

mindset

BOOK DIGEST

Introduction

Carol Dweck's work is part of a tradition in psychology which shows the **power of beliefs**. Whether we're aware of them or not, **our beliefs shape what we want and our ability to succeed in getting it**. Changing them can therefore have profound effects. And one simple belief has been shown to guide a large part of our life! And to permeate every part of it.

The mindsets

The author's work took birth in her obsession to understand how people cope with failures—and how some people seem to **know how to turn failures into a gift**. She believed at that point that human abilities were carved in stone: you were smart or you were not! And **failure meant you were not**. This book explores the consequences of thinking that your intelligence or personality is something fixed and deep-seated or something you can develop.

Interestingly, she teaches us that Binet did not develop the IQ test to grade people's intelligence but to identify children who were not benefiting from Paris Public schools, in order to better design new educational programs. Here's a quote from him:

“With practice, training and above all, method, we manage to increase our attention, our memory, our judgment and literally to become more intelligent than we were before”.

Most experts now agree that **it's neither Nature nor nurture but a constant give and take between our genes and our environment**. We're also discovering that people have more capacity for brain development or lifelong training than was believed before. Experience, training and personal effort are just as impactful as the temperaments and aptitudes we were born with.

The two mindsets

The fixed mindset: believing our abilities are carved in stone, which creates an urgency to prove ourselves over and over.

In this mindset every situation calls for a confirmation of our intelligence, personality or character. Every situation is evaluated... and the stakes are really high. They define us for life.

The growth mindset: believing that our basic qualities are things we can cultivate through our efforts, our strategies and help from others.

In this mindset we realize that a person's true potential is unknown and that it's impossible to foresee what years of passion, toil and training will allow someone to accomplish. This mindset allows us to thrive during the most challenging times of our lives.

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The two mindsets

People with the growth mindset will get upset just as often as people with a fixed mindset, but they won't let events define them. Instead of creating feeling of utter failure and therefore paralysis after a setback, people with a growth mindset see them as opportunities for growth which allow them to take risks, confront challenges and keep working at them.

People in a fixed mindset do not believe in putting in effort or getting help, and this mindset also shapes our ideas about risks and efforts. It's just too dangerous! So it's not worth it. But the good news is that when we switch mindsets, those ideas change too!

Interestingly, people with a growth mindset are far better at evaluating their own abilities and it makes sense:

"If you're oriented toward learning (...), you need accurate information about your current abilities in order to learn effectively. However if everything is either good news or bad news about your previous traits—as it is with fixed mindset people—distortion almost inevitably enters the picture."

A growth mindset allows us to convert life's setbacks into future successes. It fuels resilience and perseverance. It changes what we strive for, how we define success and failures. It even changes the meaning of effort.

"Not only weren't they discouraged by failure, they didn't even think they were failing.

They thought they were learning."

"The passion for stretching yourself and sticking to it,

even (or especially) when it's not going well,

is the hallmark of the growth mindset."

"The message is: YOU CAN change your mindset."

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Inside the mindsets

Carol Dweck remembers when she dreamt of marrying Prince Charming. She was then [looking for validation of who SHE was](#). Her work then led us to realize that there are two meanings to the word ability: a fixed ability or a changeable one. The first one must be proven, the second can be developed through learning. This is when she realized that [she had a choice](#).

We indeed choose the world we live in by choosing which mindset we want to build our life on:

In the [growth mindset](#) world, failure means [failure to grow](#). It means that you're not fulfilling your potential nor reaching for what you value. In the [fixed mindset](#) world, [effort is seen as a bad thing](#) and proof of who you're not. It should be easy... It would be easy for someone smart or talented which we then clearly can't be. The good news, it bears repeating, is that [we can choose what we believe in!](#)

Mindsets are just that, beliefs. And we can change our mind.

[Is success about learning or proving you're smart?](#)

The author reminds us that [everyone is born with an intense drive to learn](#). So what can make us lose it? Yes, our mindset. Children with a fixed mindset can't afford to fail, it would mean too much about them... so they make sure they succeed by staying knee deep in their comfort zone. Children with the growth mindset, success is about stretching ourselves! [It's about becoming](#) (more talented, smarter, better...), [not BEING](#). The fixed mindset turns us into non learners because the priority is to avoid exposing our deficiencies at all costs. On the opposite end, when we live in a growth mindset, our priority is to learn.

Our [mindset](#) therefore [impacts](#) also [whom we mate with](#). If I have a fixed mindset, I need someone to validate me, to make me feel perfect and worshiped. If I have a growth mindset, I want someone who challenges me to be better, who supports me to overcome my shortcomings and build on my strength, who encourages me to grow and learn.

The growth mindset doesn't only allow us to accept challenges, it leads us to seek them out and thrive on it. The author quotes Olympian Patricia Miranda who said:

"when you're lying on your deathbed, one of the cool things to say is 'I really explored myself'".

With a fixed mindset, we only feel safe when things are within our grasp... We lose interest when things get too challenging or when we're not feeling smart or talented. With a growth mindset, our challenges and interest grow from each other.

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Inside the mindsets

Is success about learning or proving you're smart?

The curse of the fixed mindset is that succeeding is not enough. Looking talented or smart is only part of it. You have to be pretty much **flawless**: always and right away. You have to be perfect from the get go or it's unacceptable. Shifting to a growth mindset allows us to see that immediate perfection is not what matters, the goal is to confront a challenge and make progress regularly.

With a fixed mindset we can't allow for learning. You either have the ability or you don't. You're great! Or not. As Carol Dweck puts it, people with a fixed mindset "**don't know how to do this-yet. THEY FORGET THE yet**". The luxury of becoming is not allowed: you have to be before you even start. Which also means that a test score is forever. THAT's why it's so crucial to be perfect now. There's no coming back.

However, it's forgetting that potential is not someone's ability but their capacity to develop their skills over time... and who knows where effort, time and guidance can take someone?

"Many of the most accomplished people of our era were considered experts to have no future. Jackson Pollock. Marcel Proust. Elvis Presley. Ray Charles. Lucille Ball. and Charles Darwin were all thought to have little potential for their chosen fields."

"The idea that one evaluation can measure you forever is what creates the urgency for those with the fixed mindset.

That's why they must succeed perfectly and immediately.

Who can afford the luxury of trying to grow when everything is on the line right now?"

"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?"

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Mindset changes the meaning of failure

Of course failure can be painful also for people with a growth mindset. The difference is that we then don't let failure define us. We only see failure as an opportunity to learn from once faced. We can then use our failures to grow.

Stuck in a fixed mindset, we tend to try to repair our self-esteem instead of repairing our failures and let alone learn from them. We can get tricked into focusing on people who are even worse off than we are instead of looking up to those who can guide us towards growth. We might even start blaming others or circumstances for our setbacks. Which is why Carol Dweck quotes basketball coach, John Wooden, saying that:

“you aren't a failure until you start to blame”

Because as she then reminds us:

“you can still be in the process of learning from your mistakes until you deny them”.

Our mindset even affects our response to a depressive state. The fixed mindset will make us susceptible to fall into a vicious cycle... The growth mindset tends to motivate us to become even more determined to find a way out of our current rut. We then cope with determination. Interestingly, teaching people the growth mindset also changed the way they reacted to a depressed mood.

Fixed mindset curse:

“When people believe in fixed traits, they are always in danger of being measured by a failure. It can define them in a permanent way. Smart or talented as they may be, this mindset seems to rob them of their coping resources.”

Growth mindset blessing:

“When people believe their basic qualities can be developed, failures may still hurt, but failures don't define them. And if abilities can be expanded—if change and growth are possible—then there are still many paths to success.”