



## Mindset: The New Psychology of Success

Author : Carol S Dweck

Mindset is a book that captures research done by Carol Dweck. This book is about discovering a belief about yourself that defines your personality. The book has 8 chapters that help you understand all about mindset and takes you through the role of mindset in the lives of sports champions, business leaders, parents, teachers and coaches.

### THE MINDSETS (Fixed and growth mindset)

The author talks about a study she conducted with children to understand how people cope with failure. Children were given puzzles that grew progressively tougher. With increasing difficulty levels, some children gave up while some relished the idea of solving challenging problems. People differ in their thoughts, actions and response to challenges. Experts believe that this is due to physical aspects (age) or psychological factors like experiences, learning methods or people's background. Today, however, most experts agree that this is a combination of both. **The author's research shows that the view you adopt for yourself, profoundly affects the way you lead your life.** There are two kinds of belief systems:

- a. **Fixed mindset**, where the person believes that her qualities are carved in stone, leading to a constant need for the person to prove her ability. To such a person, a failure reveals her inadequacies and therefore effort matters only if there is a 100% chance of success.
- b. **Growth mindset**, where the person believes that her qualities can be developed through efforts and she can change and grow by making mistakes and learning. Failure is seen as a stepping stone to improvement.

This belief (mindset) defines your thoughts, actions & personality, leading to totally different human journeys depending on whether you feel comfortable in the fixed mindset camp or the growth mindset camp. The most important news is that you can change your mindset.

### INSIDE THE MINDSETS (Ability, effort and confidence as seen with a mindset filter)

People of a fixed mindset believe that ability is fixed and needs to be proven and validated, while those of a growth mindset believe that ability is something that improves through learning and is about stretching one's limits.

In 1995, actor Christopher Reeves got completely paralysed below the neck, owing to a riding accident. Reeves refused his doctors' advice that his efforts in terms of getting his body to listen to his mind were futile. In 5 years, Reeves, while miles away from a full recovery, regained movement in his hands and legs.



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**Growth mindset people thrive when they stretch themselves. Fixed mindset people believe that ability will do the job on its own and make them successful.** In their world, there is no journey to improvement. They believe that they have the ability, and that alone will do the trick. Beyond ability is potential. Potential for fixed mindset is what you have now & how it will help you in future. In growth mindset, potential is the ability to develop skills with some effort over a time period.

NASA identified its potential astronauts by rejecting people with only success stories, instead, picking people who had seen significant failures and bounced back. The meaning of failure changes with the mindset frame. **Fixed mindset converts failure from an activity (I failed) to an identity (I am a failure).** **Growth mindset finds failure equally painful, but does not make it a part of its personality.** Mindset frame also changes the meaning of effort. In fixed mindset, effort is for those who do not have ability. For the growth mindset camp, effort improves ability which, then, improves chances of success.

**Mindset can be changed and it is true that a person can have elements of both fixed and growth mindset at the same time, albeit applied in different areas.** Growth mindset people win more often, not because for them winning is above everything. They win more often because they love what they are doing. Does confidence have anything to do with mindset? Both fixed and growth mindset people can be equally high on confidence. It's just that in fixed mindset the confidence is more fragile as failure is seen as a part of personality.

### THE TRUTH ABOUT ABILITY & ACCOMPLISHMENT

**Why do some people achieve less than expected and some achieve more?** The fixed mindset limits a person's ability to achieve more. A person with a fixed mindset believes that efforts are not important as the ability.. People around such a person are seen, not as allies, but as judges.

Acclaimed artist Betty Edwards ran a drawing course. In her book *Drawing on the Right Side of the Brain*, she compiled her students' before and after self-portraits: before being on the joining day of the course, and after being five days later. The change in quality of self-portraits was astonishing. Betty Edwards explains that people believe drawing is a "fixed" skill because they do not understand the learnable components of drawing. Drawing skills comprise smaller component skills like the skill to observe, the skill to perceive depth and shadows, and a few more. Some people do have the natural ability to pick these skills, but as Edwards' book shows, these can be learnt through structured effort as well.

**Praising a person's ability is not always the best thing to do.** The author conducted a study where she



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gave students a non-verbal IQ test. The students mostly did well. To some students the message was **“Wow, you scored well. You must be smart at this”**. To other students, who had scored equally well, the author said **“Wow, you got a good score. You must have worked really hard.”** After the above feedback, the students were offered the choice to do a more challenging task. The group with you are so smart feedback refused the choice to do a more challenging task as they wanted to maintain their smart quotient and not risk failure. In contrast, in the group that was praised for effort, 90% wanted to take on the new, more challenging task. **So, not all positive labels are good.**

### SPORTS: THE MINDSET OF A CHAMPION

**Everyone believes that talent is a prerequisite in sports. In boxing, physical measurements like weight, chest expansion matter a lot.**

**Muhammad Ali** did not have the physique or the strength of a boxer. In one face-off, Muhammad Ali was to fight Sonny Liston-who was a natural with his size, strength and power. But Ali was quick, and his brilliance was in his mind. Ali is quoted on how he studied Liston's fighting style and what kind of person Liston was outside the ring. In Ali's words, “Liston had to believe I was crazy. He couldn't see nothing to me at all but mouth and that's all I wanted him to see.” Liston lost the bout with Ali. In the world of sports, there is a strong correlation between practice and improvement. Yet the popular belief is that natural talent is all that is needed for success in sports.

