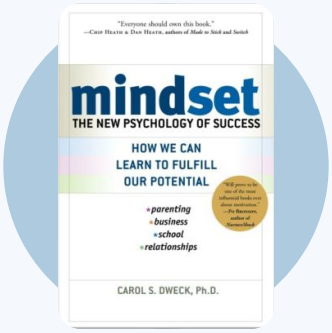

BOOK

Mindset

The New Psychology of Success

Carol S. Dweck | Copyright © 2006 by Carol S. Dweck, Ph.D. Published by arrangement with The Random House Publishing Group, a division of Random House, Inc. | 288 pages

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★ 10 | Inspiring | Innovative | Scientific

What You Will Learn

- How fixed and growth mindsets shape learning, resilience, and self-esteem.
- Why praising effort, not talent, fosters motivation and higher achievement.
- How mindset influences leadership, company culture, and long-term success.
- Why changing your mindset transforms relationships, coping, and personal growth.

Supported Skills

Cultivate a Growth Mindset | Become More Adaptable | Live Well

About the Author

Carol S. Dweck is a leading researcher in personality and psychology. A psychology professor at Stanford University, she formerly taught at Columbia University. She is a member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. She also wrote *Self-Theories*, which was named Book of the Year by the World Education Fellowship.

Recommendation

This book has a simple premise: The world is divided between people who are open to learning and those who are closed to it, and this trait affects everything from your worldview to your interpersonal relationships. Author and psychology professor Carol S. Dweck has scoured research papers and news clippings to extract anecdotes about the pros and cons of both mindsets. Thus, stories about Michael Jordan, Lee Iacocca, John McEnroe, Wilma Rudolph and Babe Ruth, among others, find a place in this book. Dweck addresses the ways that mindsets have an impact on people. She explains that you can have a closed mindset in regard to some traits and an open mindset in regard to others. Dweck's highly thought-provoking insights comes from learning when you need to adjust your mindset to move ahead.

Take-Aways

- People have either a fixed or a growth mindset.
- People who believe their personal qualities are unchangeable have a "fixed mindset."
- People who believe they can improve or change their personality traits over time have a "growth mindset."
- People with a growth mindset believe that the future presents an opportunity to grow, even during challenging times.
- Mindsets produce definite worldviews, but they can be changed.
- Children who are praised for their intelligence tend to adopt a fixed mindset and reject new challenges.
- Jack Welch, who had a growth mindset, took over GE in 1980 when the company was valued at $14 billion; 20 years later, it had a $490-billion valuation.
- Athletes with a growth mindset build strong characters by challenging themselves.
- Historically company executives who hold fixed mindsets and regard themselves as geniuses or visionaries do not build great teams.
- Coaching and teaching about mindset are the best ways to boost kids' self-esteem.

Summary

The Growth Mindset

Some people are more intelligent, more thoughtful or more adventuresome than others. For years, experts attributed such differences to each individual's combination of environment, physiology and genetic makeup. But other factors help determine individual characteristics, including traits that stem from having a "fixed" or "growth" mindset.

> *"The view that you adopt for yourself profoundly affects the way you lead your life."*

Those who view their personality or intelligence as unshakable have a "fixed mindset." They believe that neither personality nor intelligence is subject to change and they feel the need to prove themselves constantly in all situations. People with a fixed mindset often develop this outlook at an early age, usually due to some influence from their teachers or parents. Alternately, people with a "growth mindset" believe that they can improve or change their personality characteristics over time. They believe that the future offers opportunities to grow, even during challenging times.

> *"Mindsets frame the running account that's taking place in people's heads."*

To show the differences between fixed and growth mindsets, an interviewer asked people what they would do if they got a C+ on a midterm exam and then got a parking ticket. Faced with accumulated events, people with fixed mindsets said this situation would prove that "the world is out to get me" or that they were losers or idiots. People with growth mindsets said they would work harder in school and park more carefully.

The Impact of Mindset

Mindset has significant implications, although most people are very inaccurate at estimating their own capabilities. People with a fixed mindset tend to take each failure personally. They interpret any setback, from being fired to being spurned romantically, as a message of rejection. Feeling unwanted exacerbates their low self-esteem. People with fixed mindsets work hard to hide their weaknesses, but they believe that their relationships, their traits and their partner's traits are all unchangeable.

