

“Mindset: The New Psychology of Success”
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What are the consequences of thinking that your intelligence or personality is something you can develop, as opposed to something that is a fixed, deep-seated trait? The major factor in whether people achieve expertise “is not some fixed prior ability, but purposeful engagement.”

This growth mindset is based on the belief that your basic qualities are things you can cultivate through your efforts, your strategies, and help from others. Although people may differ in every which way—in their initial talents and aptitudes, interests, or temperaments—everyone can change and grow through application and experience. It’s startling to see the degree to which people with the fixed mindset do not believe in putting in effort or getting help. What’s also new is that people’s ideas about risk and effort grow out of their more basic mindset.

Suddenly we realized that there were two meanings to ability, not one: a fixed ability that needs to be proven, and a changeable ability that can be developed through learning.

In one world—the world of fixed traits—success is about proving you’re smart or talented. Validating yourself. In the other—the world of changing qualities—it’s about stretching yourself to learn something new; developing yourself. People in a growth mindset don’t just seek challenge they thrive on it. The bigger the challenge, the more they stretch. It was a clever test for mindset. As a former student tells it, “Her students first have to survive a trial period while she watches to see how you react to praise and to correction. Those more responsive to the correction are deemed worthy.”

People with the growth mindset know that it takes time for potential to flower. An assessment at one point in time has little value for understanding someone’s ability, let alone their potential to succeed in the future. The problem is when special begins to mean better than others. However, lurking behind that self-esteem of the fixed mindset is a simple question: If you’re somebody when you’re successful, what are you when you’re unsuccessful? Another way people with the fixed mindset try to repair their self-esteem after a failure is by assigning blame or making excuses. In short, when people believe in fixed traits, they are always in danger of being measured by a failure. Effort isn’t quite everything and that all effort is not created equal. Many growth-minded people didn’t even plan to go to the top. They got there as a result of doing what they love.

People with a growth mindset might also like a Nobel Prize or a lot of money. But they are not seeking it as a validation of their worth or as something that will make them better than others. Having a growth mindset doesn’t force you to pursue something. It just tells you that you can develop your skills. It’s still up to you whether you want to. The growth mindset also doesn’t mean everything that can be changed should be changed. We all need to accept some of our imperfections, especially the ones that don’t really harm our lives or the lives of others. Most often people believe that the “gift” is the ability itself. Yet what feeds it is that constant, endless curiosity and challenge seeking.

Remember, test scores and measures of achievement tell you where a student is, but they don’t tell you where a student could end up. Just because some people can do something with little or no training, it doesn’t mean that others can’t do it (and sometimes do it even better) with training. Can anyone do anything? I don’t really know. However, I think we can now agree that people can do a lot more than first meets the eye. As with the kids in our study, the burden of talent was killing his enjoyment. When you’re given a positive label, you’re afraid of losing it, and when you’re hit with a negative label, you’re afraid of deserving it.

A growth mindset helps people to see prejudice for what it is—someone else’s view of them—and to confront it with their confidence and abilities intact. Remember our study where praising kids’ ability lowered their IQ scores. Find a growth-mindset way to compliment them. You would think the sports world would have to see the relation between practice and improvement—and between the mind and performance—and stop harping so much on innate physical talent. Yet it’s almost as if they refuse to see. Perhaps it’s because, as Malcolm Gladwell suggests, people prize natural endowment over earned ability.

Yet I think by now we’re getting the idea that character grows out of mindset. All of these people had character. None of them thought they were special people, born with the right to win. They were people who worked hard, who learned how to keep their focus under pressure, and who stretched beyond their ordinary abilities when they had to.

Remember, in the fixed mindset, effort is not a cause for pride. It is something that casts doubt on your talent. Character, heart, the mind of a champion. It’s what makes great athletes and it’s what comes from the growth mindset with its focus on self-development, self-motivation, and responsibility.

As Gladwell writes, “This ‘talent mind-set’ is the new orthodoxy of American management.” It created the blueprint for the Enron culture—and sowed the seeds of its demise. We know from our studies that people with the fixed mindset do not admit and correct their deficiencies. Gladwell concludes that when people live in an environment that esteems them for their innate talent, they have grave difficulty when their image is threatened: Obviously, a company that cannot self-correct cannot thrive.

They are constantly trying to improve. They surround themselves with the most able people they can find, they look squarely at their own mistakes and deficiencies, and they ask frankly what skills they and the company will need in the future.

In more than two-thirds of these leaders, the researchers saw a “gargantuan personal ego” that either hastened the demise of the company or kept it second-rate. Many of these comparison companies operated on what Collins calls a “genius with a thousand helpers” model. They operated on the fixed-mindset premise that great geniuses do not need great teams. They just need little helpers to carry out their brilliant ideas. In not one autobiography of a fixed-mindset CEO did I read much about mentoring or employee development programs. The people who preen their egos and look for the next self-image boost are not the same people who foster long-term corporate health.

You’ll see they all start with the belief that some people are superior; they all have the need to prove and display their superiority; they all use their subordinates to feed this need, rather than fostering the development of their workers; But for many, the suspicion that he put his ego before the welfare of the company was confirmed.

But the power that CEOs wield allows them to create a world that caters night and day to their need for validation. It allows them to surround themselves only with the good news of their perfection and the company’s success, no matter what the warning signs may be. This, as you may recall, is CEO disease and a peril of the fixed mindset. There is no chapter about making a business work. In other words, it’s always about Dunlap proving his genius.

In each case, a brilliant man put his company in jeopardy because measuring himself and his legacy outweighed everything else. At critical decision points, they opted for what would make them feel good and look good over what would serve the longer-term corporate goals. Sometimes the victims are people the bosses consider to be less talented. This can feed their sense of superiority. But often the victims are the most competent people, because these are the ones who pose the greatest threat to a fixed-mindset boss.

