JUDGMENT

How to Get Better at What You Already Do Well

Jim Petersen, PhD · June 18, 2026

Most people who want to improve begin with the same question: What am I doing wrong?

The most valuable growth rarely comes from fixing what is broken; it comes from sharpening what already works.

Approx. 800 words

It is not a bad question. We all have weaknesses, blind spots, and habits that deserve attention. But after four decades of working with leaders, financial advisors, military officers, students, and entrepreneurs, I have come to believe there is a better one:

What am I already doing well, and how can I do it even better?

That question changes everything.

Too often we treat improvement like repair work. Something is broken, so we set out to fix it. But the people who become truly excellent are not only solving problems; they are refining strengths. They pay attention to the behaviors, decisions, relationships, and habits that already create value, and then they make those things sharper on purpose.

A good communicator can become a great one.

A good leader can become a more trusted one.

A good thinker can become a better decision-maker.

A good professional can become the person others seek out when the stakes are high.

That kind of growth rarely happens by accident. It begins with awareness.

The best leaders and professionals are willing to ask themselves direct questions. How do people experience me? Do I listen well? Do I make good decisions under pressure? Do I bring clarity or confusion? Do I create confidence or anxiety? Do I help people see what is possible?

These questions are not about self-criticism. They are about self-leadership.

One of the great mistakes we make is assuming that success proves we no longer need to grow. In reality, success usually raises the stakes. The more responsibility you carry, the more your judgment matters. The more people depend on you, the more your leadership style matters. The more visible you become, the more your character matters.

That is why getting better is never only about technical skill. It is about the whole person.

In my own work, I think about leadership through three connected areas: character, style, and judgment.

Character is who you are when pressure shows up.

Style is how you lead, communicate, and influence others.

Judgment is how you decide what matters and what to do next.

When those three areas improve, almost everything else improves with them. A person with stronger character becomes more trustworthy. A person with a more effective style becomes easier to follow. A person with sharper judgment becomes more valuable in every room they enter.

The good news is that none of this requires perfection. It requires attention.

You do not have to become someone else to become better. Usually the goal is the opposite. The goal is to become a stronger version of who you already are.

If you are naturally encouraging, learn to encourage with more clarity.

If you are naturally analytical, learn to explain your thinking in ways others can use.

If you are naturally decisive, learn when to slow down and listen.

If you are naturally empathetic, learn to pair compassion with accountability.

If you are naturally creative, learn to turn ideas into execution.

Improvement is not always dramatic. Often it is a small adjustment repeated consistently.

A better question in a meeting.

A calmer response under pressure.

A more thoughtful decision.

A clearer explanation.

A handwritten note.

A willingness to say, “I may have missed something.”

A commitment to prepare a little better than expected.

Over time, those small choices compound. That is how people build trust. That is how reputations grow. That is how leaders create cultures where people want to do their best work.

We live in a world with no shortage of noise, criticism, and negativity. It is easy to focus on what is wrong: with our organizations, our leaders, our society, and even ourselves. But improvement

does not have to begin with discouragement. It can begin with possibility.

What if the next level of your success is not hidden in becoming someone different? What if it is found in becoming more intentional about the strengths you already have?

That is where meaningful growth usually begins. Not by asking, “What is wrong with me?” but by asking, “What is right with me, and how can I make it even better?”

About the author

Jim Petersen, PhD, is a retired U.S. Navy Captain, author, educator, executive coach, and President of the Professional Business Coaches Alliance. His work focuses on leadership, character, judgment, and helping people become better at what they already do well.

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