

# Always Growing



How To Be  
A Strong(er) Leader  
In Any Season

**Jones Loflin**

*Coauthor of *Juggling Elephants* and *Getting To It**

## Praise for Jones Loflin and *Always Growing*

“*Always Growing* serves as a poignant reminder that all relationships – business as well as personal – are living things. As such, following a proven regimen of care and nurturing is essential to their continued success. The book’s practical and well-explained analogies are helpful for leaders in any circumstance. Additionally, the use of relatable characters and scenarios makes the book an absolutely enjoyable read. For both new and experienced leaders alike, this book is an eye-opener to the boundless possibilities of intentional leadership!”

– Leslie C. Cooper, Esq.

*Deputy Director/Chief Operating Officer  
Pretrial Services Agency for the District of Columbia*

“Anyone in a leadership role will benefit from *Always Growing*. It’s an effortless read introducing concepts (and reinforcing existing ones) on how to powerfully manage a team.”

– Craig Mueller

*Manager, Coach: Training & Development  
Tractor Supply Company*

“Jones Loflin has impressive and entertaining messages that all individuals in any line of business or walk of life MUST hear.”

– Kathi Newman

*CMPE and President  
Medical Group Management Association of Utah*

# Always Growing



How To Be  
A Strong(er) Leader  
In Any Season

**Jones Loflin**



SALT LAKE CITY

Copyright © 2017 by Jones Loflin

All rights reserved.

Printed in the United States of America

Book design by Daniel Ruesch

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS CONTROL NUMBER: 2016916101

ISBN 978-0-9766882-3-5

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

No portion of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form or by any means – electronic, mechanical, photocopy, recording, scanning or other – except for brief quotations in critical reviews or articles, without prior written permission from the copyright owner.

*Always Growing* may be purchased in bulk for educational, business, fundraising or sales promotional use. For information, email the author at [orders@jonesloflin.com](mailto:orders@jonesloflin.com) or call 800-853-4676.

For more information on keynotes and training programs  
related to *Always Growing*:

800-853-4676 • [www.alwaysgrowingbook.com](http://www.alwaysgrowingbook.com)

*To my dad,  
who first instilled within me  
a love for seeing things grow.*

*“We keep bringing in mechanics—  
when what we need are gardeners.  
We keep trying to drive change—  
when what we need to do is cultivate change.”*

– PETER SENGE

Author of *The Fifth Discipline* and *The Dance of Change*

*“Before you are a leader,  
success is all about growing yourself.  
When you become a leader,  
success is all about growing others.”*

– JACK WELCH

Author and Former CEO of General Electric

## Table of Contents

Needing to Grow .....	11
Experiencing a Green Thumb Epiphany .....	17
Breaking Ground .....	27
Requiring More Than Just Sunlight .....	33
Encouraging Growth .....	43
Getting into the Weeds .....	51
Taking Control .....	55
Working the Tough Row.....	67
Cutting Back to Grow Forward.....	81
Learning That Timing Is Everything .....	91
Making Better Choices.....	97
Encouraging Desirable Growth.....	101
Watching It Grow.....	105
Ripening Fast .....	119
Reaping the Rewards?.....	125
A New Growing Season.....	133



## NEEDING TO GROW

“**W**hat was I thinking?” “Have I lost my mind?” “Have I doomed my career?” These and more frantic thoughts raced through David’s mind as he sped down the interstate. He wanted to be excited but, after the initial meeting about his new job, he wondered if he really had made the right decision.

David had been the “go-to guy” for troubleshooting problems and finding solutions at Trendex. His hard work, technical skills and attention to detail led to success in previous positions. It seemed like he had the perfect situation – that was, until he grew tired of the frequent travel, long hours and inconsistent schedule.



David also sensed that he was ready for something more. In past roles, he typically worked alone, interacting with others only when necessary to solve a problem or get more information. In his work with Trendex and its customers, he encountered teams that really seemed to know how to get things done. David admired the men and women who led such teams and wondered if he could become that kind of leader.

