

What is Mindset?

<http://mindsetonline.com/whatisit/about/index.html>



Mindset is a simple idea discovered by world-renowned Stanford University psychologist Carol Dweck in decades of research on achievement and success—a simple idea that makes all the difference.

In a fixed mindset, people believe their basic qualities, like their intelligence or talent, are simply fixed traits.

They spend their time documenting their intelligence or talent instead of developing them. They also believe that talent alone creates success—without effort. They're wrong.

In a growth mindset, people believe that their most basic abilities can be developed through dedication and hard work—brains and talent are just the starting point. This view creates a love of learning and a resilience that is essential for great accomplishment. Virtually all great people have had these qualities.

“Think about your intelligence, talents, and personality. Are they just fixed or can you develop them?”

The Mindsets: Mindsets are beliefs—beliefs about yourself and your most basic qualities. Think about your intelligence, your talents, your personality. Are these qualities simply fixed traits, carved in stone and that's that? Or are they things you can cultivate throughout your life?

People with a fixed mindset believe that their traits are just givens. They have a certain amount of brains and talent and nothing can change that. If they have a lot, they're all set, but if they don't... So people in this mindset worry about their traits and how adequate they are. They have something to prove to themselves and others.

People with a growth mindset, on the other hand, see their qualities as things that can be developed through their dedication and effort. Sure they're happy if they're brainy or talented, but that's just the starting point. They understand that no one has ever accomplished great things—not Mozart, Darwin, or Michael Jordan—without years of passionate practice and learning.

Why Do People Differ?

Since the dawn of time, people have thought differently, acted differently, and fared differently from each other. It was guaranteed that someone would ask the question of why people differed why some people are smarter or more moral – and whether there was something that made them permanently different. Experts lined up on both sides. Some claimed that there was a strong physical basis for these differences, making them unavoidable and unalterable. Through the ages these alleged physical differences have included bumps on the skull (phrenology), the size and shape of the skull (craniology), and, today, genes.



“It's not always the people who start out the smartest who end up the smartest.”

Others pointed to the strong differences in people's backgrounds, experiences, training, or ways of learning. It may surprise you to know that a big champion of this view was Alfred Binet, the inventor of the IQ test. Wasn't the IQ test meant to summarize children's unchangeable intelligence? In fact, no. Binet, a Frenchman working in Paris in the early 20th century, designed this test to identify children who were not profiting from the Paris public schools, so that new educational programs could be designed to get them back on track. Without denying individual differences in children's intellects, he believed that education and practice could bring about fundamental changes in intelligence. Here is a quote from one of his major books, *Modern Ideas About Children*, in which he summarizes his work with hundreds of children with learning difficulties:



“A few modern philosopher's assert that an individual's intelligence is a fixed quantity, a quantity which cannot be increased. We must protest and react against this brutal pessimism.... 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.”

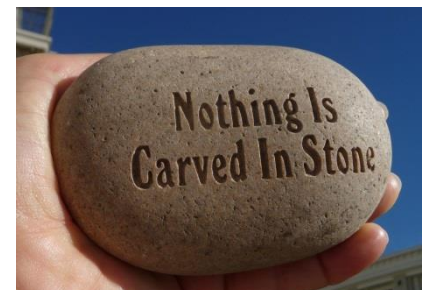
Who's right? Today most experts agree that it's not either/or. It's not nature or nurture, genes or environment. From conception on, there's a constant give and take between the two. In fact, as Gilbert Gottlieb, an eminent neuroscientist put it, not only do genes and environment cooperate as we develop, but genes require input from the environment to work properly.

At the same time, scientists are learning that people have more capacity for life-long learning and brain development than they ever thought. Of course, each person has a unique genetic endowment. People may start with different temperaments and different aptitudes, but it is clear that experience, training, and personal effort take them the rest of the way. Robert Sternberg, the present-day guru of intelligence writes that the major factor in whether people achieve expertise “is not some fixed prior ability, but purposeful engagement.” Or, as his forerunner, Binet, recognized, it's not always the people who start out the smartest who end up the smartest.

What does this mean for me?

It's one thing to have pundits spouting their opinions about scientific issues. It's another thing to understand how these views apply to you. For twenty years, my research has shown that the view you adopt for yourself profoundly affects the way you lead your life. It can determine whether you become the person you want to be and whether you commit to and accomplish the things you value. How does this happen? How can a simple belief have the power to transform your psychology and, as a result, your life?

Believing that your qualities are carved in stone—the fixed mindset—creates an urgency to prove yourself over and over. If you have only a certain amount of intelligence, a certain personality, and a certain moral character, well then you'd better prove that you have a healthy dose of them. It simply wouldn't do to look or feel deficient in these most basic characteristics...I've seen so many people with this one consuming goal of proving themselves—in the classroom, in their careers, and in their relationships. Every situation calls for a confirmation of their intelligence, personality, or character. Every situation is evaluated: Will I succeed or fail? Will I look smart or dumb? Will I be accepted or rejected? Will I feel like a winner or a loser? But doesn't our society value intelligence, personality and character? Isn't it normal to want these traits? Yes, but...



