

Mindset: The New Psychology of Success

How We Can Learn to Fulfill Our Potential

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Chapter 2: Inside the Mindsets

I changed [my mindset] because of my work. One day my doctoral student, Mary Bandura, and I were trying to understand why some students were so caught up in proving their ability, while others could just let go and learn. Suddenly we realized that there were *two* meanings to ability, not one: a fixed ability that needs to be proven, and a changeable ability that can be developed through learning.

When you enter a mindset, you enter a new world. In one world--the world of fixed traits--success is about proving you're smart or talented. Validating yourself. In the other--the world of changing qualities--it's about stretching yourself to learn something new. Developing yourself.

Is Success About Learning--Or Proving You're Smart?

One seventh-grade girl summed it up. "I think intelligence is something you have to work for... it isn't just given to you... Most kids, if they're not sure of an answer, will not raise their hand to answer the question. But what I usually do is raise my hand, because if I'm wrong, then my mistake will be corrected. Or I will raise my hand and say, "How would this be solved?" or "I don't get this. Can you help me?" Just by doing that I'm increasing my intelligence."

A Test Score Is Forever

_____To find out, we showed fifth graders a closed cardboard box and told them it had a test inside. This test, we said, measured an important school ability. We told them nothing more. Then we asked them questions about the test. First, we wanted to make sure that they'd accepted our description, so we asked them: How much do you think this test measures an important school ability? All of them had taken our word for it.

Next we asked: Do you think this test measures *how smart you are*? And: Do you think this test measures *how smart you'll be when you grow up*?

Students with the growth mindset had taken our word that the test measured an important ability, but they didn't think it measured how *smart* they were. ;!And they certainly didn't think it would tell them how smart they'd be when they grew up. In fact, one of them told us, "No way! Ain't no test can do that."

But the students with the fixed mindset didn't simply believe the test could measure an important ability. They also believed--just as strongly--that it could measure how smart they were. *And* how smart they'd be when they grew up.

They granted one test the power to measure their most basic intelligence now and forever. They gave this test the power to define them. That's why every success is so important.

Mindsets Change the Meaning of Failure

Shirk, Cheat, Blame: Not a Recipe for Success

Jim Collins tells in *Good to Great* of a similar thing in the corporate world. As Procter & Gamble surged into the paper goods business, Scott Paper--which was then the leader--just gave up. Instead of mobilizing themselves and putting up a fight, they said, "Oh well... at least there are people in the business worse off than we are."

When Enron, the energy giant, failed--toppled by a culture of arrogance--whose fault was it? Not mine, insisted Jeffrey Skilling, the CEO and resident genius. It was the world's fault. The world did not appreciate what Enron was trying to do. What about the Justice Department's investigation into massive corporate deception? A "witch hunt."

Jack Welch, the growth-minded CEO, had a completely different reaction to one of General Electric's fiascos. In 1986, General Electric bought Kidder, Peabody, a Wall Street investment banking firm. Soon after the deal closed, Kidder, Peabody was hit with a big insider trading scandal. A few years later, calamity struck again in the form of Joseph Jett, a trader who made a bunch of fictitious trades, to the tune of hundreds of millions, to pump up his bonus. Welch phoned fourteen of his top GE colleagues to tell them the bad news and to apologize personally. "I blamed myself for the disaster," Welch said.

Questions and Answers

So they're racing to prove themselves over and over, but where are they going? To my they're often running in

place, amassing countless affirmations, but not necessarily ending up where they want to be.

You know those movies where the main character wakes up one day and sees that his life has not been worthwhile--he has always been besting people, not growing, learning, or caring. My favorite is *Groundhog Day*, which I didn't see for a long time because I couldn't get past the name. At any rate, in *Groundhog Day*, Bill Murray doesn't just wake up one day and get the message; he has to repeat the same day over and over until he gets the message.

Phil Connors (Murray) is a weatherman for a local station in Pittsburgh who is dispatched to Punxsutawney, Pennsylvania, to cover the Groundhog Day ceremony. On February 2, a groundhog is taken out of his little house; if he is judged to have seen his shadow, there will be another six weeks of winter. If not, there will be an early spring.

Phil, considering himself to be a superior being, has complete contempt for the ceremony, the town, and the people ("hicks" and "morons"), and after making that perfectly clear, he plans to get out of Punxsutawney as quickly as possible. But this is not to be. A blizzard hits the town, he is forced to remain, and when he wakes up the next morning, it's Groundhog Day again. The same Sonny and Cher song, "I Got You Babe," wakes him up on the clock radio and the same groundhog festival is gearing up once again. And again. And again.

