

# Fixed Mindset

## Intelligence is static



People who hold these beliefs think that “they are the way they are”, but that doesn’t mean that they have less of a desire for a positive self-image than anyone else. So of course they want to perform well and look smart.

Leads to a desire to look smart  
and therefore a tendency to...

### CHALLENGES

...avoid challenges

By definition, a challenge is hard and success is not assured, so rather than risk failing and negatively impacting their self-image, they will often avoid challenges and stick to what they know they can do well.

### OBSTACLES

...give up easily

Same with obstacles. The difference here, as I see it, is that challenges are things that you can decide to do while obstacles are external forces that get in your way.

### EFFORT

...see effort as fruitless or worse

What’s the point of working hard and making efforts if afterwards you are still on square one? If your worldview tells you that effort is an unpleasant thing that doesn’t really pay dividends, then the smart thing to do is to avoid it as much as possible.

### CRITICISM

...ignore useful negative feedback

Useful negative feedback is ignored in the best of cases, and taken as an insult the rest of the time. The Fixed Mindset logically leads you to believe that any criticism of your capabilities is criticism of you. This usually discourages the people around and after a while they stop giving any negative feedback, further isolating the person from external influences that could generate some change.

### SUCCESS OF OTHERS

...feel threatened by the success of others

The success of others is seen as a benchmark against which the person looks bad. Usually when others succeed, people with a Fixed Mindset will try to convince themselves and the people around them that the success was due to either luck (after all, almost everything is due to luck in the Fixed Mindset world) or objectionable actions. In some cases, they will even try to tarnish the success of others by bringing up things that are completely unrelated (“Yes, but did you know about his...”).

As a result, they may plateau early  
and achieve less than their full potential.

All this confirms a deterministic view of the world.

As a result, they don’t reach their full potential and their beliefs feed on themselves: They don’t change or improve much with time, if at all, and so to them this confirms that “they are as they are”.



# Growth Mindset

## Intelligence can be developed

Leads to a desire to learn  
and therefore a tendency to...

People who hold the Growth Mindset believe that intelligence can be developed, that the brain is like a muscle that can be trained. This leads to the desire to improve.



...embrace challenges

And how do you improve? First, you embrace challenges, because you know that you'll come out stronger on the other side.



...persist in the face of setbacks

Similarly, obstacles - external setbacks - do not discourage you. Your self-image is not tied to your success and how you will look to others; failure is an opportunity to learn, and so whatever happens you win.



...see effort as the path to mastery

Effort is seen not as something useless to be avoided but as necessary to grow and master useful skills.



...learn from criticism

Criticism and negative feedback are sources of information. That doesn't mean that all criticism is worth integrating or that nothing is never taken personally, but at least the Growth Mindset individual knows that he or she can change and improve, so the negative feedback is not perceived as being directly about them as a person, but rather about their current abilities.



...find lessons and inspiration in the success of others

The success of others is seen as a source of inspiration and information. To Growth Mindset individuals, success is not seen as a zero-sum game.

As a result, they reach ever-higher levels of achievement.

All this gives them a greater sense of free will

And so, Growth Mindset individuals will improve and this will create a positive feedback loop that encourages them to keep learning and improving. Of course, most people do not have a 100% Fixed mindset or a 100% Growth mindset; most of us have some of both.

The good news is that it is possible to change your worldview from a fixed mindset to a growth mindset. And Carol Dweck's research indicates that both children and adults can be taught to change their mindset!

## Grow Your Mindset

From Carol Dweck's book, *MindSet: The New Psychology of Success*, pages 205 – 206

Every word and action from parent to child sends a message. Tomorrow, listen to what you say to your kids and tune in to the messages you're sending. Are they messages that say: You have permanent traits and I'm judging them? Or are they messages that say you're a developing person and I'm interested in your development?

How do you use praise? Remember that praising children's intelligence or talent, tempting as it is, sends a fixed-mindset message. It makes their confidence and motivation more fragile. Instead, try to focus on the processes they used—their strategies, effort, or choices. Practice working the process praise into your interactions with your children.

Watch and listen to yourself carefully when your child messes up. Remember that constructive criticism is feedback that helps the child understand how to FIX something. It's not feedback that labels or simply excuses the child. At the end of each day, write down the constructive criticism (and the process praise) you've given your kids.

Parents often set goals their children can work toward. Remember that having innate talent is not a goal. Expanding skills and knowledge is. Pay careful attention to the goals you set for your children.

If you're a teacher, remember that lowering standards doesn't raise students' self-esteem. But neither does raising standards without giving students ways of reaching them. The growth mindset gives you a way to set high standards and have students reach them. Try presenting topics in a growth framework and giving students process feedback. I think you'll like what happens.

Do you think of your slower students as kids who will never be able to learn well? Do they think of themselves as permanently dumb? Instead, try to figure out what they don't understand and what learning strategies they don't have. Remember that great teachers believe in the growth of talent and intellect, and are fascinated by the process of learning.

Are you a fixed-mindset coach? Do you think first and foremost about your record and your reputation? Are you intolerant of mistakes? Do you try to motivate your players through judgment? That may be what's holding up your athletes.

Try on the growth mindset. Instead of asking for mistake-free games, ask for full commitment and full effort. Instead of judging the players, give them the respect and the coaching they need to develop.

As parents, teachers, and coaches, our mission is developing people's potential. Let's use all the lessons of the growth mindset—and whatever else we can—to do this.

## Words That Encourage:

1. Wow! ☺
2. Look at that!
3. Tell me about it.
4. Show me more.
5. How did you do that?
6. Let's see what you did.
7. How do you feel about it?
8. How did you figure that out?
9. I see that you \_\_\_\_\_.  
(be specific)
10. That looks like it took a lot of effort.
11. How many ways did you try it before it turned out the way you wanted it?
12. What do you plan to do next?
13. That looks like it took so much work.
14. Are you pleased with what you did?

## Labels that Judge:

- Smart
- Cute
- Great
- Fast
- Best
- Pretty
- Good
- Quick
- Clever
- Beautiful
- Lovely
- Intelligent
- Right
- Amazing
- The best
- Better than \_\_\_\_\_.  
(another person)

## Grow Your Mind-Set

- "What did you struggle with today?"
- "This is hard, this is fun, what should we do next?"
- "You can grow your intelligence"
- "You can learn. You can stretch. You can keep mastering new things."
- "I don't think there's anything better in the world than a child hearing from a parent or teacher the words, 'You'll get there'."
- "Do you label your kids? This one is the artist and that one is the scientist. Next time, remember that you're not helping them -even though you may be praising them. Remember... praising kids' ability lowered their IQ scores."

# Packet Credits

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## **The Mindset Graphic**

The color graphic of the Fixed and Growth Mindsets was created by graphic artist Nigel Holmes ([www.nigelholmes.com](http://www.nigelholmes.com)) for an article in the March/April 2007 issue of Stanford Magazine ([www.stanfordalumni.org/news/magazine/2007/marapr/features/dweck.html](http://www.stanfordalumni.org/news/magazine/2007/marapr/features/dweck.html)). The added text is written by Michael Graham Richard ([www.michaelgr.com](http://www.michaelgr.com)).

## **The Book**

*Mindset: The New Psychology of Success*

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