

mindset

BOOK DIGEST

INSIDE THE MINDSETS

Mindsets change the meaning of effort

Carol Dweck walks us through the fable of the tortoise and the hare with an interesting new perspective... Most of us don't end up aspiring to be seen as the tortoise; we want to become a less foolish version of the hare! It doesn't have to be an either-or. **We can be gifted AND prone to effort.**

The fixed mindset tricks us into believing that effort is for those who don't have the ability, and that's just not true. She builds on Malcolm Gladwell's insight that we, as a society, tend to value natural, effortless accomplishment over achievement through effort. We want to believe that our heroes were ready-made superhumans from the day they were born. **The growth mindset allows us to acknowledge that accomplishments come from hard work, even for geniuses.** It will even lead us to question if there's anything heroic in the first place about having a gift? With a growth mindset, people ADMIRE effort: *"...for no matter what your ability is, effort is what ignites that ability and turns it into accomplishment."*

"From the point of view of the fixed mindset, effort is only for people with deficiencies.

And when people already know they're deficient, maybe they have nothing to lose by trying.

But if your claim to fame is not having any deficiencies—if you're considered a genius, a talent, or a natural—then you have a lot to lose. Effort can REDUCE you."

"The idea of trying and still failing—of leaving yourself without excuses—is the worst fear within the fixed mindset."

=> And there are two reasons why effort feels so terrifying through that lens: You're not supposed to need it! So needing it is already an indication that there's something wrong... AND you're left without any excuses if you fail... No "I could have been" to hide behind: You tried. You were not.

And yet isn't it far more heartbreaking to actually be left with a "I could have been... but I did not try"?
Folks with a growth mindset sure think so:

*" in the growth mindset, it's almost inconceivable to want something badly,
to think you have a chance to achieve it,
and then do nothing about it".*

*"Billie Jean King says it's all about what you want to look back and say (...)
You can look back and say, "I could have been...", polishing your unused endowments like trophies.
Or "I gave my all for the things I valued".
Think about what you want to look back and say. Then CHOOSE YOUR MINDSET".*

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THE TRUTH ABOUT ABILITY AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Some people achieve more than expected. Some people achieve a whole lot less.
WHY IS THAT?

Mindset and school achievement

The author introduces us to Charles Danzig. Once late to his class at Berkeley where he was a math graduate student, he copied two homework problems from the blackboard. They turned out to be quite complicated and took him several days to solve! That's when he learned that they were not assignments... They were examples of two famous math problems no one had ever been able to solve before.

THAT's the impact our mindset can have on our actions.

If you're raised with a fixed mindset, adolescence will be even trickier to navigate:

So. Much. Change. So much risk of being exposed as "defective"! The best policy for most of us is to stop trying in order to protect our egos from any exposure to failure. As she explains:
"This low-effort syndrome is often seen as a way that adolescents assert their independence from adults, but it is also a way that students with the fixed mindset protect themselves".

When you've inherited a growth mindset, adolescence can be a time of opportunity like no other in our lives:

A time to learn about the world and ourselves; a time to decide who to BECOME.

College is another very triggering time if you're operating with a fixed mindset:

"Nowhere is the anxiety of being dethroned more palpable than in pre-med classes".

Mindset also greatly impacts the way we relate to **MOTIVATION:**

- With a fixed mindset, a boring textbook and an uninspiring teacher on a tough subject can be enough to break us.
- With a growth mindset, the harder it gets in regards to "outside circumstances", the more important it becomes to motivate OURSELVES.

*"Because they think in terms of learning,
people with the growth mindset are clued in to all the different ways to create learning".*

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When curiosity is your guide and challenges your quest, it's much easier to move forward. That's when your inborn abilities can flourish and spur from your interests.

The ability itself is not what allows us to shine, because the ability has to be used and shared to have an impact.

We are not all created equal, we're all different. But we can all use our gifts or hide them from the world. This is why mindset matters.

And not only for the students...

"With the right mindset and the right teaching, people are capable of a lot more than we think".

Carol Dweck highlights how crucial it is to also have a growth mindset as a teacher to be able to guide our students on their specific paths. To meet them where they are instead of expecting them to meet us where we think they should be.

Children need to believe that they can learn and we need to believe that they can too. She quotes an eminent educational researcher called Benjamin Bloom:

"After forty years of research on school learning (...) my major conclusion is: What any person in the world can learn, almost all persons can learn, IF provided with the appropriate prior and current conditions of learning."

"The fixed mindset limits achievement.

*It fills people's minds with interfering thoughts, it makes effort disagreeable,
and it leads to inferior learning strategies.*

What's more, it makes other people into judges instead of allies.

Whether we're talking about Darwin or college students, important achievements require a clear focus, all-out effort, and a bottomless trunk full of strategies. Plus ALLIES in learning.

This is what the growth mindset gives people, and that's why it helps their abilities grow and bear fruit."

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THE TRUTH ABOUT ABILITY AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Is artistic ability a gift?

A lot of people believe that artistic abilities are a God-given gift. However, even though it may be true that some bodies can sing, run, draw or compose music naturally in an awe inspiring way, it doesn't mean that those abilities are fixed and cannot be developed by those to whom they didn't come as effortlessly.

As Carol Dweck reminds us:

“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.”

The fixed mindset leads us to believe that early performances can tell us everything about someone's talent and future. [The growth mindset has allowed countless people to prove this belief wrong.](#)

The danger of praise and positive labels

So if we all have such potential to achieve, how can we gain the confidence we need to harness it?

And are praises helpful or dangerous?

They can be both! [Depending on what we choose to praise](#) in people: their [EFFORTS](#) or their [ABILITIES](#).

As it turns out, Dr. Dweck's research allowed us to witness that it can be detrimental to make someone feel they they have some kind of special gift! However it is very empowering to be praised for doing what it takes to succeed. [Ability praises push us into the fixed mindset.](#) We're back to wanting to protect ourselves from exposing any flaw which could make others reevaluate WHO we are. But [when we're praised for our efforts, the growth mindset takes over](#) and pushes us to seek challenges. We're seen for WHAT we're doing.

- The fixed mindset tells us that success means we're intelligent. It's easy to then deduce that less-than-success will mean we're deficient. And adding insult to injury, it takes the fun out of everything too.
- The growth mindset allows us to better and better our performances; by allowing ourselves to fail, we can practice, and practice allows us to sharpen our skills. AND we can do it all enthusiastically.

As one of the author's students puts it:

“failure [is] not a sign of stupidity but [a] lack of experience and skill.”

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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.”