

# MAPLE: A Deliberately Developmental Organization

*Striving to fulfill our highest potential through rigorous practice in community.*



## **Three Core Enablers of Individual and Organizational Growth<sup>1</sup>**

*The Edge of Growth: Developmental Aspirations.*

*The Home of Growth: A Trustworthy Community.*

*The Groove of Growth: Daily Practices and Routines.*

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***"People come for meditation and they stay for the community."  
- Peter Park, MAPLE Executive Director and Mindfulness Teacher***

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**There are three critical components to the training at MAPLE: a set of regular practices and routines, a trustworthy community, and lofty developmental aspirations.** These factors serve a central guiding mission: to change the patterns in the human mind that are leading to widespread global devastation through the development of wise, powerful, and compassionate leaders. In the face of cultural patterns that foster divisiveness and natural destruction, it becomes crucial to craft alternative visions and narratives. MAPLE is offering a cultural story that integrates wisdom and love as

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<sup>1</sup> A conceptualization based on Robert Kegan and Lisa Lahey's research on Deliberately Developmental Organizations (DDOs). See their book [An Everyone Culture](#) for a deeper dive into DDOs.

fundamental to decision-making; let's take a look at how that vision manifests in the training at MAPLE.

As one resident puts it, **MAPLE is a place that brings you in, heals you, and then lets you back out into the world order to heal it.** The rigor of the training requires a strong baseline of physical, mental, and emotional health as a foundation which can withstand the necessary internal shifts that allow deep integrity and confidence to emerge unhindered. A unique ecology of practices trains skills and abilities in community, all of which is built into a nonprofit organization that views the fruition of each individual's full potential as essential to the success of the organization itself. This means leadership development and personal growth are integrally woven into daily work and life. What does this look like?

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## The Edge of Growth: Developmental Aspirations

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When it comes to developmental aspirations, "get enlightened" is surely one of the more lofty. Now, that's not necessarily what you agree to when you come to train here, but it's one of the things you can shoot for. More commonly, individuals are striving to overcome their negative patterns in order to lead from integrity and compassion. Through meditation and leadership development, among other practices, we strive to see the world more directly so we rely less on our often inaccurate ideas about it. MAPLE demands that you live in reality, and much of the training consists of struggling against that, and being pushed back into reality.

***"People are striving to be real. The social norms don't have to follow what happens outside. Honesty and realness are big." - F.T.***

Trying to see directly the assumptions and truths we are holding onto without investigation is a great challenge. It requires being able to see the limits of our own perspectives, which is not something we're generally apt to do. This is fostered through being faced with problems that don't have clear solutions, and attempting over and over again to find ways to change what often seem like immutable patterns. In learning to lead and learning to follow, we see the limits of our ability to accomplish what needs to be done, and we are goaded to learn. Overcoming our personal limitations demands that we take risks; we try new things, we inevitably fail a number of times, and we learn as we go.

***"It's beautiful to be in a place where people are trying to become the best version of themselves." - L.F.***

An important aspect of the training is holding leadership responsibilities. These positions are most often just beyond the edge of someone's capacity. A senior resident explains this: "People are often thrust into a new situation with new responsibilities, often something beyond what their normal training or skill set is. There's a lot to be done here, so diving in, without knowing exactly how to do this, is something that's happened to me over and over again." When each resident is working and living with the people who are directly experiencing the consequences of each others' actions and decisions as leaders, there's a lot of feedback available for quick course correction and learning.

Often in both the workplace and other social environments, we strive to cover up our flaws and embellish our virtues in order to maintain or gain status. In doing so, we waste time and energy that could have been used to address those very weaknesses. In the context here, we strive to take the time and energy that normally goes towards self-preservation and turn it towards developmental aspirations. This often means quite a bit of awkwardness and discomfort as we fail often in front of others, and try to learn from it without judging or criticizing ourselves.

***"What I'm learning here how to make commitments and stick with them."  
- A. P.***

We aspire and practice to make decisions grounded in compassion, become more aware of when our considerations are self-centered, and strive to act for the benefit of the community. This guiding light permeates our culture to the core. One resident speaks of Soryu Forall, the head teacher and a founder of MAPLE: "Soryu is very high integrity. He'd rather the organization fail than do the wrong thing or feed systems of injustice. He's willing to take risks that in most organizations or groups, it would be like, wouldn't it be easier to not do that, wouldn't we have greater odds of success if we just didn't care about that thing?" It is in this context that we experience what it's like to live an ethical life, and from that understanding we can find the capacity to do what we know is right, even when it is difficult.

