THE GROWTH GROUP, LLC

Foundational Wisdom

Abstracts of the Twelve Themes

Foundational Wisdom is a twelve-theme leadership series by Carl F. Hicks, Jr., Ph.D., of The Growth Group, LLC. Each theme pairs a concise article or infographic with reflection questions to connect leadership ideas to everyday choices, conversations, and habits. These abstracts outline the central idea of each theme and offer a question to carry forward.

THEME 1

What's Your Perspective?

Three Perspectives That Separate Good Leaders from Great Ones

Great leadership combines three perspectives. The first identifies eight human skills technology cannot replace: curiosity, discipline, adaptability, self-awareness, social influence, decision-making, analytical thinking, and emotional intelligence. The second uses deeper questions to uncover hidden issues, challenge assumptions, and refocus teams. The third offers fifteen mindset reframes for leading yourself, your team, and your company. Together, skills provide the foundation, questions create leverage, and reframed thinking opens the way to breakthroughs.

> **Reflect: Which skill should I sharpen, question should I ask, and belief should I reframe?**

THEME 2

Why AI Literacy Is the New Leadership Advantage

Know the landscape. Master the skills.

AI is reshaping industries, roles, and expectations for leaders. This theme maps the landscape—from AI and machine learning to deep learning, generative AI, large language models, and agents that can plan and act. It then outlines ten practical capabilities, including prompt engineering, no-code automation, AI-supported decisions, content and workflow creation, customer engagement, analytics, sales outreach, ethics and risk, and continuous learning. AI is changing what professional excellence looks like; leaders who build fluency now can help shape what comes next.

> **Reflect: What step can I take this week to become AI-capable?**

THEME 3

The Career Growth Benefits of a Life-Long, Self-Enforced Probation Period

Stay hungry. Stay humble. Stay on probation.

Many professionals bring their sharpest focus to their first 90 days, then drift toward comfort when the pressure lifts. This theme recommends keeping probation's best conditions by choice: clear expectations, frequent feedback, visible accountability, and a daily standard. Satya Nadella's shift from “know-it-all” to “learn-it-all” and Mary Barra's career illustrate five benefits: staying coachable, avoiding complacency, building a reputation, attracting opportunity, and modeling excellence. The daily pillars are prepare, seek feedback, learn, measure, and show up ready to earn trust.

> **Reflect: If probation began tomorrow, what would I change—and why not now?**

THEME 4

How Are You Thinking About the Problem?

Your perspective either multiplies the difficulty or turns it into a doorway.

Problems are often less limiting than our thinking about them. This theme identifies two traps: acting without thinking and thinking without acting. High performers move through a rhythm of reflecting, deciding, acting, reviewing, and adjusting. Four beliefs guide the process: the questions you ask shape the answers; solutions can be found within problems; a problem can point toward the path forward; and obstacles may conceal opportunities. For the next challenge, reframe it, question it, take the lesson, choose your attitude, and act thoughtfully.

> **Reflect: If I keep thinking this way for five years, where will it lead?**

THEME 5

Goal Achievement: The Path to Success

Goals as your blueprint

Like a home renovation, goal achievement requires a clear vision and plan; without them, time, energy, and money are wasted. The Hicks Fix process—Affirming, Discerning, and Determining—helps ensure goals are genuinely your own. Lifestyle Goals span Faith, Family, Friends, Fortune, Fame, Fitness, Fun, and Fulfillment. Livelihood Goals support that life through compensation, becoming indispensable, credentials, and skills. Refine goals with S.M.A.R.T.E.R. criteria—Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-bound, Enjoyable, and Rewarding. State goals as actions, not avoidances, and use Magic Cards and motivation habits to keep your "why" visible.

> **Reflect: Do my Livelihood choices support my most important Lifestyle Goals?**

THEME 6

From Doing to Leading

How you spend your time defines who you're becoming

Every professional works in three lanes: Doing (contributing), Managing (coordinating), and Leading (multiplying impact). Each matters, but high performers can remain stuck in Doing—the very strength that earned their promotion. Drawing on Alan Mulally, Herb Kelleher, Coach John Wooden, Nelson Mandela, and leadership thinkers including Peter Drucker and Stephen Covey, this theme shows how to shift from tracking numbers to developing people. A five-minute daily audit helps leaders review how they spend their time and respond as the person they are becoming.

