

HEIKO VEIT

THE VERTICAL DEVELOPMENT PRIMER

Understanding STAGES: A clear, human introduction to a living map of
adult development.

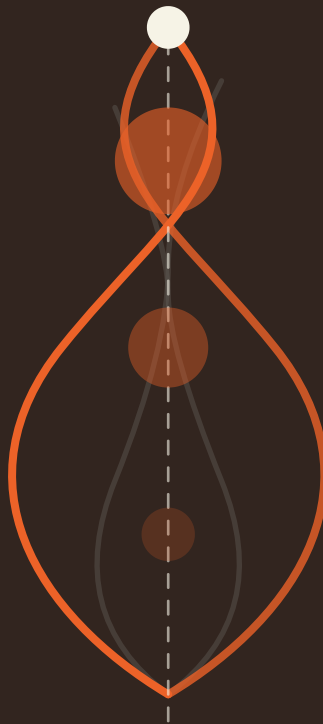


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How to use this primer

- *Read it like a map, not a verdict. A map helps You navigate; it doesn't tell You who You are.*
- *Notice what resonates and what irritates You (irritation is often a growth signal).*
- *Keep it practical: "What do I do differently this week?"*

Chapter 1: Why vertical development matters (and what it is)

KEY STATEMENTS

- Vertical development is about *how we make meaning*, not just what we know.
- It shows up as increased perspective taking, complexity tolerance, and inner freedom.
- Growth is uneven: we all have a *range*, not a single fixed “level.”

Reader takeaway: A simple distinction: **horizontal** = more skills/knowledge; **vertical** = a broader/deeper meaning making lens.

What “vertical” really means

In everyday life we grow in two directions at once.

- **Horizontal development:** learning more within the same lens. New skills, new knowledge, new strategies.
- **Vertical development:** the lens itself changes. The way You make meaning becomes more spacious, more nuanced, more capable of holding complexity.

A simple example: If You learn a new feedback method, that is horizontal. If You notice that Your relationship to feedback changes (less defensiveness, more curiosity, more ability to see the system You are part of), that is vertical.

I like to name this carefully: vertical development is not “being smarter”. It is a shift in the *structure* of meaning making. It tends to show up as:

- more perspectives available in the moment
- more tolerance for ambiguity (without collapsing into chaos)
- more inner freedom to choose how You respond (instead of being run by impulse, role, or identity)

And yes, it can feel disorienting. Growth often begins as a loss of certainty before it becomes a new kind of clarity.

A practical warning (because models get misused)

Vertical development models can become status games. That is the moment they stop helping. So here is the stance I recommend: *Use the map to increase compassion and effectiveness, not superiority.*

Range, center of gravity, and “state”

Most of us do not live in one stage, as if it were a permanent address. We live in a **range**. Two simple distinctions help a lot:

- **Center of gravity:** the lens You return to most often, especially under normal stress.
- **State:** a temporary configuration (tired, inspired, threatened, resourced). States can pull You into earlier patterns or open You into later ones.

This is why You might sound deeply wise in one conversation and strangely reactive in the next. That is not hypocrisy. It is human.

MICRO PRACTICE (5 MINUTES)

Pick a situation from the last seven days where You felt contracted or reactive. Answer these three questions in writing:

1. What story was I telling myself?
2. What did I protect (image, belonging, control, being right)?
3. What would become possible if I could hold one more perspective?

Keep it gentle. The goal is not self improvement. The goal is self contact.

Chapter 2: STAGES on one page: a living map, not a ladder

It is tempting to read stage models as a ladder. Up is better, down is worse. That temptation is understandable. And it is also one of the fastest ways to misuse the model.

STAGES is a map. A map helps You orient. It does not decide Your worth. And it is never the territory itself.

What STAGES is actually tracking

STAGES is not primarily tracking intelligence, education, or spiritual attainment. It is tracking **meaning making**: how reality gets organized in Your mind and in Your relationships.

In practice, the model looks at three repeating angles:

- What can You take as an object of awareness.
- Do You organize experience primarily as an individual or as a collective.
- What is the relationship style between self and world.

