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The Mindset Needed for Sales Success

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Key #1 to Successful Selling: The Right Mindset

A mindset, which is a set of assumptions, beliefs, habits or methods held by one or more people or groups of people, can be very insidious in terms of its influence on behavior. How a mindset is shaped and developed can have powerful implications for relationships, selling interactions and successful selling outcomes.

In simple terms, the salesperson operating from a *static or fixed* mindset has imposed artificial barriers to potential productivity. The salesperson having a *dynamic, learning or growth* mindset is managing from the perspective of incremental productivity progress and potentially unimaginable opportunities. Since a person's potential is unknown and unknowable, a *growth* mindset provokes an adventurous journey, where one anticipates and grows one experience at a time. Doing business where seemingly limitless information manifests at an increasing rate of volume, variety and velocity is high-octane fuel for the growth-minded person.

Fixed Mindset and Growth Mindset

Carol Dweck's book, *Mindset – The New Psychology of Success*, explores the power of our beliefs, both conscious and unconscious, and how changing even the simplest of our beliefs can have a significant impact on both our lives and our sales productivity.

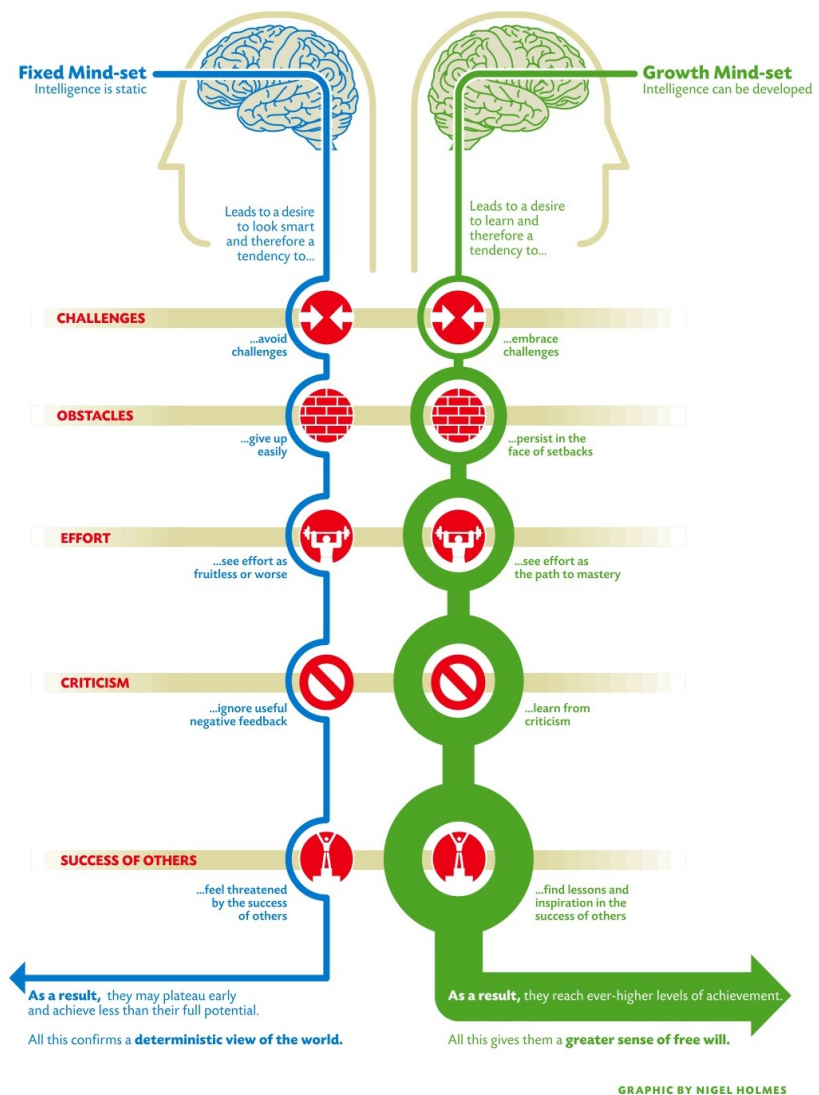
Maria Popova's article, "Fixed vs. Growth: The Two Basic Mindsets That Shape Our Lives," summarized Dweck's work and highlighted one of our fundamental beliefs, which is how we perceive our personality. A *fixed mindset* considers our abilities, including character and intelligence, to be static givens that cannot change in a meaningful way. The *fixed mindset* views success as the affirmation of inherent talents. One's ongoing assessment of how those given talents measure up against a striving-for-success-and-avoiding-failure-at-all-costs standard becomes a way of maintaining the sense of being smart or skilled. A *growth mindset*, on the other hand, thrives on challenge and sees failure not as evidence of inadequacy, but as a heartening springboard for growth and for extending existing abilities. Out of these two mindsets, which are manifested at an early age, springs a great deal of our behavior and our concepts of success and failure in both professional and personal contexts.

Dweck writes, "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 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?” She adds, “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.”

