

Mindset: The New Psychology of Success

By Carol Dweck, PhD

The purpose of this book summary is to provide a quickly digestible synopsis of key points and suggestions made in the book, not an editorial review. **Mindset: The New Psychology of Success** focuses on the benefits of a growth mindset in areas like academics, sports, and relationships, and explores how a fixed mindset can be a detriment to one's goals, self-esteem, and success.

The Mindsets

Exceptional individuals have “a special talent for identifying their own strengths and weaknesses.”

– Howard Gardner

The mindset you adopt for yourself profoundly affects the way you live your life.

- Fixed mindset – Belief that your qualities are set in stone. Creates an urgency to repeatedly prove and validate yourself and your abilities (like intelligence, morality, or talents). Failure is having a setback. Belief that if you are smart and talented, you don't need effort!
- Growth mindset – Belief that your basic qualities can be cultivated through your efforts. Involves developing and stretching yourself and sticking to your goals even when you are not doing well. Failure is not fulfilling your potential. Belief that effort is what makes you smart and talented.
- Those with the growth mindset are better at estimating their true abilities and capabilities than those with the fixed mindset. Those with the growth mindset need accurate information about their abilities to learn effectively.

You can change your mindset!

Just a few reasons to cultivate a growth mindset:

1. Learning in one's formative years – Carol Dweck's research indicates that mindset affects children as young as four years old, determining whether they continue to challenge themselves or remain complacent with easily-achievable goals.
2. Academic tenacity – When faced with academic failure, fixed-mindset students are more likely to give up entirely, while growth-mindset students are more likely to study harder in the future. This behavior has been observed among all students of all ages.
3. Success in business and management – a five-year study by Jim Collins suggests that the stock returns of companies run by growth-mindset leaders were more likely to rise than those of rival companies (and continue to maintain this difference over a long period of time).
4. Interpersonal relationships – A study by Jennifer Beer found that while people of both mindsets can initially appear shy, those with the growth mindset are more likely to “open up,” increasing their social skills and strengthening personal relationships.

Inside the Mindsets

“I don’t divide the world into the weak and the strong, or the successes and the failures... I divide the world into the learners and non-learners.” – Benjamin Barber

Fixed Mindset	Growth Mindset
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Seek validation• Thrive on easily-achieved goals• Rely on natural ability• Failure is seen as permanent and can result in giving up• Tell themselves: “I’m a failure”• College students with fixed mindset were more likely to be depressed and to ruminate over their failures and thoughts of incompetence• Believe they are superior, self-esteem built by putting others down	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Seek a challenge• Thrive when forced to stretch themselves• Strive to improve natural ability• Failure is seen as an opportunity to grow and improve performance• Tell themselves: “I failed”• College students with growth mindset were still likely to experience depression, but the more depressed they felt, the more action they took to resolve problems• Believe in their ability to improve through hard work, build self-esteem through personal achievement

Ability and effort are not either/or characteristics – you can have both! In fact, one person can have both mindsets for different areas of their lives. Your mindset for each area will guide your behavior related to that area.

- Putting forth **effort** can be scary for those with the fixed mindset. For them, effort must mean that they lack ability. Putting forth effort eliminates all possible excuses for failure, so a lack of effort protects their self-esteem.
- **Confidence isn’t always necessary for success.** Those with a growth mindset may take on tasks because they are not good at them. They do so because they enjoy the tasks and want to improve their abilities.

The Truth About Ability and Accomplishment

“You mean I don’t have to be dumb?” – “Jimmy,” a participant in one of Carol Dweck’s groups

Your ability to draw, sing, or study is not fixed – skills can always be improved!

School Achievement

- In one study, when fixed- and growth-mindset students transitioned to middle school, those with fixed mindsets performed worse academically throughout the next two years. They blamed their “lack of natural ability” or shifted the blame to others for their lack of success. Those with a growth mindset earned better grades. They responded to the challenges of middle school by trying harder.
- Low-effort syndrome - Students with the fixed mindset may stop trying in order to protect their egos. Without effort, they can’t be blamed for their failures.