> *"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."*

In contrast, people with growth mindsets believe they can change their personality traits. They think their abilities can grow. They are more likely to build on their talents. They love to learn and they feel frustrated when they are not developing their potential. Having a growth mindset helps people cope with stress.

Mindset also determines leadership qualities, including how well people perform in school. Medical students with fixed mindsets lost interest in an important class when they earned "C" grades. Accustomed to quick reinforcement, they stopped being interested when they did not earn fast rewards. Students with growth mindsets thrived as the class became more difficult.

Mindsets play a role in the development of "natural" talent. One educational researcher found that exceptional people, from swimmers to musicians, did not show their talents until they studied and applied themselves. For instance, Mozart worked for a decade before he wrote anything memorable. However, inventors and artists share the ability to learn over time as they mature. They do not rely solely on their natural abilities. Mindsets are specific to diverse talents, so an artist may be more open to new ideas, but more restricted socially.

> *"Telling children they're smart, in the end, made them feel dumber and act dumber, but claim they were smarter."*

Mindsets affect depressed people. Depressed students with growth mindsets tend to work to solve their depressions while maintaining their school schedules and their outside interests. Students with fixed mindsets become less active and involved when they become depressed.

People with fixed mindsets react differently to praise than those with growth mindsets. Children who are praised for their intelligence often tend to adopt a fixed mindset and to reject new challenges. In tests, they wanted to bask in their success and did not want to risk revealing any weaknesses. Students who were told that they had high abilities did not like being asked to solve harder problems. They said the extra work took away from their enjoyment in learning. At the same time, students who were praised for making an effort said they liked working on the harder problems. In trials, praising a child's ability even worked to reduce his or her IQ score, but praising a child for trying harder raised IQ totals.

> *"In the fixed mindset, the loss of one's self to failure can be a permanent, haunting trauma."*

Labeling people can be very harmful, from calling children "gifted" or "exceptional" to using negative sexual and racial stereotypes. Such labels actually can make people feel inferior and generate a negative, self-fulfilling prophecy. Often, being labeled seems to encourage people to not live up to their potential. When people believe these stereotypes, they often lie about or exaggerate their real accomplishments. Other people's opinions can be damaging. When teachers tell young girls that they may not be good in math or science, it can drive them to under-perform. A study of adolescent boys found that when boys were asked to validate negative stereotypes about girls, reinforcing those stereotypes boosted the boys' self-esteem.

Changing Your Mindset

While mindsets produce definite worldviews, people can change them by learning new skills. Human beings can be taught how to react in new ways, how to face challenges and think differently. For example, when athletes with a growth mindset challenged themselves, they developed positive character traits. According to sports researchers, athletes with growth mindsets did not dwell on winning alone. They focused on the process and ignored distractions, enjoying the challenge as much as the conclusion. They learned from failure and recognized that hard work brought personal gain. In contrast, athletes with fixed mindsets forced themselves to win to show they were better than their competition. When they lost, they were dejected.

Talent and Teaching

Business today worships talent. This inadvertently has cultivated certain mindsets. Enron sought talented people with advanced degrees. Problematically, it also developed an internal culture where people could not fail without harming their reputations and the company's image. Enron hated to admit mistakes and valued image highly. When investors probed its activities, the fixed mindset of its executives led them to be defensive and untruthful.

Research shows that companies with leaders who have a growth mindset tend to seek employees who can address deficiencies and find solutions. These executives believe in people's ability to grow and conquer problems. One study compared companies according to their stock value gains or losses. When it contrasted companies with exceptional growth (as measured by stock prices) against companies that did not grow, or that realized gains and then faded, it found that corporate success was tied to leaders who consistently examined the company's processes and challenged its failures. For example, the CEO of Circuit City held debates in

his boardroom to discuss pressing problems so he could question and learn from other board members.