His desire to take his career in a new direction led David to apply for a division manager position at the Trendex facility on the east coast, even though it would require relocating his family. He knew it was a long shot, but a recent reorganization had created several vacancies.

To his surprise, David got the job. While he wouldn't start the new position until next month, the company asked him to visit the facility today to get a better understanding of its operations and his team.

In talking with the vice president of his division, David discovered the group he was now responsible for had been plagued by poor leadership. The company had overlooked its poor performance in the past but, with the uncertain economy, there were no guarantees. David knew that if he didn't get his team moving in the right direction fast, he might be out of a job.

David's biggest realization to this point was that it was going to be incredibly difficult to get his work done AND figure out how to best help his team members get their work done too. David thought to himself, "If I'm feeling this way *before* I start, what's it going to be like when it's for real?"

David's reflection about this season of change in his life brought him back to thoughts of his family. The new job at Trendex required David to relocate and, while he was excited about the possibility of new beginnings, the uncertainty of it all was a bit overwhelming. He sighed and thought, "Ashley is already in middle school, and Emma is turning 5 next month." David knew that there were some things he just didn't want to miss as a dad. "I've got to make this new direction work out," he murmured to himself.

And then there was his amazing wife, Amy. Time with her was always too short. Her success as a teacher was well-known, but her long hours and their joint responsibilities as parents only further limited their ability to grow in their relationship as a couple. These days, it seemed as if they spent a lot more time reflecting on how good things *used* to be, before life got so crazy. Unfortunately, the new job and the move were adding even more stress to their relationship.

David exited the interstate and turned left at the intersection. The two-lane road with minimal traffic gave him a moment to relax and enjoy the view of familiar rolling hills. Stopping for a moment to get out and stretch, he took in the chilly fresh air as he stood up and thought, “This trip back to where I grew up is just what I need to clear my head.” After a few moments, he got back behind the wheel and chuckled, “Kelly is going to be so surprised.”

Kelly and David grew up like typical siblings, even though they were nine years apart. They fought one minute and were inseparable the next. He laughed out loud thinking about some of the pranks and practical jokes they had pulled on each other.

He and Kelly remained close through his high school years but began to drift apart after their mom lost her battle with cancer and their dad took a job in another state. David’s career had taken him to the west coast, leaving little opportunity to return to where he grew up. Despite good intentions, visits occurred only about once a year...but that was about to change.

David's new job was at the Trendex facility about an hour from Kelly and her husband Michael's home. David was looking forward to seeing Kelly more often because moments with her were never dull, and she always seemed to have time to engage in meaningful conversation. As he turned right at the "Kelly's Place" sign, rows of apple trees and open fields reminded him of one of her true passions.





## EXPERIENCING A GREEN THUMB EPIPHANY

**F**rom the time she was 4 years old, Kelly loved watching things grow. Their grandfather was an avid gardener and apple grower, and Kelly definitely inherited his genes. She was always finding seeds and sticking them in the dirt or, as she later reminded David, “Soil. It’s called soil. Dirt is what you get on your pants.”

She nurtured her green thumb throughout her teenage years, eventually establishing her own roadside vegetable stand. After high school, she continued to expand her operation while attending the local community college. Following graduation, she purchased some land with the help of their dad and combined it with acreage from their grandfather’s farm to establish an apple orchard and commercial fruit and vegetable operation.

Kelly was now one of the largest produce growers in the region. She was extremely intelligent, understood horticultural practices better than people twice her age and had an incredible work ethic. What accelerated the growth of her business more than anything, however, was her uncanny ability to work with people. She just knew how to bring out the best in others.

David parked his car at the retail center. There wasn't a significant amount of produce for sale at this time of year, so there were only a few customers in the store.

As he wandered the aisles, his eyes were drawn to the "Growers of Tomorrow" wall, which showcased numerous pictures of children and adults showing off fruits and vegetables they had grown. As he moved closer, he began reading a letter to Kelly from someone who had started his own vegetable operation because of her guidance. He chuckled to himself, "That's one way to put yourself out of business."

His musing was interrupted by the sound of footsteps. One of Kelly's employees approached him and said, "Good afternoon. I'm Maria. How may I help you?"

