

The Wisdom Orchard

Leadership Development Worksheets



Are You Growing the People Around You?

The Space to Grow — Creating the Conditions for Others to Contribute, Develop and Lead

Unlike equipment or buildings, human capital doesn't depreciate with use — it appreciates. A skilled, trusted, challenged employee is worth more to your organization at year five than at year one. Whether that appreciation happens is almost entirely up to their immediate supervisor. That's you.

Why This Is the Most Important Thing You Do

Leadership research is remarkably consistent on this point: the single biggest factor in whether talented people stay, grow, and give their best is not salary, not the organization's mission, not the size of the company. It's their direct supervisor.

70%

of variance in employee engagement is attributable to the manager. Not the organization, the strategy, or the benefits package — the immediate supervisor. (Gallup)

#1 reason

people leave jobs is their manager, not the company. And the #1 reason they stay? The same. A great supervisor is a retention strategy.

Most talent

isn't looking for an easy job. They're looking for a place to grow — challenging work, honest feedback, and a leader who invests in them. Without that, they leave.

The orchard analogy is precise here: trees that are regularly tended, pruned, nourished, and given room to grow produce the most fruit. Neglect them — even well-intentioned neglect — and you get stunted growth, early drop, or loss to another orchard.

This worksheet asks you to take stock of how intentionally you are investing in the people around you — and where the gaps are.

Part One: Know What Your People Are Made Of

You can't create space for someone you don't really know.

STEP 1 — For each person on your team, answer honestly: Do you know what they're great at beyond their job description? Do you know what they want to get better at?

(If you can't answer both questions for each person, that's the gap to close first.)

Team member	What they're great at	What they're hungry to develop	One thing I can do to invest in them

Honest mirror: For how many of these people have you actually had a conversation about their development — not a performance review, but a real conversation about where they want to go?

STEP 2 — Think about the last 90 days. What genuine opportunities did your team members have to stretch — to do something at the edge of their capability?

Stretch opportunities I created (or missed) in the last 90 days:

Part Two: Trust as a Growth Mechanism

Creating space for others to grow is fundamentally about trust — specifically, the willingness to give people authority proportional to their capability, and then get out of their way. This is harder than it sounds. Most leaders hold more control than they need to, either from habit, anxiety, or the mistaken belief that their involvement makes things better.

Here's the uncomfortable truth: when capable people are micromanaged, they don't grow — they shrink. They stop bringing initiative because it gets corrected. They stop offering ideas because they don't get used. And eventually, they stop showing up fully, even when they're still physically present.

Honest mirror: Where are you holding on to work, decisions, or authority that a capable team member could — and should — be handling?

STEP 3 — Use the table below to assess where each team member currently operates in terms of autonomy, and where they could be.

Think of the scale as: 1 = I direct everything, 3 = we collaborate on most decisions, 5 = they operate with full ownership and I'm a resource.

Team member / role	Current autonomy level (1=low, 5=high)	Where it should be	What's holding me back from giving more?

The one person I most need to give more ownership to — and the specific thing I'll hand them:

Part Three: Feedback as the Fertilizer

Talent doesn't develop in silence. Honest, specific, timely feedback is the mechanism by which people actually improve — and it's one of the most underused tools in a supervisor's kit. Most leaders either give too little (hoping problems resolve themselves) or too much generic praise ("great job!") that doesn't actually tell anyone what worked or why.

The question isn't whether you give feedback. It's whether you give feedback that people can actually use — specific enough to act on, honest enough to matter, and delivered with enough care that it lands as investment rather than judgment.

STEP 4 — Think about each person on your team. When did you last give them genuinely useful developmental feedback — not praise, not a performance rating, but something they could take into their next challenge?

Person who most needs honest feedback from me right now:

What I need to say, and haven't:

What's getting in the way of me saying it?

Honest mirror: *Are you the kind of leader people can bring bad news to? If they made a mistake, would they tell you? If not — what does that say about the environment you've built?*

Part Four: Build the Environment, Not Just the Skills

Enabling others to act isn't just about individual development. It's about the environment you build — one where people feel safe to try, safe to fail, safe to disagree, and safe to bring their full capability to work. That environment is your creation. It doesn't happen by default.

What a growth environment looks like	Where I stand / what I want to strengthen
People know what's expected and why it matters	
Mistakes are treated as learning, not evidence of failure	
People are challenged at the edge of their capability — regularly	
I know each person's development goals and reference them in our conversations	
I give honest, specific feedback within 48 hours of something worth noting	
People disagree with me openly — and I receive it well	
I celebrate progress, not just outcomes	
I advocate for my people's growth beyond my own team	

Part Five: Your Development Commitments

This worksheet only matters if something changes. Use the space below to make three specific commitments — one for a team member who needs more challenge, one for someone who needs more autonomy, and one for the feedback conversation you've been avoiding.

Commitment	What specifically I will do	By when
More challenge		
More autonomy		
Overdue feedback		

The best leaders don't make themselves indispensable. They make the people around them indispensable. Every season you invest in someone's growth, you are compounding — not just their value, but your own. That's the return on human capital that no balance sheet ever fully captures.

— The Wisdom Orchard

Name: _____

Date: _____

Role: _____
