

Mindset Summary

By Carol Dweck

What if you were offered practical and easy-to-use advice on how to change aspects of your life?

Mindset blends research and relevant anecdotes to illustrate the differences between a fixed and growth mindset. Drawing from contexts such as sport, business, relationships, and education, she explains why we all need to adopt a growth mindset.

Carol Dweck, a world-renowned professor of Psychology at Stanford University, presents a convincing argument that we can change our lives by changing the way we think. By combining differing contexts with practical advice on developing a growth mindset, she provides strategies that can help us become significantly better at any task we tackle. Furthermore, she emphasizes how to encourage and nurture this behavior in children.

Dr. Carol Dweck has a clear focus on growth, which she has developed over many years of psychological research. As a young researcher, her pivotal, “ah-ha moment” happened while observing two children trying to solve increasingly complex puzzles. While engaging in a challenging puzzle, one 10-year-old exclaimed, ‘I love a challenge!’ while the other remarked, ‘You know, I was hoping this would be informative!’ These different reactions intrigued her. Why do some people frame failure as a challenge, and a valuable learning opportunity, while others see their abilities as carved in stone? This central question became the inspiration for her life's work.

Let's briefly explore what characterizes a growth mindset, as opposed to one that's fixed. Dweck uses this to emphasize the positive impact of building a growth mindset. She gives us practical ideas about changing our perspectives and those of the children in our care.

Growth vs. Fixed Mindsets

Dweck's observations from the puzzle-solving exercise contribute to understanding what she describes as a growth mindset. This is a conviction that our innate mental abilities and personal qualities can change and grow, mainly if we apply ourselves and learn from experiences. By reframing failure as something that shouldn't be feared, and viewing mistakes as learning opportunities, challenges can become exciting.

On the other hand, a fixed mindset is the belief that our ability, intellect, and personality traits are immutable. Unchangeable. This means when someone with a fixed mindset fails, this is perceived as weakness, and as a result failure should be avoided at all costs.

Which of the following questions resonate the most with you?

Is your intelligence something fundamental about you that you can't change very much? Are you a certain kind of person, and there's not much that can be done to change that? Do you believe that no matter how much intelligence you have, you can always change? Do you think that you can always change things about your personality?

Mindsets are often context-specific. The first two questions reflect a

fixed mindset. Dweck cautions that we all have fixed mindsets that pop up in certain situations. For example, there are times where all of us are likely to agonize over mistakes and failures, and when we may want to hide our deficiencies. Wanting to prove ourselves and feeling the need for perfection are natural responses, but they can hold us back.

Dweck admits that she had previously held a robust fixed mindset, and that her experiences in her early years of schooling entrenched this. Over time she noticed a shift towards a growth mindset when she could say, in the same breath... 'This is hard! This is fun!'

A growth mindset is when we believe that we can grow our intelligence, and we delight in the process of stretching ourselves. Perceptions of success should focus on what we have learned, and what obstacles we may have had to overcome. Furthermore, when we value the process of learning, regardless of the outcome, then these are positive steps. And it's important to note, that it's not always the people who start out the smartest, who end up becoming the smartest. The fixed mindset of feeling that we have to live up to labels and expectations, can inhibit our perseverance. Hence, for some people, it becomes safer to give up, than to risk potential failure.

The need to feel continuously validated, and feeling like "somebody for a while," is problematic. This is because underlying concerns aren't being addressed. So, while a growth mindset doesn't negate unpleasant feelings and experiences, it does allow individuals to confront setbacks, not as significant obstacles, but as problems to be solved.

In a society that lauds effortless accomplishment, and celebrates innate talent and ability, it can be problematic to encourage a growth mindset. This is because fixed mindsets are so prevalent in so many areas of our

lives, and they're often entrenched in early childhood. The author's research into education and parenting, reveals how mindsets perpetuate in adult life, whether in business, sport, or relationships.

Mindsets in Different Contexts

To explore the impact of different mindsets in various contexts, let's examine a few sporting legends. Individuals such as Muhammad Ali, Michael Jordan, and Tiger Woods, have growth mindsets, which made them push much harder for success. The effort that they were willing to put in, arguably exceeded their initial talent. A growth mindset also makes champions dig deeper when they need to.

Some coaches recognize the importance of personality traits and work ethic, and recruit for growth mindsets, instead of just focusing on talent or physical prowess. A sports coach's job might be geared toward winning, but good coaches analyze and motivate their players, not only for the game but also for life. They build character, which develops out of mindsets.

The downplaying of hard work over natural talent, doesn't only happen in sport, but also in business. There are numerous examples of big and small companies that have been inhibited by fixed mindsets. Enron is a good, or more accurately, bad example of our fixation with talent and hero status, and how destructive this can be. Enron believed in talent, and this message filtered down to staff, who felt the need to appear extraordinarily talented. Keeping them in a fixed mindset made them less likely to admit to deficiencies, and more inclined to cover up than to self-correct.