A compact one page summary

TIER SNAPSHOT

Concrete: rules, roles, actions, boundaries

Subtle: inner life, identity, systems, multiple perspectives

MetAware: awareness of awareness, constructs, how meaning is made

Stage spectrum: Early stages tend to stabilize life through rules, belonging, competence, and achievement. Later stages tend to stabilize life through integration, systems wisdom, and reflexive awareness.

A common misunderstanding

Many people use stage language to explain other people. That usually collapses into judgment. The healthier move is the opposite. Use STAGES first as a mirror: "What lens am I in right now."

MICRO PRACTICE (2 MINUTES)

Pick a moment from this week where You felt reactive. Ask:

1. What did I treat as given.

2. What might be constructed instead.
3. What is one action I would take if I had 10 percent more choice.

Chapter 3: The three repeating questions

KEY STATEMENTS

- STAGES uses repeating parameters/questions that show up in language and lived experience.
- These parameters help us see *how* a person is organizing reality, not just *what they believe*.
- When You learn the questions, You can diagnose gently: “From which lens am I speaking right now?”

The STAGES Matrix in plain language

It asks three repeating questions.

1. **What is the object of awareness?** Concrete, subtle, or metaware. (This tells us the tier.)
2. **Where is the social preference?** Individual or collective.
3. **What is the learning sequence?** Receptive, active, reciprocal, or interpenetrative.

Question 1: Object of awareness

- **Concrete:** “What happened, what is right, what is wrong, what is the rule.”
- **Subtle:** “What does it mean, what is the pattern, what is the value, what is the system.”
- **MetAware:** “How is meaning being made right now, what assumptions create this reality.”

Question 2: Individual or collective

- **Individual:** autonomy, self expression, personal responsibility, personal experience.
- **Collective:** belonging, shared norms, relational fields, systemic conditions.

Question 3: Learning sequence

- **Receptive:** taking in, being shaped by, allowing.
- **Active:** asserting, choosing, separating (either or logic).
- **Reciprocal:** mutuality, both and logic.
- **Interpenetrative:** the sense that distinctions arise within a deeper unity.

A SIMPLE SELF INQUIRY

Choose a situation where You disagree with someone. Write three short lines:

1. Object of awareness: What am I focused on (facts, meanings, meaning making)?
2. Social preference: Am I prioritizing me, or us?
3. Learning sequence: Am I receiving, asserting, reciprocating, or sensing interpenetration?
4. **What would be a more flexible move from here?**

Chapter 4: The tiers: Concrete, Subtle, MetAware

Concrete tier

Concrete awareness tends to focus on things You can point to: the body, actions, roles, rules, and boundaries.

When healthy: it brings reliability and groundedness. **When stressed:** it can narrow into control, blame, and rigid right and wrong.

Micro practice: Ask, "What is the simplest responsible next step I can take today."

Subtle tier

Subtle awareness is the world inside the world. It includes complex emotions, inner narratives, imagination, interpretation, and the ability to see contexts and systems.

When healthy: it brings nuance, empathy, strategic thinking, and real identity work. **When stressed:** it can flip into rumination and self narrative loops.

Micro practice: Ask, "What story am I telling, and what else could be true."

MetAware tier

MetAware awareness turns awareness back onto itself. At this tier, the "objects" include constructs, assumptions, definitions, meaning making itself.

When healthy: it brings spaciousness, agility, and humility. **When stressed:** it can become detached, overly abstract, or subtly superior.

Micro practice: Ask, "What am I treating as given that might actually be constructed."

Chapter 5: A guided tour of the stages (1.0 to 6.5)

This tour is meant for recognition, not typing. A stage is a **person perspective**, a patterned way of organizing experience.

1.0 (Concrete, Individual, Receptive)

Signature focus: Immediate needs and impulses. **Gift:** Raw life force. **Growth:** Build basic self regulation.

1.5 (Concrete, Individual, Active)

Signature focus: Protecting the self, getting what I want. **Gift:** Self preservation. **Growth:** Begin to include others as real.

2.0 (Concrete, Collective, Reciprocal)

Signature focus: Right and wrong, duty, rules. **Gift:** Reliability, loyalty. **Growth:** Hold intention alongside rules.

2.5 (Concrete, Collective, Interpenetrative)

Signature focus: Belonging, tradition, being “nice”. **Gift:** Community cohesion. **Growth:** Differentiate, form an inner compass.