**In Wimbledon 2000, Pete Sampras faced Pat Rafter in the finals.** A win here would get him his record 13th Grand Slam victory. Sampras was down 1 set, and down 4-1 in the tie-breaker of the second set. He went on to win his 13th title. Later Sampras was quoted *“When you are sitting on the changeover you think of past matches that you've lost the first set...came back and won the next three. You reflect on your past experiences, being able to get through it.”* **What Sampras showed was a growth mindset where he searched for a frame of reference that could carry him through.**

**John McEnroe** was a talented tennis player who was number one player for four years. But he did lose matches, which were lost because he had fever, he ate too close to the match or he was too cold. McEnroe lost the 1984 French Open final to Ivan Lendl after leading 2-0, because an NBC cameraman had taken off his headset and a noise started coming from a side of the court. Great talent framed within fixed mindset.

Growth mindset sportspersons find success in doing their best and see setbacks as a wake-up call. In the fixed mindset, setbacks label you with failure. In growth mindset, sportspersons identify processes that lead to success (training) and look back on them in moments of doubt. **Growth mindset builds character**



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and the mind of a champion, which define success in sports.

### BUSINESS: MINDSET & LEADERSHIP

The author showcases Lou Gerstner, Jack Welch & Anne Mulcahy as examples of growth mindset business leaders. In contrast are Iacocca, Albert Dunlap, Kenneth Lay & Jeff Skilling as the talented but fixed mindset business leaders. **Growth minded leaders see their companies not as their fiefdom, but as growth engines for their teams, their company & themselves.**

In late 1980s, IBM had become so successful that elitism penetrated its culture. Turf wars were the way to show supremacy. Lou Gerstner joined IBM as its CEO in 1993. Lou created a clear communication channel across the company and attacked elitism by reducing hierarchy and disbanding management committees. He changed the incentive structure to reward overall IBM performance rather than an individual unit's performance. He also focussed on execution and on meeting IBM's customers.

At the end of his first quarter, Gerstner had nothing much to show in terms of performance and it was widely said that the IBM stock had nothing because he (Gerstner) had done nothing, He ploughed on and in March 2002, IBM stock had grown by 800% & IBM was 'Number one in the world in IT services, hardware & high performance computer chips.'"

**Kenneth Lay was the founder & CEO of Enron.** Jeff Skilling was his COO. Documented anecdotes reveal that Skilling used his brilliance to intimidate his co-workers. He believed that anyone who disagreed with him was not as smart as him. Skilling's belief that his brilliant ideas, which may lead to profits should be proclaimed as actual profits by Enron, led to a large scale financial reporting jugglery. Enron finally went down. Groupthink is a fixed mindset frame within organisations. **Groupthink** (coined by Irving Janis in 1970s) is when everyone in the group starts thinking alike & no one disagrees. This happens when either the group puts unconditional faith in the ability of its leader, or when the entire group itself believes that it is brilliant and therefore, superior.

### RELATIONSHIPS: MINDSETS IN LOVE

Almost everyone has been in love and has been hurt. **For growth mindset people, it has been about forgiving, and though very hurt, moving on. For fixed mindset, it is about being judged and rejected and therefore having a strong need to take revenge.**

The earlier chapters talked about in-born talent of sportspersons like John McEnroe or the God-gifted



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ability of some in creative arts. Are there any such “gifted” people in the world of relationships? Unlike sports or business, where there is clear measurement of success, in relationships there is no such measure.

However, people incredibly good in relationships (whether in-born or developed by efforts) are the people you see as “cool or charming”.. So far in the book, mindset was an individual frame of reference. **In the world of relationships, there are three frames: you, your partner and the relationship itself.** Each of these three frames can have variants of fixed and growth mindset. In growth mindset, the belief is that all three frames can be grown and developed, consistently leading to lasting and fulfilling relationships. **In the case of fixed mindset, relationships are built on the following:**

- Relationships are fixed, come as a “given” and cannot be worked upon.
- Problems in the relationship are on account of character flaws of one of the partners.
- The need to prove one's ability is part of the relationship and hence competition to show one-upmanship.

### PARENTS, TEACHERS AND COACHES

**No parent starts the day deciding to undermine her child on purpose.** But some of the messages sent by the parent are received by the child as a fixed mindset message. Parents send both success and failure messages.

**Success messages like “You are so smart” do more harm than good.** They harm the child's motivation (I am the best) and performance (This looks difficult. I might fail and I do not want to be a failure).

**Success messages need to be about praising effort,** not talent. Failure messages like “So what if you failed, you are the best” end up protecting the child from failure & creating a fixed mindset that there is no need to improve. The failure message, instead, needs to be constructive (criticism).

**Growth mindset parents do not coddle their children with only positive messages. Instead they believe in high standards and help children with the roadmap to reach them as well.** Teachers' role is similar to that of parents, with the difference that they manage 10-20 children at a time. Great teachers believe and help their students in the process of learning.

A growth mindset teacher says “*I am going to teach you*”, while a fixed mindset teacher says “*I am going to judge your talent.*” Growth mindset teachers hold the mirror to their students to identify learning gaps and help them bridge those gaps. Similarly, fixed mindset coaches believe that they are as good as their team's winning record. Their holy grail is a mistake free game.





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The author compares fixed and growth mindset coaches using the examples of Bobby Knight (who coached by fear & playing off one team member against the other) & John Wooden (who led the UCLA basketball to ten NCAA Championship wins). Wooden applied the growth mindset, in his words, *“You have to apply yourself each day to becoming a little better. By applying yourself to the task of becoming a little better each and every day over a period of time, you will become a lot better.”* He did not ask for mistake free games, but asked for full commitment games.

### CHANGING MINDSETS

**The growth mindset essentially is about believing in change.** At a sub conscious level, people keep a running account of what they are going through in their life & what they should do. Mindset helps put guardrails to this running account.

In the case of fixed mindset, these guardrails are negative (I am a failure or I am the best). In growth mindset, this guardrail or internal monologue is about How can I improve from here or What can I learn from this? The change from fixed to growth mindset requires changing this internal monologue from a judging discussion to a growth oriented one.

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