There's another mindset in which these traits are not simply a hand you're dealt and have to live with, always trying to convince yourself and others that you have a royal flush when you're secretly worried it's a pair of tens. In this mindset, the hand you're dealt is just the starting point for development. This growth mindset is based on the belief that your basic qualities are things you can cultivate through your efforts. 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.



Do people with this mindset believe that anyone can be anything, that anyone with proper motivation or education can become Einstein or Beethoven? No, but they believe that a person's true potential is unknown (and unknowable), that it's impossible to foresee what can be accomplished with years of passion, toil, and training.

Did you know that Darwin and Tolstoy were considered ordinary children? That Ben Hogan, one of the greatest golfers of all time, was completely uncoordinated and graceless as a child? That the photographer Cindy Sherman, who has been on virtually every list of the most important artists of the 20th century, failed her first photography course? That Geraldine Page, one of our greatest actresses, was advised to give it up for lack of talent?

You can see how the belief that cherished qualities can be developed creates a passion for learning. Why waste time proving over and over how great you are, when you could be getting better? Why hide deficiencies instead of overcoming them? Why look for friends or partners who will just shore up your self-esteem instead of ones who will also challenge you to grow? And why seek out the tried and true, instead of experiences that will stretch you? 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. This is the mindset that allows people to thrive during some of the most challenging times in their lives.

How can you change from a fixed mindset to a growth mindset?

fixed → growth

Step1. Learn to hear your fixed mindset “voice.”

THE VOICE

As you approach a challenge, that voice might say to you “Are you sure you can do it? Maybe you don't have the talent.” “What if you fail—you'll be a failure” “People will laugh at you for thinking you had talent.” “If you don't try, you can protect yourself and keep your dignity.”

As you hit a setback, the voice might say, “This would have been a snap if you really had talent.” “You see, I told you it was a risk. Now you've gone and shown the world how limited you are.” “It's not too late to back out, make excuses, and try to regain your dignity.”

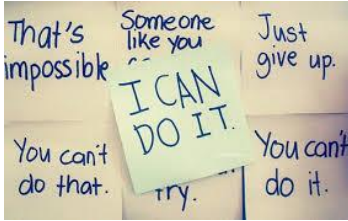
As you face criticism, you might hear yourself say, “It's not my fault. It was something or someone else's fault.” You might feel yourself getting angry at the person who is giving you feedback. “Who do they think they are? I'll put them in their place.” The other person might be giving you specific, constructive feedback, but you might be hearing them say “I'm really disappointed in you. I thought you were capable but now I see you're not.”

Step 2. Recognize that you have a choice.

How you interpret challenges, setbacks, and criticism is your choice. You can interpret them in a fixed mindset as signs that your fixed talents or abilities are lacking. Or you can interpret them in a growth mindset as signs that you need to ramp up your strategies and effort, stretch yourself, and expand your abilities. It's up to you. So as you face challenges, setbacks, and criticism, listen to the fixed mindset voice and...



Step 3. Talk back to it with a growth mindset voice.



As you approach a challenge:

THE FIXED-MINDSET says “Are you sure you can do it? Maybe you don’t have the talent.”

THE GROWTH-MINDSET answers, “I’m not sure I can do it now, but I think I can learn to with time and effort.”

FIXED MINDSET: “What if you fail—you’ll be a failure”

GROWTH MINDSET: “Most successful people had failures along the way.”

FIXED MINDSET: “If you don’t try, you can protect yourself and keep your dignity.”

GROWTH MINDSET: “If I don’t try, I automatically fail. Where’s the dignity in that?”

As you hit a setback:

FIXED MINDSET: “This would have been a snap if you really had talent.”

GROWTH MINDSET: “That is so wrong. Basketball wasn’t easy for Michael Jordan and science wasn’t easy for Thomas Edison. They had a passion and put in tons of effort.

As you face criticism:

FIXED MINDSET: “It’s not my fault. It was something or someone else’s fault.”

GROWTH MINDSET: “If I don’t take responsibility, I can’t fix it. Let me listen—however painful it is—and learn whatever I can.”

Then...

Step 4. Take the growth mindset action.



Over time, which voice you heed becomes pretty much your choice. Whether you

- take on the challenge wholeheartedly,
- learn from your setbacks and try again
- hear the criticism and act on it is now in your hands.

Practice hearing both voices, and practice acting on the growth mindset. See how you can make it work for you.

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Website: <http://mindsetonline.com/index.html>

Based on the book: *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success* by Carol Dweck