



The Three Questions Every Senior Leader Should Ask Themselves in 2026

By Joelle K. Jay, Ph.D.

As an executive coach, I've spent the decades working with senior leaders who have achieved extraordinary success on paper—running companies, shaping industries, and leading teams at the top of their game. Yet, even at the highest levels, many find themselves quietly wondering: *Am I succeeding in the ways that truly matter?*



In 2026, that question will become more urgent than ever.

The world of leadership has shifted dramatically, even in just the last few years. The C-suite is no longer defined solely by performance metrics or shareholder returns, but by adaptability, authenticity, and personal sustainability. The leaders who thrive now are those who know how to lead both outwardly and inwardly—with clarity, integrity, and purpose.

So how do you measure success when the traditional yardsticks no longer fit?

In my coaching practice, I often bring my clients back to three deceptively simple but powerful questions—ones that help them evaluate not just their results, but their growth, balance, and fulfillment as leaders and as people.

1. Am I achieving what matters most?

Every executive I coach has a long list of goals, strategic priorities, growth targets, and personal commitments. But the ones who experience *true success* aren't just achieving; they're achieving *what matters most*.

That requires ruthless clarity. What are the outcomes that truly move the needle—for your organization, your team, and your life? What legacy are you building?



Too often, senior leaders find themselves spending 80 percent of their time driving outcomes that don't align with their deeper priorities. The result is a persistent sense of imbalance or burnout that no title or bonus can fix.

Start 2026 with a recalibration. Write down your top three priorities— professionally and personally—and ask yourself how your calendar reflects them. If the alignment isn't there, your leadership impact (and satisfaction) will always be limited.

2. Am I growing in the ways I want to grow?

High performers are used to growth—but growth at the top is different. Once you've mastered operational excellence and strategic influence, the next level of development is more personal: emotional intelligence, self-awareness, and resilience.

One CEO I coach realized that while his company was expanding rapidly, *he* wasn't. "I've been developing everyone else," he said, "but I've outgrown my own growth plan."

That awareness led him to redefine success—not by scale, but by selfmastery. He started working on becoming a more intentional leader: slowing down to think, making space for creativity, and reconnecting with his curiosity.

In 2026, growth for senior leaders won't come from doing more. It will come from doing differently.

Ask yourself: *Where do I want to grow next?* Not just for your role, but for the person you're becoming.

3. Am I living the life I want to live?

Leadership is demanding. It can easily consume your time, energy, and identity. But the leaders who sustain success over the long term are the ones who integrate their professional and personal lives intentionally.

One of my clients, a global executive with an unrelenting travel schedule, used to measure success by quarterly earnings. Now she measures it by something simpler: "Do I get to have dinner with my family three nights a week?" For her, that shift wasn't about balance—it was about *alignment*.

When you consciously design your leadership life, you rediscover your agency. You move from reacting to the demands of leadership to *shaping* the experience of it.

So pause and reflect: Are you leading the life you want—or just living the one that's expected of you?



A new definition of success

As we move into 2026, the best leaders aren't just achieving—they're evolving. They're expanding their definition of success to include not just results, but resonance. Not just output, but impact. Not just ambition, but authenticity.

That's the essence of *personal leadership*: taking ownership of your growth, your fulfillment, and your life—no matter how full your calendar may be.

So, as you plan for the year ahead, ask yourself these three questions:

- Am I achieving what matters most?
- Am I growing in the ways I want to grow?
- Am I living the life I want to live?

Your answers will tell you more about your success in 2026 than any performance review ever could.



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