David put on a serious face and asked, "Is the owner here?"

Maria answered, "Why yes, she is."

“Good,” David said. “I want to speak to her. I bought some apples here a month ago, and they rotted within a week.”

Maria seemed shocked but held her composure. “I’m so sorry, sir,” she replied. “Let me page Kelly so you can share your concern with her.”

David could hardly keep from breaking out in laughter as he thought about Kelly and her reaction when she found out who the angry customer was. He didn’t have to wait very long.

Kelly came scurrying through the door, drying her hands with a towel as she approached the service counter to talk with Maria. David moved out of sight for just a moment so she couldn’t see him.

As Kelly finished speaking to Maria, David stepped out from behind a tall display of seed packets, and Kelly’s tanned face erupted into a huge smile. “YOU!” she exclaimed. “You never quit, do you?”

After a quick hug, Kelly motioned for Maria to join them. “Maria, this is my brother, David – the world’s *worst* practical joker.”

Maria extended her hand and smiled. “We’ve heard some stories about the two of you,” she said.

“I’m sure they get better with time,” David replied.



“Now if you’ll excuse me, I need to go take care of our next *crisis*,” Maria chuckled. “It was nice meeting you.” David smiled in response as she returned to the counter.

Turning their attention to each other, Kelly said, “What a wonderful surprise, David! But what in the world are you doing here? I hope nothing’s wrong.”

“Oh no,” David replied. “In fact, I have good news. Seems as if you’ll be seeing more of me in the near future.”

Kelly smirked and said, “I thought you said you had GOOD news.” Smiling warmly, she then said, “I can’t wait to hear about it. Give me about five minutes to give instructions to some of my team members, and then we can meet in the office.”

David paused at the bulletin board hanging at the entrance to Kelly’s office. Pictures of employees and their families covered much of the space. There were wedding announcements, baby pictures and other life-related invitations. Near the center of the board was a faded piece of paper that read, “**You are always a gardener. What grows – and how it grows – is up to you.**” It was her favorite saying.

“Good-looking bunch, eh?” Kelly asked as she came through the door.

“Certainly is, sis,” David replied. “You’ve done well.”

You are always a gardener.  
What grows—and how it grows—  
is up to you.

---

“Thanks, David,” she said. “Now tell me what brings you back to our little corner of the world.”

They sat down at a small conference table, and David shared more about his new job as division manager and returning to the area.

“Well, that sounds like fantastic news,” Kelly said. “I know Amy and the kids will be happy to see more of you and start a new chapter in their lives.”

“Yes,” David replied. “That’s the upside. The downside is that for the first time in my career, much of my work is about leading and managing others. I’m not sure I’m cut out to tell other people what to do.”

Kelly leaned forward and said, “If that’s your idea of leadership, I can assure you that your time in that position will be short.”

David tried to clarify his comment. “That came out wrong,” he said. “What I mean is that I’m accustomed to lining up my own work and doing it without relying on much help from others. All of my focus has been on me. As a division manager, I’m going to be responsible for making sure my entire team is working on the right things. THAT stresses me out in a way I can’t begin to explain.”

“Well,” Kelly began, “maybe a visit here every now and then can help with that new job. And who knows... you might just ‘grow’ a little while you’re here.”

“What do you mean?” David asked.

“I know it may sound strange, but I’ve found that many principles of growing successful plants can be applied to leading teams and managing people,” Kelly explained.

David laughed out loud and then replied, “Kelly, I think you’ve been hanging out in the greenhouse a little too long.”

“I’m serious,” Kelly replied with a sharper tone. “Things like identifying what causes something to grow, knowing how to provide a positive environment and using your resources wisely are critical whether you’re running a company or growing award-winning apples.”

Sensing he might have touched a nerve, David conceded. “Well, I can’t deny you’ve grown something here that’s been successful for many years,” he said. “And right now, I need all the help I can get. So if you’re willing to offer advice, I’m willing to listen.”

Kelly stood up. “Good. Let’s take a quick walk,” she said. “It will only take five minutes. Get your coat from the car, and meet me behind the greenhouses.”