- Study styles of college students with fixed and growth mindsets differ. Students with fixed mindset read, reread, and memorize. Those with the growth mindset look for themes and principles. They continued to be motivated even when the work was dry or difficult.

Ability Levels and Tracking

- When it comes to art, some people believe that they will never draw well. But “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.”
 - Different types of praise can influence one’s overall mindset. In one study, students were praised for either their natural ability or for their effort. Those praised for natural ability quickly adopted the fixed mindset and refused to take on more challenging tasks. Those who were praised for their effort were eager to continue challenging themselves.
 - Drawing attention to stereotypes (“negative labels”) can worsen the performance of those with a fixed mindset. When asked to provide their gender or race, members of minority groups with a fixed mindset tested worse in math or sciences than those with a growth mindset. Because they believed that their traits were fixed, they were more likely to let labels “get to them.” Those with a growth mindset viewed stereotypes as irrelevant—it’s the effort that matters!
-

Sports: The Mindset of a Champion

Your mindset applies not only to academics, but also to physical activities.

- An athlete’s definition of success varies with their mindset:
 - The fixed mindset equates success with superiority, rather than persistence and perseverance. Winning with one’s “natural talent” is most important.
 - The growth mindset finds success in refining one’s skills. Even “at the top,” there is always room for improvement. Improving is most important.
- In boxing, a “natural boxer” possesses certain physical traits, such as a certain weight, reach, or chest expansion. Boxer Muhammad Ali failed to meet such measurements, but his growth mindset, focusing on unpredictability and quick thinking, allowed him to succeed. An athlete who is a “natural fit” may shun hard work and expect their natural talents to carry them.
- Soccer player Mia Hamm says that a learned “mental toughness” is the most important thing a soccer player can have. Learning how to focus in stressful situations helped Hamm succeed.
- Somebody-nobody Syndrome: the belief that personal success is binary. “If I win, I’ll be somebody; if I lose, I’ll be nobody.”
 - The fixed mindset accepts a single defeat as personal failure. Iciss Tillis, daughter of boxer James “Quick” Tillis, showed this: “This is the year to win a national championship. I just feel like I’d be such a failure...I’m going to end up like my dad: a nobody.”

Business: Mindset and Leadership

“After all, what better testament to your own personal greatness than that the place falls apart after you leave?” – Jim Collins, Good to Great

The success or failure of a company is heavily influenced by the mindsets of its leaders and the relationships of its workers.

- In Jim Collins’s Good To Great, research shows that successful companies (based on stock returns) are differentiated from competitors by their leadership.
 - In thriving companies, leaders were self-effacing, willing to admit mistakes or change tactics, and guided by facts and information that benefited the whole company.
 - Companies that faltered often used a “genius with a thousand helpers” model: leaders relied on ego and “personal greatness” to such a degree that some CEOs intentionally tried to set a company up to fail once they were no longer in charge. Instead of emphasizing the company as a whole, they emphasized their own superiority.
 - Mindsets of leaders are instrumental in a company’s success.
 - Lee Iococca, as CEO of Chrysler, was more interested in building his public image and Chrysler’s reputation than keeping the company competitive. His choices were guided by his desire to prove himself as superior, and his fixed mindset caused him to blame others when Chrysler faltered.
 - Jack Welch, using a growth mindset, brought tremendous success to GE after taking it over in 1980. He visited the company’s factories, spoke with workers, and tried to learn from others whenever he could. He explains that his accomplishments have always involved other people, not because of his own superiority to the rest of the company’s employees. He openly asked for feedback from employees, asking what they liked or disliked about GE, and what they thought could be improved.
 - In a study, thirty groups of three managed a simulated company, matching workers to jobs and motivating them. The growth mindset groups, expressing opinions openly and learning from feedback, outperformed the fixed mindset groups over a longer period. Fixed mindset groups did not engage in much productive discussion and feedback, and generally believed that “people have a certain fixed amount of management ability and cannot do much to change it.”
 - The growth mindset can lead to success in other areas of business, like negotiation and employee training. The fixed mindset considers these skills to be unchangeable.
-

Relationships: Mindsets in Love (Or Not)

A growth mindset permits relationships of all types to grow, change, and improve over time.