***"There is a sense here that every moment is the training. Even when I don't want to do the training, and I'm going through the motions, I'm learning from that experience. That's the training too." - J. P.***

## The Groove of Growth: Daily Practices and Routines

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The backbone of MAPLE is the schedule, which is a rigorous, comprehensive, and evolving structure within which we practice the development of each of our [wisdom, love and power] leadership. We start each morning at 4:40am. We chant, meditate, exercise, and eat breakfast. At 8am, the workday starts, and continues until lunch. After lunch a brief period an additional hour of work is completed, followed by a few hours of free time. At 5pm we gather again for two hours of work, meditation, or a workshop. At 7pm we meditate together, followed by chanting, closing at 9pm.

As one resident says, "If you can't follow this pretty simple, though strict, schedule, you're not going to be able to function effectively in this world." This daily structure is a challenging and essential way that leadership is trained. A benefit of this rigidity is that deviation from our structured intention becomes much more salient, and can thus be addressed more directly. In the workplace this often shows up in the difference between how honest we are in a meeting versus when we're talking to a coworker at lunch, and at MAPLE there is an expectation that we hold to the same integrity and values no matter what our current context is, so as to practice constantly without any gaps in our attention to our actions and awareness of the context in which we are operating.

*"There are many different rules and customs that we have. We don't tell everyone all of them, partly because it would be overwhelming, but part of it is allowing people to watch and be mindful and see what's going on around them. No one told me to bow at that specific time, but I notice that's part of what people do here. There are many subtleties like that to the training here." - S. B.*

Another resident speaks of how "the external structure allows an internal freedom to develop. Out there [in the world at large], where external freedom is so easy, we end up not developing an internal freedom, because there is never a need. We are taught to adjust our external conditions to find freedom, rather than adjusting our internal conditions to find an unconditional freedom." **Through the rigidity of the structure, we are pushed to**

**learn how to be happy even when we aren't getting what we want**, because being miserable all the time becomes insufferable.

***"Rituals are an important aspect of our practice. We clean our bowls after meals using fruit and hot water. It is an expression of gratitude for every last piece of food that is going into our bodies and helping us say yes to life today." - B. A.***

Every three weeks we have a week-long retreat, which allows us to deeply practice meditation, circling (interpersonal meditation), and other skills that build our clarity and discernment. It is pretty unusual for an organization to dedicate a full week each month to meditation, but the capacities and understanding built through these retreats are integral to effective leadership. In this way, they feed directly back into the quality of the work that is done outside of retreat. They grow the capacity to manage the rest of the world with integrity and skill and enable a deconstruction of negative patterns, the confluence of which allows an even stronger foundation to be built.

The ecology of practices allows us to train a variety of skills and competencies, increasing the range and depth of our abilities. Each facet of the training helps us harness our strengths and face our challenges in a different way. What you practice in meditation may well be the same issue you face in your leadership role, but you'll have to craft different approaches, since sitting still with your eyes closed works well in meditation, but won't always work as a leadership move.

We each have unique hang-ups and blindspots, and the multiplicity of practices creates a variety of routes for facing and overcoming our doubts. One resident comments on the set of practices, saying, "You have to meditate and do all these practices over and over again to get the real deal, deep benefit. On your own, you just fall off after a certain amount of time. Here, in the community, you practice more, more often, than most people can sustain on their own, and the sheer volume has impact." One untraditional offering that has become integral to the ecology is circling, which many residents have found to be a priceless springboard for growth. One resident says, "The circling experiences themselves, to be vulnerable like that, I can't imagine some other way at home that I could have found a container that safe. It's quite powerful to be seen in that way."

Soryu teaches that the practices should serve to reveal the suffering that is already there, not to create new suffering. This is one of the nuanced aspects of the training, some of which at first can appear to be something they are not. The practices and rules are not about creating difficulty. They are tools for gaining clarity around how we create our own suffering, and how to stop doing that so we can find real satisfaction and happiness in our lives, and not settle for quiet desperation. MAPLE offers a growth-accelerating structure for day-to-day life that one can jump right into.

## **The Home of Growth:**

### **A Trustworthy Community**

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Living at MAPLE, we are deeply embedded in community. We learn to support each other, take care of each other, challenge each other, keep our commitments, and be honest with each other. Community creates feedback loops that reinforce the goals of the training. However, as one resident says, "The community is created by, and shapes, the people who participate." This means everyone who comes impacts the environment, and that can be for better or for worse. Through this process we learn the deep and unforeseeable impacts of our actions.