In another example, Lee Iacocca, CEO of Chrysler Motors, suffered from what's referred to as "CEO disease." So-called CEO disease is the mindset where leaders apply their strengths to achieve fast and visible results, and they don't acknowledge or build on weaknesses. Furthermore, they take massive exception to criticism. This lack of flexibility makes it too risky for colleagues to challenge them, or apply a growth mindset in their own roles in the company.

On the other hand, companies that thrive over the long term, often have self-effacing leaders who ask many questions, absorb tough answers, and work with staff at all levels to find strategies to regroup and thrive. A fixed mindset leader is focused on the self, whereas a growth mindset leader focuses on the "we" and the "us."

In their study of particular Fortune 500 and Fortune 1000 companies, researchers found that when employees perceived their organization as having a growth mindset culture, they felt more empowered and committed to the business. Interestingly, supervisors in these companies saw their staff as having more potential, than their managerial counterparts in fixed-mindset companies. The fact is that all managers can train to develop a growth mindset, to create a "culture of development," as opposed to a "culture of genius."

Maybe it's time to consider whether or not we work in a growth or fixed mindset workplace, and to interrogate which mindset we reflect in our own comments and actions. This self-awareness will make us a lot more open to adapting, and perhaps shifting our mindsets.

On a more personal note, our relationships can also be deeply affected by which mindset we adopt. When hurt in love, growth mindset people do

not succumb to a sense of permanent unworthiness, or hold onto seeking revenge. They feel that they can apply what they have learned, and what they have experienced in new relationships. Furthermore, a fixed mindset can happen on three relationship levels – our innate qualities, our partner's qualities, and the qualities of the relationship – and this is when we believe that nothing will change. As with everything else, relationships are not perfect, and they frequently demand flexibility, open-mindedness, and hard work.

Encouraging Growth Mindsets in Children

Encouraging growth mindsets in children is paramount, and education and parenting are crucial aspects of this development. The belief that underpins a growth mindset, when dealing with children, is that it's parents and educators who should be wholeheartedly committed to this development.

People wrongly assume that emphasizing a growth mindset may mean compromising on high standards. However, changing our approach to children's learning, doesn't mean giving up on excellence. Instead, the idea is to create healthy pathways for learning and education.

So while congratulating excellence by saying, 'You're so brilliant, you got an A without even studying,' is well-intentioned, it can also be harmful. This phrase is redolent of a fixed mindset, and this focus on excellence may harm future motivation and performance. Furthermore, such statements tell us that our ability is innate, while also downplaying the value of hard work. So teachers need to be aware of how children respond to feedback. What's important is that great teachers are the people who are fascinated with the process of learning, as opposed to the outcomes. Furthermore, and importantly, teachers and parents need

to be honest with children, and provide them with realistic and achievable goals. And crucially, children need to be given the tools to reach their goals.

We all know that the human brain is incredibly complex. Learning about brain development and how we learn, is invaluable to students. In this regard, the author has developed an online program for children, called “Brainology.” Often children try to present what they feel their parents would like them to be, and they strive towards this perfect image. This image of the self is likely to come from a fixed mindset. A helpful family activity for practicing a growth mindset could be, at the end of the day, when everyone in the family shares what they learned that day. By detailing what they learned, their mistakes, and what this experience taught them, family members will learn to adapt to a growth mindset.

As a cautionary note, it's possible to adopt a false growth mindset. This is when we praise the effort that's not taking place. Growth mindsets need outcomes, and shouldn't be about empty promises and telling children that they can do anything. Developing a healthy and well-rounded child is about accessing skills and resources and encouraging setbacks. And, rather than admonishing a child with a fixed mindset towards something, we should focus on how to engage with why they feel that way. We also have to be aware that even if we, as parents or teachers, have a growth mindset, we don't necessarily pass this on to children. We have to carefully evaluate how we praise, how we react to our struggles, and how we dive into learning.

In Conclusion

Carol Dweck gives guidance on how to gear a growth mindset towards finding a solution. And, just thinking this way isn't sufficient, which is why

we need concrete steps.

What happens when you're disappointed or don't achieve a particular goal?

Many of us will feel dejected or carry around the feeling of failure. Adopting a growth mindset allows us to engage with the ways to stay on track with our goals, despite any setbacks or failures. So, despite the setbacks that all of us will undoubtedly face, having a growth-directed plan will allow us to overcome challenges more healthily and productively. So we all need to visualize and implement our growth plans to overcome obstacles and challenges.

This isn't a foolproof method, and we need to be cognizant of the fact that our fixed mindset is likely to get triggered at certain times. For example, when confronted by failure or criticism, we need to listen to ourselves and critically evaluate how we're feeling and why we have been triggered. Dweck encourages us to name this persona in our heads. This way, we recognize that this persona will accompany us on our life journey at many times, and we can help him or her to let go a little, relax into the experience, and enjoy the trip more.

Ultimately, a growth mindset is about believing that we can all develop our abilities. And the practicality of Dweck's work helps us understand that we don't get a growth mindset by proclamation. Establishing a growth mindset is a journey. What's more, our fixed mindset persona is likely to accompany us on our travels. So, with this in mind, you may as well get to know them, because they'll be riding shotgun, as we head towards personal growth and wellbeing.