Coaching, Professional Tutor and
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Steph Coleman, IT and Customer Experience Director, Microlease

Jackie Beere MBA OBE worked as a newspaper journalist before starting a career in teaching and school leadership. She was awarded the OBE in 2002 for developing innovative learning programmes. Since 2006 she has been offering training in the latest strategies for learning, developing emotionally intelligent leadership and growth mindsets. She is the author of several bestselling books on teaching, learning and coaching, as well as being a qualified Master Practitioner in NLP.



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