This learning occurs through both implicit and explicit feedback. We see more clearly the impacts of our actions because others won't hide them from us or fix the problems we create, so naturally we become more aware of how we affect our environment. We also receive explicit feedback from others sharing how they're impacted by our decisions and actions. There is an expectation that we will honestly encounter the information provided. One resident describes this: "People will tell you how they really feel, and they will listen when you share how you feel... It enables growth by immediately showing you the effects of your stuck patterns and how they're actually impacting other people in a negative way."

***"It can be hard to be in community, you have all these personalities, you're in a pinball machine bouncing around getting hit by these different lights and sounds, but there's something that feels deeply right about being with a group of people who you love, and trust, and care about." - K. O.***

In community we create new norms of interaction. One resident comments, "Seeing other people interact was helpful modeling for me. Like, if I were that person I'd have been really upset, but they just got over it. That's interesting. Or, this person is so nice and generous, why can't I do that? We're in the same context, with the same people. Why is it so hard for me and so easy for them?". In this way, we learn from our own interactions, and from being in a setting where we're constantly exposed to interactions all around us in both professional and personal contexts. When we act in a way that hurts others, they will ask us to change, and we will learn from that.

***"MAPLE demonstrates what a healthy and functional community looks like." - T. K.***

**Together we work to build integrity and trust.** Part of this is through holding each other accountable for our actions. One resident describes this experience: "The identity others are putting on me in most other contexts, I have to struggle against. I've had to find communities and events which reify the parts of me I actually want to build. Here, it's already set that the people around me are reinforcing my being in ways that are in greater integrity".

**The structure and community don't allow you hide.** There's just not enough time in the schedule to vent or deal with things after the fact. You end up pent up and it will feel terrible, and leak out and affect others, they'll call you out on it, and you'll have to deal with it. You can't hide from the impacts of your ways of seeing and ways of being, and you can't offset them in ways you might in the outside world like watching tv to decompress, drinking, or eating whatever you want, because you're almost always on schedule.

***"There was a big gaping hole around, when relationships, groups, get hard, the normal trajectory I saw was that people separate and disconnect, and I really didn't want to keep having that happen. This seemed like a place I could work through that stuff, and it was less likely that people would reactively leave when things get hard." - P. P.***

In most situations, if there are people you don't like, you can find many ways to avoid them. A resident explains the difference at MAPLE quite simply: **"Other places, when there's conflict, relationships stop and people go their separate ways. Here, we work through it."** We are pushed to learn how to love the people who are part of this community, even though we didn't choose them. This becomes an essential aspect of our practice. One resident explains, "You don't have an out. You can't just cut people off. You're all here together." Through meditation and circling we create space internally and relationally to cultivate deeper ways of relating. This allows a deep happiness to emerge in relationship to ourselves, in relationship with others, and in relationship with the world around us.

***"Here, even if you don't like someone, what people intend to do is that you'll still be there for them, even if you hate them. This is a community where you'll be there for each other at the end of the day. I think that's something that's lacking from our society. It's very easy to justify not caring about people. It's much easier to cut someone out of your life, or leave their life, when people aren't like you, and you think they should think like you." - K. R.***

## Bringing it All Together: Growth, Community, and Practice Under One Roof

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*It takes hard work to break through patterns and become wise, compassionate people. It also enables a joy that is more satisfying, more worthwhile, and more nourishing than what we are usually offered by conventional means. This is a training ground for people who are serious about making that journey.*

The real magic happens at the confluence of community, growth, and practice. Community enables us to follow a rigorous set of practices we often don't have the willpower to sustain on our own, in the face of the forces around us. It also provides a container that shows us our edges, helps us learn how to be more deeply compassionate, and helps us become who we are in relating to others. We're asked to change by others, by the teacher, and by the practices. We're asked to try new things, to be on time all the time, to truly change the patterns that are running us and develop a more genuine way of living and being, and we support each other in doing that. Practicing in this way, we reinforce and build on the trust and integrity of the community. A resident describes this trifecta of forces succinctly: **"I've broken a hundred times [edge of growth: developmental aspirations] since I've been here and I've still had to show up for chanting [groove of growth: set of practices and routines]. I think that could only happen here. I don't have that support [home of growth: trustworthy community] at home."**