> *"The fixed mindset makes you concerned about judgment, and this can make you more self-conscious and anxious."*

Another study found that defining a task for students and explaining how success would be measured could determine what mindset the students developed. Researchers gave two student groups a high production goal to meet. They told one group that it would be measured by how much its members knew about a specific process (engendering a fixed mindset). They told the other students that they were to develop new skills so they could learn as they worked (spurring a growth mindset). At first, both groups failed to meet the goals. But over time, members of the growth mindset group learned from their mistakes, motivated each other and out-produced the other group.

Coaching and teaching about mindset are productive ways to boost a student's self-esteem. The key is to show the student that the mentor is interested in advancing the student, in helping the student's overall growth process.

However, teachers should be careful about their language. Blind praise often works against students since it can send mixed messages about how fast the students learn, the effectiveness of their study habits or how much ability they have. Praise students for their efforts and accomplishments, so they can pursue more difficult challenges. Children can interpret even innocuous comments – such as "You learn quickly since you are so smart" – to mean that learning slowly is bad.

> *"Benjamin Barber, an eminent sociologist, once said: 'I don't divide the world into the weak and the strong, or the successes and failures…I divide the world into the learners and the nonlearners'."*

It is also not wise to protect children from failing. Not being the best, or failing, happens often in life. It is a common occurrence. Parents who focus only on being the best do not provide any substitute position for the child if he or she doesn't win, leaving the child to blame others, devalue the activity or turn failure into a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Open and Shut: Mindset and Leadership

A leader who displays a fixed mindset can set a company up for failure. One researcher found that corporate executives who focus on their personal reputations do so at the expense of their companies. For instance, Lee Iacocca helped resurrect Chrysler, but then he concentrated on his own reputation. While he was preoccupied, the company declined.

> *"When stereotypes are evoked, they fill people's minds…with secret worries about confirming the stereotype."*

The same researcher found that executives who regard themselves as geniuses or visionaries do not build great teams. Albert Dunlap, a corporate turnaround specialist who was always ready to prove himself again, went to Sunbeam in 1996. He fired half the employees and saw the stock appreciate so much that he could not sell the company. Faced with running Sunbeam, he fired people who disagreed with him and he had to inflate revenues. Within three years he was ousted.

Executives with growth mindsets are at the opposite extreme. For example, take Jack Welch, who assumed control of GE in 1980 when it was valued at $14 billion. Twenty years later, it had a $490-billion valuation.

Welch got GE's top position by admitting that he was not a genius and promising that he was ready to learn. That pitch worked. He set out to generate more employee input and to break down arbitrary internal barriers. He frequently met with assembly line employees to get their opinions.

He once addressed a small club of top GE managers and asked about the group's plans and activities. About a month later, the club president announced that the members would become community volunteers and that the club would open its membership. Two decades later, it has 42,000 members.

Welch also fired four managers who met their financial goals, but did not live up to GE's values. He made a costly mistake when GE bought Kidder, Peabody & Co., but he learned from it. The purchase cost GE hundreds of millions of dollars and taught Welch the fine line between failure and overconfidence.

Good leaders have a desire to learn. Studies found that there is no such thing as a "natural leader." People become leaders by changing themselves. Instead of trying to identify future leaders by their "natural talent," companies should distinguish leadership candidates based on their individual development potential and then give them openings to learn new skills. In fact,

when companies give employees new opportunities to learn, they enable individuals to advance, to earn more and to become better prepared for life's challenges.

In Love and War

People with open mindsets react differently in personal relationships than people with fixed mindsets. People with fixed mindsets seek spontaneous affiliations and dramatic break-ups. They tend to be slow to forgive since that can be considered a weakness or could pose the risk of rejection. When relationships go bad, people with fixed mindsets are forced to blame their partners. They deflect any personal blame. In extreme cases, a person can be so competitive that he or she overshadows a partner's accomplishments and identity.

Your worldview can be a source of happiness or anxiety depending on how you interpret events and how extremely you react. People with fixed mindsets tend to be judgmental. Psychologists have used cognitive therapy to encourage people to ask themselves why they make extreme judgments about others, and whether their opinions are justified. This is one way to break the fixed-mindset cycle and open new pathways for growth.

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