The *growth mindset* lives life from a very different perspective. Dweck says, “There is 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 your belief that your basic qualities are things that 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. 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.” Not only are *growth-minded* individuals not discouraged by failure, but they see themselves as having a learning experience in the process. Why waste time proving over and over how great you are, when you could be working on becoming better? And why seek out the tried and true instead of looking for experiences that will stretch you?



Comparing the Two Mindsets to Create Habits Which Build the Right Mindset

In order to develop a *growth mindset*, sales professionals should focus on building sound habits of industry, which are essential ingredients to the highly productive sales career mindset. In the words of Aristotle, “We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence, then, is not an act, but a habit.”

Stephen Covey in his book, *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, provided a guide to changing one’s mindset from the inside-out. Change must start from within.

Habit #1 – Be Proactive

Proactive people are solution-minded, using their resourcefulness and initiative to find solutions rather than reporting problems for others to solve. Being proactive is about being responsible for our own lives, and understanding that you will get from an experience what you put into it, nothing more and nothing less.

Habit #2 – Begin with the End in Mind

The most productive way to begin a project, personal or business, is to begin with the end in mind. Once your desired destination is clear, then you process the necessary steps and actions to fulfill the mission by working backwards.

Habit #3 – Put First Things First

Putting first things first is about prioritizing your planned necessary steps to the desired outcome or end in mind. In carrying out a plan, especially one that is long term, we all must wrestle with the same self-management dilemma - when do I address urgent matters versus when do I perform the important tasks necessary to the fulfillment of my work in mind? To paraphrase Peter Drucker, effective people don’t solve problems – they pursue opportunities. Time management is an essential skill for personal effectiveness, and the essence of quality time management is to organize and execute around your priorities.

Habit #4 – Think Win – Win

Thinking win-win is a powerful self-management tool. The salesperson’s biggest dilemma is when do I compete (win-lose thinking) versus when do I cooperate/collaborate (win-win thinking)? The latter has consistently proven to be the most productive outcome in both the short- and long-term.

Habit #5 – Seek First to Understand, Then to be Understood

The most important ingredient to mastering this habit is the practice of active listening. One of the key attitudes in life, personally and professionally, is the attitude of active

listening. Right listening is essential to doing the right things for others. It is much more than demonstrating empathy. It is about sincerely caring about the interests of others to cultivate a more productive relationship result. The three most important words in managing successful selling relationships is nurture, nurture, nurture.

Habit #6 – Synergize

The practice of all of the first five habits prepares us for the habit of synergy. The result of exercising synergy is that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts, i.e. $1 + 1 = 3$. In both personal and business interactions, synergy is one of our most productive activities. Highly successful salespeople are continually seeking to add customer value by creating alternatives and tapping new opportunities.

Habit #7 – Sharpen the Saw

This habit is about consistently and regularly practicing physical, mental, social/emotional and spiritual renewal. Taking the time to sharpen the saw (that's you) is the habit that makes the others possible.

Adopting a Growth Mindset in Real Estate

Peter Senge, author of *The Fifth Discipline* says, “The only sustainable competitive advantage is an organization’s ability to learn faster than the competition.” Nothing could be truer for the individual salesperson, especially in the highly competitive discipline of real estate sales. Employing a *growth or learning mindset* is essential to the shaping and development of a continuously productive real estate sales career.

So how does one commence this *growth-minded* journey? Highly productive people don’t begin with motivation, but rather with action. William James, considered by many to be the father of American psychology once posed the question, “Do we run from a bear because we are afraid or are we afraid because we run?” Probably both conditions have some truth, but he proposed that the seemingly obvious answer, that we run because we are afraid, was wrong, and instead concluded that we are afraid because we run. He stated, “My thesis on the contrary is that bodily changes follow directly the PERCEPTION of the exciting fact, and that our feeling of the same changes as they occur is the emotion.”



Therefore, it would seem to make sense to begin with physical action, or from Covey's habit terms, be proactive. Develop an action plan with each individual habit, and as you realize improved productivity, motivation (the emotion) and progress will be realized. Using James' terms, man isn't productive because he's motivated, but rather he's motivated because he's productive.

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Chuck Fifield is a Senior Lecturer for Baylor University's Hankamer School of Business, Marketing Department and serves as the faculty coach to Baylor's Sales Team and Uproar Music and Entertainment Group, a student-managed business. He joined the faculty at Baylor University in 2001, teaching in the Graduate Business School (Operations Management), the Management Department (Negotiations and Conflict Resolution) and the Economics Department (Principles of Macroeconomics). Chuck has taught or guest lectured at other Texas-based Universities in the fields of sales, international business, money and banking and finance/investments. Professor Fifield has conducted sales research and training for several organizations, including most recently State Farm Insurance. Prior to joining Baylor, Chuck was a financial consultant for nearly thirty years to businesses located throughout the U.S. He owned and operated several financial service businesses in the fields of securities, real estate, oil and gas and insurance.