3.0 (Subtle, Individual, Receptive)

Signature focus: Correctness, expertise, mastery. **Gift:** High standards, clear thinking. **Growth:** Let multiple valid viewpoints exist.

3.5 (Subtle, Individual, Active)

Signature focus: Goals, performance, the future. **Gift:** Execution, leadership. **Growth:** Let values and purpose lead, not only metrics.

4.0 (Subtle, Collective, Reciprocal)

Signature focus: Context, “it depends”, inclusion. **Gift:** Empathy, perspective taking. **Growth:** Integrate differences without collapsing into relativism.

4.5 (Subtle, Collective, Interpenetrative)

Signature focus: Systems, transformation, shadow work. **Gift:** Deep strategy, redesigning causes. **Growth:** Trust emergence.

5.0 (MetAware, Individual, Receptive)

Signature focus: Constructs, definitions, language. **Gift:** Agility with frames. **Growth:** Embodiment and grounded action.

5.5 (MetAware, Individual, Active)

Signature focus: Integration of multiple models, history. **Gift:** Deep integration. **Growth:** Grounded service.

6.0 & 6.5 (Unity and Flow)

Rare stages focusing on wholeness, unity, and interpenetration of emptiness and form.

Chapter 6: Development + shadow

Vertical development is not only “more perspective”. It is also more contact with the parts of You that were pushed out of awareness.

The three classes of shadow

- **Introjections:** “Not me” that got put into “me”. (Rules, shames, “shoulds”). Need *release*.
- **Projections:** “Me” that got pushed out onto someone else. (Judgments, strong charge). Need *owning*.
- **Divisions:** Inner splits where parts pull in different directions. Need *integration*.

THE MINIMUM VIABLE SHADOW PRACTICE

1. **Activate a kind witness.**
2. **Name the trigger.** “When X happened, I felt Y.”
3. **Locate the sensation.**
4. **Choose one healing direction.** Release, integrate, or own?
5. **Take one small action.**

Chapter 7: The Shadow Window

The four quadrants: **Public self**, **Personal self** (secrets), **Blind self** (You know, I don't), **Unknown self**.

The smallest feedback practice that actually works

Pick one person who has Your best interest at heart. Ask one question:

"What do You notice in me that I probably do not see."

Then add one constraint: *"Please give me one example."*

Chapter 8: Micro practices for Your next edge

PRACTICE SET 1: ATTENTION (3.0/3.5)

- **Breath counting:** Count breaths to 10. Reset if You drift.
- **Mindfulness with return:** Note when mind wanders, return to breath.
- **Feel the feeling:** Stay with a sensation for one minute.

PRACTICE SET 2: PERSPECTIVE TAKING (TOWARD 4.0)

- **The two way mirror:** Imagine others can see Your thoughts. What do they see?
- **The “it depends” doorway:** Start answers with “It depends on...”

PRACTICE SET 3: INTEGRATION (4.0/4.5)

Facilitate a conversation between inner voices. Ask each: “What do You want, and what are You protecting?”

PRACTICE SET 4: OWNING PROJECTIONS

When You notice a judgment, add: *“And yes, that is me.”* Then ask: “What is the healthy version of this quality?”

Chapter 9: Using STAGES responsibly

Pitfall 1: Status. If a stage becomes a badge, You are no longer using the model.

Pitfall 2: Typology trap. Use stages like a flashlight, not a cage.

Pitfall 3: Spiritual bypass. Trying to solve depth issues with height language.

Pitfall 4: Over diagnosing. Do not use STAGES to explain why others are wrong.

Chapter 10: What now: Your next step

1. **Pick one practice** from Chapter 8 and do it for two weeks.
2. **Add a mirror:** feedback from one trusted person.
3. **Watch for the charge:** where You get activated is often where the next edge is.

Appendix A: Glossary

- **Vertical development:** transformation in meaning making capacity.
- **Center of gravity:** the most frequent organizing lens.
- **Tier:** a broad family of meaning making (Concrete / Subtle / MetAware).
- **Shadow:** disowned, split, or unconscious material.

Ready to go deeper?

If You want support mapping Your developmental patterning and designing a practice that fits Your life, explore coaching and assessment.

Contact:

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Transformational Development