> **Reflect: Did I invest in someone's growth today? Does my time reflect who I'm becoming?**

THEME 7

Confirmation Bias

Same brain. Different response. Different life trajectory.

Confirmation bias can turn a limiting belief into a self-fulfilling loop: doubt that something will work, avoid the risk, get small results, then treat those results as proof. The Survival Loop reinforces the original story; the Growth Loop interrupts it in four moves: notice the thought, test whether it is fact or self-protection, act intentionally rather than recklessly, and build a new story through fresh evidence and habits. Reflection helps reveal where comfort is winning and which evidence you may be overlooking because it challenges your assumptions.

> **Reflect: What evidence am I ignoring because it challenges my story?**

THEME 8

Whose Dream Are You Building?

How agency and self-efficacy shape your productivity, purpose, and direction

You can be busy, disciplined, and successful while pursuing a life you never consciously chose. Agency is the sense that you can choose your direction; self-efficacy is the belief that you can take the actions a challenge requires. Agency sets the course, and self-efficacy supports movement—each completed step builds evidence of capability. Begin with small, confidence-building actions, replace "I have to" with "I am choosing to because," and review your calendar to decide what must be honored, renegotiated, and protected.

> **Reflect: Would I still want this life if no one applauded my choice?**

THEME 9

Nobody Quits Because the Goal Was Too Hard

They quit because the reason was too small

When two people pursue the same goal, the one who persists can often explain clearly why it matters. Drawing on Edward Deci and Richard Ryan's self-determination theory, this theme presents six principles: intrinsic motivation outlasts external rewards; a clear “why” aligns action; purpose builds resilience; clarity replaces vague intentions; meaning creates energy; and ownership multiplies results. Before setting another target, complete the sentence “This matters to me because…” and use the answer to connect Livelihood Goals with the Lifestyle Goals they are meant to support.

> **Reflect: Whose goal is this, and how would I state it in my own words?**

THEME 10

Doing, Being & Becoming

Three dimensions of a meaningful career and a well-lived life

Two advisors can follow the same process with the same family, yet only one earns a lifelong client. The difference is not simply what they do, but who they are while doing it and who they are becoming through the work. Doing means visible action and output; Being means presence, character, and standards; Becoming means growth in capability and identity over time. The dimensions reinforce one another: being shapes doing, doing builds becoming, and becoming deepens being. Five weekly practices turn the framework into daily choices.

> **Reflect: If I focused more on who I need to be, what would change this week?**

THEME 11

Three Lines, One Choice

Three poems, three questions, one decision you make today

Three poems become a practical philosophy for career and life, forming a sequence of Perspective, Agency, and Action. Thomas Gray reminds us that titles and trophies are temporary; William Ernest Henley affirms our power to choose our response, while John Donne reminds us that no one leads alone. John Greenleaf Whittier warns that inaction can become our deepest regret. Together, these lines ask leaders to look beyond status, own their responses, and act before an opportunity passes.

> **Reflect: Which inaction this year might I regret in five years?**

THEME 12

Three Perspectives: Frankl, Jung, Hicks

Meaning, wholeness, and intentional growth

Viktor Frankl asks why we live and work, reminding us that purpose beyond ourselves can turn a job into a calling and that we retain a choice in how we respond. Carl Jung asks who we are beneath our roles, including the “shadow” we may prefer not to see; unexamined shadows can influence how we lead. Carl Hicks translates meaning and self-knowledge into daily practice through six Powers: Perspective, Purpose, Passion, Preparation, Positivity, and Perseverance. Frankl and Jung deepen our understanding of who we are; intentional practice shapes what we do and who we become.

> **Reflect: If I knew my why, faced myself honestly, and prepared daily, who could I become in a year?**