

I think I broke the rearview mirror of my life's vehicle. I was always convinced I was moving forward, chasing new opportunities on the horizon. But no matter how far I went, the rearview mirror reflected the same past—my old workplace, the leaders I admired, the colleagues who shared my values, and the deep sense of purpose that once propelled my growth. The more I looked back, the stronger the temptation to turn around. Was I truly progressing, or was I just trying to recreate what I had left behind?

My previous company held a significant meaning for me. Fresh out of my MBA, uncertain of where I belonged, my first manager recognized something in me—potential. He believed in my capabilities and gave me the space to grow. I thrived in solving the challenges he faced, and that mutual trust fueled my sense of purpose. I was given a job rotation to expand my impact, but the transition was not as seamless as I had imagined. I found myself working directly under a C-level executive—one of the company's co-founders. It was daunting. Self-doubt crept in, especially when I saw my peers thriving in high-profile roles with greater support. Comparison weighed me down, but I persevered.

Then came the uncertainty. The company faced global economic challenges, leading to a significant downsizing. I braced myself for the worst, convinced that my tenure was nearing its end. When my manager called for a one-on-one meeting, I thought it would be my final conversation with him. Instead, he surprised me—he wanted to retain me. He valued my problem-solving skills and offered me a more strategic role, one that placed me at the heart of organizational development. That moment changed me. It solidified my confidence in my own worth. I wasn't just another employee—I brought something unique to the table.

Yet, as I settled into my new role, something shifted. The workplace that once nurtured me began to feel indifferent. The company's response to the layoffs felt cold, and the values I cherished seemed to fade. I knew I couldn't stay. When an opportunity presented itself—one that seemed aligned with my aspirations—I took it without hesitation, convinced that this was my second curve, my next big leap.

But the road ahead was not what I had envisioned. What I thought was an exciting opportunity turned out to be the roughest, most treacherous terrain I had ever encountered. Instead of inspiring leadership, I found deception. Instead of a collaborative team, I faced exclusion and gatekeeping. My direct boss and senior colleagues weren't just difficult; they were enablers of corruption, upholding a toxic culture that suffocated any hope of ethical progress. Every day felt like navigating a road riddled with potholes, each one designed to test my endurance.

Worse, I found myself surrounded by people who had chosen silence. Whether out of fear, self-preservation, or indifference, they justified what should never be justified. The weight of it all pushed me to the edge. But I refused to let the road define my journey. If I couldn't change the entire landscape, I would carve out a space where integrity could still exist. Even if my impact was small, even if my resistance took the form of silent defiance and prayers, I held my ground. Because sometimes, growth isn't about moving forward effortlessly—it's about standing firm when everything else tries to push you off course.

I could feel how much this environment had diminished my sense of worth. And I was afraid. Afraid that if I didn't find a way out soon, I would lose the ability to bounce back. I hastened my way toward an exit plan, determined to reclaim my sense of self before it was too late.

But just as I was working toward my escape, the landscape started to shift. A new organizational structure was introduced, leading to the rotation of many senior figures into different functions. Fresh faces entered the scene, bringing a new energy that began to challenge the entrenched toxic culture. The once unshakable status quo started to crack, making space for change. Suddenly, I found myself with more autonomy and control to influence the direction of my work. I could see the possibility of making things better, of transforming the workplace from within.

It left me with a dilemma. Should I stay, knowing the risks and difficulties ahead, but recognizing that I now had a chance to create meaningful change? Or should I continue with my exit plan, prioritizing long-term growth over the uncertainty of reform that provides stability in life? Yet, regardless of my choice, I felt a quiet satisfaction in knowing that I had persisted. The battle had not been in vain. Through all the turmoil, I had learned something invaluable: growth is my own responsibility. It is not dictated by circumstances, nor is it contingent on an ideal workplace. It is something I must cultivate, no matter where I am.

It's easy to romanticize the past when the road ahead is challenging. I longed for the supportive culture I once had, the leadership I respected, the sense of purpose that once fuelled me. But here's the paradox: the past wasn't following me. It was a reflection, not a destination. And just like in driving, if I focused too much on the mirror, I would miss what lay ahead. Was the problem the road itself, or was it the way I was driving on it?

Every transition reaches a point where reality demands confrontation. My new workplace clashed with my values. Leadership seemed distant. The way things were done felt frustratingly foreign. I wrestled with a difficult question: Do I adapt, or do I stand my ground?

Growth doesn't happen without discomfort. Sometimes, it feels like losing yourself first. My values, once so firm, were now being tested. Was I compromising? Or was I learning? The road felt unstable, my career vehicle shaking under the pressure of uncertainty. For the first time, I questioned whether I could keep going.

Then, something changed—not the road, but me.

I started noticing things I hadn't before. I observed how leadership operated differently, how influence worked in subtle ways, how small shifts in my approach could create an impact. I realized that while my old workplace had given me a highway, this new terrain was making me a better driver.

I learned to adjust my speed, to anticipate the curves, to handle unpredictable turns with confidence. Instead of resisting, I started adapting—not by abandoning my values, but by

expanding them. Growth, I realized, wasn't about clinging to who I used to be; it was about integrating who I was into who I was becoming.

The concept of the second curve in life and career suggests that growth requires a leap of faith. One must leave behind the comfort of familiarity to embrace the unknown. However, the key insight is that the transition to the second curve must begin before the first curve declines. If we wait until the current path becomes stagnant or unbearable, we risk making reactive, desperate choices rather than strategic, intentional ones. The best time to prepare for change is when we still have the energy, clarity, and resources to explore new possibilities. Recognizing this in hindsight, I now understand that growth isn't just about seizing opportunities—it's about creating them before the need becomes urgent.

The second curve concept also teaches us the importance of self-awareness and timing. Identifying the right moment to transition requires a blend of foresight, adaptability, and courage. Some key indicators include a diminishing sense of purpose, stagnation, and a growing discomfort that signals the need for evolution. However, embracing the second curve isn't just about recognizing when to leave—it's about knowing how to prepare for change. The right mindset involves resilience, intellectual curiosity, and the willingness to embrace uncertainty.

One day, I glanced at the mirror and saw that the past seemed farther away. It hadn't changed—but I had. The longing faded, replaced by a new sense of purpose. My previous workplace had shaped me, but it didn't define my future.

The second curve is never easy. It demands endurance, adaptability, and trust in the process. It asks us to embrace uncertainty, to recognize that while the past was good, the future holds its own rewards—ones we can only discover by continuing to move forward.

I also realized that the journey isn't just about the road—it's about the driver. The vehicle may be the same, but the way I handled it had evolved. My past experiences weren't just nostalgic memories; they were lessons, preparing me for this moment.

I no longer fear the unfamiliar road. My second curve isn't about forcing my new workplace to be like my last but about finding meaning in different ways. I stopped resenting the contrast and started appreciating what this experience was teaching me.

I learned resilience, developed new skills, and found new ways to align my purpose with my reality. And most importantly, I stopped checking the rearview mirror so often. Not because the past wasn't valuable, but because I no longer needed it to guide me.

The road is still unknown, but I trust myself to navigate it. Because I am not just driving—I am evolving. And that is what truly matters.