If you're really concerned about our performance, you don't pick on those who are performing best." But if you're really concerned about your competence, you do. When bosses become controlling and abusive, they put everyone into a fixed mindset. Andrew Carnegie once said, "I wish to have as my epitaph: 'Here lies a man who was wise enough to bring into his service men who knew more than he.' Even when those leaders are globe-trotting and hobnobbing with world figures, their world seems so small and confining—because their minds are always on one thing: Validate me!

Instead of using the company as a vehicle for their greatness, they use it as an engine of growth—for themselves, the employees, and the company as a whole. We see the me me me of the validation-hungry CEO becoming the we and us of the growth-minded leader.

He went on to say that Welch was arrogant, couldn't take criticism, and depended too much on his talent instead of hard work and his knowledgeable staff. It taught him that "there's only a razor's edge between self-confidence and hubris. What he learned was this: True self-confidence is "the courage to be open—to welcome change and new ideas regardless of their source." Real self-confidence is not reflected in a title, an expensive suit, a fancy car, or a series of acquisitions. It is reflected in your mindset: your readiness to grow.

He learned how to select people: for their mindset, not their pedigrees. "Eventually I learned that I was really looking for people who were filled with passion and a desire to get things done. A resume didn't tell me much about that inner hunger."

Then Jack Welch spread the word: This company is about growth, not self-importance. The approved way to foster productivity was now through mentoring, not through terror. As Welch had done, he attacked the elitism. Like Enron, the whole culture was about grappling for personal status within the company.

Let's put together in meetings the people who can help solve a problem, regardless of position." Genius is not enough; we need to get the job done. She was tough but compassionate. That leadership is about growth and passion, not about brilliance. So one group thought that you have it or you don't; the other thought your skills could grow with experience.

Groupthink can happen when the group gets carried away with its brilliance and superiority. Groupthink can also happen when a fixed-mindset leader punishes dissent. David Packard, on the other hand, gave an employee a medal for defying him. Later, at a meeting of Hewlett-Packard engineers, Packard gave the young man a medal "for extraordinary contempt and defiance beyond the normal call of engineering duty."

Leaders, to bolster their ego, suppress dissent. Or workers, seeking validation from leaders, fall into line behind them. We now have a workforce full of people who need constant reassurance and can't take criticism. Instead of just giving employees an award for the smartest idea or praise for

A brilliant performance, they would get praise for taking initiative, for seeing a difficult task through, for struggling and learning something new, for being undaunted by a setback, or for being open to and acting on criticism. Our best bet is not simply to hire the most talented managers we can find and turn them loose, but to look for managers who also embody a growth mindset: A zest for teaching and learning, an openness to giving and receiving feedback, and an ability to confront and surmount obstacles. Many organizations believe in natural talent and don't look for people with the potential to develop.

The lesson is: Create an organization that prizes the development of ability—and watch the leaders emerge. We called this a "culture of genius." We call this a "culture of development." Create ways to foster alternative views and constructive criticism. Remember, people can be independent thinkers and team players at the same time. Help them fill both roles.

Here was an event that could have defined and diminished her. Instead it was one that enlarged her. It doesn't mean there is no "they lived happily ever after," but it's more like "they worked happily ever after." Daniel Wile says that choosing a partner is choosing a set of problems. It was a problem of communication, not a problem of personality or character.

Aaron Beck tells couples in counseling never to think these fixed-mindset thoughts: My partner is incapable of change. Nothing can improve our relationship. These ideas, he says, are almost always wrong. When you need validation, you use people for it. Wouldn't harping on intelligence or talent make kids—all kids—even more obsessed with it? Praising children's intelligence harms their motivation and it harms their performance. If success means they're smart, then failure means they're dumb. That's the fixed mindset.

Parents think they can hand children permanent confidence—like a gift—by praising their brains and talent. It doesn't work, and in fact has the opposite effect. It makes children doubt themselves as soon as anything is hard or anything goes wrong.

We should keep away from a certain kind of praise—praise that judges their intelligence or talent. Or praise that implies that we're proud of them for their intelligence or talent rather than for the work they put in. "Praise should deal, not with the child's personality attributes, but with his efforts and achievements." Reassuring children about their intelligence or talent backfires. They'll only be more afraid to show a deficiency. Withholding constructive criticism does not help children's confidence; it harms their future.

When parents give their children a fixed-mindset ideal, they are asking them to fit the mold of the brilliant, talented child, or be deemed unworthy. He motivated his players, not through respect for them, but through intimidation—through fear. They feared his judgments and explosions. Did it work? Parents' praise molds their children's mindsets.

Even parents who hold a growth mindset can find themselves praising their child's ability—and neglecting to focus on their child's learning process. It's the parents who respond to their children's setbacks with interest and treat them as opportunities for learning who are transmitting a growth mindset to their children.

Third, passing on a growth mindset is about whether teachers are teaching for understanding or are simply asking students to memorize facts, rules, and procedures. It does not confront the basic assumption—the idea that traits are fixed—that is causing them to constantly measure themselves.

But opening yourself up to growth makes you more yourself, not less. Every day people plan to do difficult things, but they don't do them. Think of something you need to do, something you want to learn, or a problem you have to confront. What is it? Now make a concrete plan. When will you follow through on your plan? Where will you do it? How will you do it? Think about it in vivid detail.

These concrete plans—plans you can visualize—about when, where, and how you are going to do something lead to really high levels of follow-through, which, of course, ups the chances of success. The critical thing is to make a concrete, growth-oriented plan, and to stick to it. Change can be tough, but I've never heard anyone say it wasn't worth it.