- Mindset helps determine our views of romantic relationships that have ended.
 - After a “terrible rejection,” those with a fixed mindset feel as if they have been judged to be “unlovable.” To prove their superiority, revenge on the other person becomes their driving force. “Not a day goes by when I don’t think about how to make her pay.”
 - Those with a growth mindset focus on forgiveness and understanding while moving on. They view unsuccessful relationships as a chance to improve themselves—for example, communication skills or learning more about what kind of person was right for them.

- Those with a fixed mindset believe that both partners' qualities and the relationship's qualities are fixed, preventing adaptation in the future. Those with this mindset believe that "if you have to work at it, it wasn't meant to be." They believe that when problems arise in relationships, they are due to underlying character flaws and imperfections. Blaming the other person can help maintain the illusion of one's superiority.
 - One's response to bullying (another type of rejection) is influenced by one's mindset.
 - Victims with a fixed mindset take bullying personally, believing they themselves are misfits or outcasts, and revenge becomes very important to them.
 - Those with a growth mindset tend to view the bully as the problematic individual, and are more likely to confront the bully and eventually forgive them.
-

Parents, Teacher, and Coaches: Where Do Mindsets Come From?

"Praise should deal, not with the child's personality attributes, but with his efforts and achievements."
 – Haim Ginott

Children internalize the messages we give them through praise. The type of praise can lead them towards a fixed or a growth mindset.

- Praising one's talent or intelligence ("you're so good at math!") sets them up to adopt a fixed mindset. They may view parents and teachers as constantly trying to measure their traits.
 - If a fixed-mindset child does poorly on an assignment, he may believe that his parents will think that he is not smart. If he disobeys his parents and upsets them, he may believe that his parents are unhappy because he is a bad child.
- Instead, parents should praise how children achieve their goals: "I like the way you tried all kinds of strategies," or "I really admire your concentration on this work." Highlighting efforts and improvements over time can cultivate a growth mindset, even when a child has not succeeded.
- Students' mindsets shape their definitions of success.
 - Those with a fixed mindset believe that success cannot be attained by working towards it (only by "natural talent/ability"), so the only successful student is one who already "has it." For example, "I'll never be good at math."
 - Those with a growth mindset believe that a successful student always works towards their goals and tries to expand their knowledge. This mindset "does not see grades as an end in themselves but as a means to continue to grow."

Changing Mindsets

One's mindset is the framework through which we interpret the world around us.

By interpreting our surroundings without self-judgments of our own superiority or inferiority, we can use every opportunity to learn how to improve ourselves.

- A fixed mindset can create negative thoughts and beliefs, like “This will never work. I’ll never improve.” Psychiatrist Aaron Beck found that negative or judgmental thoughts in his patients could be changed, even when such beliefs were nearly subconscious, by teaching patients to be aware of these beliefs and to refute negative or unhelpful thoughts.
- Rather than concluding, “I’m incompetent,” “I’m unintelligent,” or “I’m not talented,” cognitive therapy asks patients to ignore these negative thoughts and instead rationally analyze a situation. This allows us to make more realistic and optimistic judgments about ourselves.
- You can **consciously plan out a growth-mindset approach to conflicts**.
 - If a fixed-mindset student applies to a college but is rejected, he may conclude that he is not smart enough or that the school is so competitive that his rejection cannot possibly reflect his true talent.
 - If a growth-mindset student is rejected, she may contact the school and ask how she can improve her application for next year. She knows that by learning more about why this rejection occurred, she can continue to grow and increase the chance of being accepted in the future.
- **Our mindset determines how we approach dilemmas and what we learn from them.** Those with growth mindset:
 - Use obstacles as opportunities to learn and be more successful in the future.
 - Make concrete plans to ensure that obstacles are learning opportunities.

“When people change to a growth mindset, they change from a judge-or-be-judged framework to a learn-and-help-learn framework.”