David was flooded with memories as he passed his grandfather’s old hay barn on the way to the greenhouses. He and Kelly had spent many hours working, playing and daydreaming in there. As he turned to walk behind the greenhouses, Kelly joined him from the other direction.

“Where are we going?” David asked.

“You’ll see.”

They walked for another minute or so before arriving at a row of strange-looking old apple trees. Some were tall with only two or three towering branches, while others looked more like shrubbery with an untold number of limbs zigzagging their way around the trunk, making it almost impossible to identify a single branch. And in some spots, there were only stumps where trees had once stood.

“Not exactly your best work, I would hope,” David said.

“No, but they are the *result* of my work,” Kelly explained. “These were some of the first trees I planted on my own. I was going to show grandpa and everyone else that I knew what I was doing, but it was during high school, and I got busy and chose to spend my time on other things.

“I worked on them occasionally,” she continued, “but eventually it was no use. I knew they couldn’t produce the kind of apples I needed to sell. These trees had the potential to produce some fantastic apples, but I missed my chance because I was too busy with other things. I keep them here as a reminder of what NOT to do if you want to be a successful gardener. You have to **identify what you can and cannot control, and invest your time where you can have the greatest return.**”

---

Identify what you can and  
cannot control, and invest your time  
where you can have the  
greatest return.

---

Pulling at a dead limb on one of the trees, Kelly continued. “Successful gardeners know that **letting something grow on its own doesn’t always bring the desired result.** Just because you start something with good intentions doesn’t mean it will turn out well. And, as you can see here, it often creates something you really *don’t* want, especially if you make the wrong choices.”

---

Letting something  
grow on its own doesn’t always  
bring the desired result.

---

As they turned to walk back to the parking lot, David had to admit that Kelly’s words stirred some thoughts about his own situation. Those trees, like the people he was leading, had the potential to create some great results if he chose to spend more time developing them instead of just trying to get his own work done. In fact, he was beginning to see that focusing on the growth of his team *is* his most important work.

“Hmmm,” David said as they passed the old barn again. “I think I get what you mean. But I’m still not sure how growing plants can be as challenging as leading a team of people. They’re two very different things.”

“Really?” Kelly said knowingly. “Maybe you just have a lot to learn.”

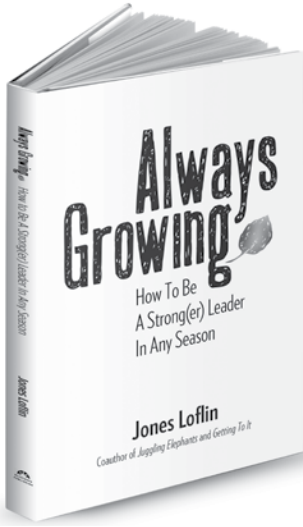
“Well, if there’s anyone who knows about growing things, it’s you, Kelly,” David said. “I’ve got to run. Give my best to Michael.”

“Yes, he will be so disappointed that he missed you. Give Amy and the kids a big hug for me.”

“Will do,” David replied as he hugged Kelly goodbye.

## GROWING TIPS

- You are always a gardener. What grows – and how it grows – is up to you.
- Identify what you can and cannot control, and invest your time where you can have the greatest return.
- Letting something grow on its own doesn’t always bring the desired result.



**To learn more** about products and services for individuals and organizations based on *Always Growing*, visit: [www.alwaysgrowingbook.com](http://www.alwaysgrowingbook.com) or call:

1-800-853-4676

336-859-9862 (International)

You can also get information about discounted bulk sales at [www.alwaysgrowingbook.com](http://www.alwaysgrowingbook.com)



### **Bring Jones Loflin to Your Organization**

With his innovative yet practical solutions, Jones Loflin is the perfect choice to make your next conference or training event unforgettable. His simple strategies related to leadership, time management, change, and motivation will equip your people to deliver their best work.

To bring Jones Loflin to your organization, visit [www.jonesloflin.com](http://www.jonesloflin.com) or call 336-859-9862.