

The 'Fixed Mindset' versus the 'Growth Mindset'

Carol Dweck literature circulated to staff:

In her bestselling book, *Mindset: The Psychology of Success*, Carol Dweck found two mindsets play an important role in all aspects of our lives: **the fixed mindset and the growth mindset**.

People with the fixed mindset believe their basic abilities, their intelligence and their talents, are just fixed traits. They have a certain amount and that's that. Their goal is to look smart all the time and never look dumb. Everything is about the outcome. If they fail – or if they're not the best – it's all been wasted.

But people with the growth mindset aren't discouraged by failure; they don't even think about it. They know they're learning. They don't just seek challenge; they thrive on it. They understand that their talents and abilities can be developed through effort, good teaching and persistence.

Should You Praise Ability or Effort?

Dweck conducted studies with hundreds of students, mostly with adolescents. She first gave each student a set of ten fairly difficult problems from a nonverbal IQ test. They mostly did well on these, and when they finished, Dweck praised them.

Some were praised for their ability. They were told: "Wow, you got [say] eight right. That's a really good score. **You must be smart at this**".

Others were praised for their efforts: "Wow, you got [say] eight right. That's a really good score. **You must have worked really hard**". They were not made to feel that they had some special gift; they were praised for doing what it took to succeed.

Both groups were exactly equal to begin with. But right after the praise, they began to differ.

As Dweck feared, when students were praised for their ability, it pushed them into the fixed mindset. They showed all the signs of it, too. When Dweck gave them a choice, they rejected a challenging new task that they could have learned from. They didn't want to do anything that could expose their flaws and call into question their talent. In contrast, when students were praised for their effort, 90 percent of them wanted the challenging new task that they could learn from. Dweck then gave the students some new problems that were harder.

The **ability** teenagers now thought they were not smart after all. If success had meant they were intelligent, then less-than-success meant they were deficient.

The **effort** teenagers simply thought the difficulty meant, "Apply more effort". They didn't see it as a failure, and they didn't think it reflected on their intellect.

After the experience with difficulty, the performance of the **ability** praise students plummeted – even when Dweck gave them easier problems to solve. They lost faith in their ability and they did worse than when they started. The effort teenagers, on the other hand, showed better and better performance.

The Problem with the 'Fixed Mindset'

When you believe your abilities are carved in stone – because of the fixed mindset – you don't believe human qualities, such as behaviour change, can be cultivated through effort. Suppose you decide to form a running habit. Every morning, when you wake up, you're going to lace up, head out the door, and to begin with, walk to next lamppost. If you've never run before, it's hard. That's why you make it so easy you can't say no. But in the fixed mindset, you don't even start. You believe you'll never get fit. "What's the point?" you rationalise, "This is who I am. I'll only end up quitting like I always do". You haven't even had an opportunity to "fail" and learn from it. You've throw in the towel before you've even tried. Fortunately, everyone can change. You can grow by applying the growth mindset and by doing so, experience opportunities you would have once overlooked.

Here's how you can do it . . .

How to Develop the 'Growth Mindset'

The growth mindset is based on the **belief of change**.

We must **believe** we can change our beliefs. We must believe **we** can change them. And we must believe we can change them **now**. Like Michael Phelps, we can choose how to respond to the events in our lives. Gavin de Becker asks, "What am I choosing not to see right now?"

"I failed my diet. I am a failure" is a misinterpretation of an event. "I failed my diet" is an objective fact; "I am a failure" is a subjective response.

Remember: **What looks like a behavioural problem is often a situational problem**. We simply need a better strategy.

Ask yourself, "What can I learn from this?" and "How can I improve?" If you fall of the diet wagon, instead of concluding you're a failure, ask yourself why you failed. Is there a diet that's perhaps better suited to meet your dietary needs?

"In a growth mindset, challenges are exciting rather than threatening" said Dweck, in an interview with *Harvard Business Review*. "So rather than thinking, oh, I'm going to reveal my weaknesses, you say, wow, here's a chance to grow".

A New Beginning

Remember: change is a process, not as outcome. Applying the growth mindset is a process of constant and never-ending improvement. You anticipate new roadblocks because with them, comes an opportunity to practice and grow. "Even when you change, the old beliefs aren't just removed like a worn-out hip or knee and replaced with better ones", writes Dweck. "Instead, the new beliefs take their place alongside the old ones, and as they become stronger, they give you a different way to think, feel and act".