

SKIP LEVEL

strategic leadership for leaders ready to think two levels up

EPISODE 132 · WORKSHEET

EPISODE 132

Grow the Field

What if the promotion you want is not won by what you know, but by what you imagined long before the job ever existed? Your imagination is a field, and the leaders who seem to see around corners grew it quietly, long before anyone asked them to use it. This episode gives you Sam Walton's notebook, Gustavson's twelve powers in four phases, and four steps to grow the field before you need it. The role two levels up will ask you for answers you cannot look up. It will ask you for a future you have already imagined, in a field you have already grown.

KEY STRATEGIES & IDEAS

1. Imagination Is Disciplined Noticing

Imagination is not daydreaming. It is disciplined noticing, done early. A leader tends the field by keeping a short note each week about the patterns they notice, the questions no one is asking, and the assumptions the business is quietly running on. No one assigns that work. No one asks for it. But when the moment arrives that has no playbook, the leader who has been tending is not starting from nothing. They are harvesting. They can see the pattern in the new situation because they already traced it in the old one. They can name what the business believes, because they already questioned it. And they can say what is actually working, because they have been evaluating the gains while everyone else was only counting the losses.

2. Sam Walton's Notebook

Sam Walton, the founder of Walmart, walked into his competitors' stores for decades carrying nothing more threatening than a yellow legal pad, and later a small tape recorder. He walked every aisle, studied the displays, counted the customers, asked the clerks questions, and filled page after page. He called Kmart his laboratory. And he made no secret of it. "Most everything I've done I've copied from somebody else." His field was his notebook. Every observation went into it, week after week, year after year, with no particular moment in mind. Then, when he opened a new store or entered a town no one thought could support one, he was not starting from nothing. He was harvesting.

3. Twelve Powers, Four Phases

Paul Gustavson's book Imagine is about hope and the twelve powerful ways to invent the future. Gustavson organizes them into four phases, a loop that leaders have used for generations. Observe, Orient, Decide, Act. Three powers live in each phase, and the loop is the point. You go around it again and again. Observe: Patterns, Curiosity, Assessment — trace the patterns, hunt down the misconceptions, and evaluate the gains. Orient: Belief, Boundaries, Values — imagine the possible, minimize the distractions, and align your steering. Decide: Resilience, Today, Discipline — get bulletproof, increase the amplitude, and notice the resistance. Act: Movement, Encouragement, Growth — enter the matrix, engage with others, and reinvent continuously.

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4. Hope Is the Fuel

The fuel is hope. Imagination without hope is just worry with better pictures. It is what lets you imagine a future worth moving toward, instead of only imagining the ways it could go wrong. Hope does not ignore the difficult present. It simply refuses to let the difficult present be the only future you can picture. The leaders who grow the richest fields are not the most optimistic people in the room. They are the ones who can picture a better outcome clearly enough to work toward it, even when the present is difficult.

5. Where to Start: Curiosity, or Ground Zero

If you can only start with one power, start with curiosity. Hunt down one misconception, one thing everyone believes that no one has checked. Curiosity is the power that opens the gate to all the others, because once you question one assumption, the patterns start showing themselves, and the field starts talking back. And if your field is bare, start where Gustavson starts, at ground zero. Become something more, and equip yourself. Those are the first two chapters of his book, before the twelve powers even begin, and they are the permission slip. You do not need a finished field. You need a first row planted. One pattern a week, one question a week, one honest look at your values.

The picture: your imagination is a field. Nothing grows in a field you never tend, and no one harvests from ground they only visit when they are hungry. The leaders who seem to see around corners did not get that sight on the day they needed it. They grew it, quietly, long before anyone asked them to use it.

ACTION & REFLECTION STEPS

- [ ] **Step one — Observe.** Trace the patterns, hunt down the misconceptions, and evaluate the gains. That is the first phase, and it is mostly watching with intent. Write down one pattern you keep seeing, one belief everyone holds that no one has tested, and one thing that is actually working and worth more of your attention. A field starts with noticing what is already growing in it.

One pattern I keep seeing:

One belief no one has tested:

One thing actually working:

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- [ ] **Step two — Orient.** Imagine the possible, minimize the distractions, and align your steering. That is the second phase, and it is where the field gets its direction. Name one future you would actually want to lead toward, clear one distraction that keeps pulling you off course, and check it against your values. If the future you are imagining does not match what you stand for, it is not your field. It is someone else's.

The future I want to lead toward:

The distraction to clear:

- [ ] **Step three — Decide.** Get bulletproof, increase the amplitude, and spot the resistance. That is the third phase, and it is where most leaders rush. Resilience is not pretending the hard parts do not exist. It is deciding what you will hold onto when they arrive. Today is the power of doing the small thing now, instead of waiting for a perfect moment. And discipline is noticing the resistance in yourself, the voice that says this is not your job, and going ahead anyway.

What I will hold onto:

The small thing I will do now:

- [ ] **Step four — Act.** Enter the matrix, engage with others, and reinvent continuously. That is the fourth phase, and it is where imagination leaves your notebook. Movement means taking one real step, not planning a tenth. Encouragement means bringing other people into the idea, because a field no one else can walk in is just a private garden. And growth means going around the loop again, reinventing as you learn.

My one real step:

Who I will bring into the idea:

Think two levels up. — Maya & Marcus

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