At first, he uses the knowledge to further his typical agenda, making fools out of other people. Since he is the only one reliving the day, he can talk to a woman on one day, and then use the information to deceive, impress, and seduce her the next. He is in fixed-mindset heaven. He can prove his superiority over and over.

But after countless such days, he realizes it's all going nowhere and he tries to kill himself. He crashes a car, he electrocutes himself, he jumps from a steeple, he walks in front of a truck. With no way out, it finally dawns on him. He could be using the time to learn. He goes for piano lessons. He reads voraciously. He learns ice sculpting. He finds out about people who need help that day (a boy who falls from a tree, a man who chokes on his steak) and starts to help them, and care about them. Pretty soon the day is not long enough! Only when this change of mindset is complete is he released from the spell.

Joseph Martocchio conducted a study of employees who were taking a short computer training course. Half of the employees were put into a fixed mindset. He told them it was all a matter of how much ability they possessed. The other half were put in a growth mindset. He told them that computer skills could be developed through practice. Everyone, steeped in these mindsets, then proceeded with the course.

Although the two groups started off with exactly equal confidence in their computer skills, by the end of the course they looked quite different. Those in the growth mindset gained considerable confidence in their computer skills as they learned, despite the many mistakes they inevitably made. But, because of those mistakes, those with the fixed mindset actually *lost* confidence in their computer skills as they learned!

Chapter 3: The Truth About Ability and Accomplishment

Mindset and School Achievement

George Danzig was a graduate student in math at Berkeley. One day, as usual, he rushed in late to his math class and quickly copied the two homework problems from the blackboard. When he later went to do them, he found them very difficult, and it took him several days of hard work to crack them open and solve them. They turned out not to be homework problems at all. They were two famous math problems that had never been solved.

The Low-Effort Syndrome

It's no wonder that many adolescents mobilize their resources, not for learning, but to protect their egos. And one of the main ways they do this (aside from providing vivid portraits of their teachers) is by not trying. This is when some of the brightest students, just like Nadja Salerno-Sonnenberg, simply stop working. In fact, students with the fixed mindset tell us that their main goal in school--aside from looking smart--is to exert as little effort as possible. They heartily agree with statements like this:

"In school my main goal is to do things as easily as possible so I don't have to work very hard."

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. They view the adults as saying, "Now we will measure you and see what you've got." And they are answering, "No you won't."

The College Transition

In this course, everybody studied. But there are different ways to study. Many students study like this: They

read the textbook and their class notes. If the material is really hard, they read them again. Or they might try to memorize everything they can, like a vacuum cleaner. That's how the students with the fixed mindset studied. If they did poorly on the test, they concluded that chemistry was not their subject. After all, "I did everything possible, didn't I?"

Far from it. They would be shocked to find out what students with the growth mindset do. Even I find it remarkable.

The students with the growth mindset completely took charge of their learning and motivation. Instead of plunging into unthinking memorization of the course material, they said: "I looked for themes and underlying principles across lectures," and "I went over mistakes until I was certain I understood them." They were studying to learn, not just to ace the test. And, actually, this was why they got higher grades--not because they were smarter or had a better background in science.

Instead of losing their motivation when the course got dry or difficult, they said, "I maintained my interest in the material." "I stayed positive about taking chemistry." "I kept myself motivated to study." Even if they thought the textbook was boring or the instructor was a stiff, they didn't let their motivation evaporate. That just made it all the more important to motivate themselves.

Chapter 4: Sports: The Mindset of a Champion

"Character"

Caitlyn Jenner, 1976 Olympic gold medalist in the decathlon, says, "If I wasn't dyslexic, I probably wouldn't have won the Games. If I had been a better reader, then that would have come easily, sports would have come easily... and I never would have realized that the way you get ahead in life is hard work."

Chapter 5: Business: Mindset and Leadership

Leadership and the Fixed Mindset

Fixed-mindset leaders, like fixed-mindset people in general, live in a world where some people are superior and some are inferior. They must repeatedly affirm that they are superior, and the company is simply a platform for this.

Many of these comparison companies operated on what Collins calls a "genius with a thousand helpers" model. Instead of building an extraordinary management team like the good-to-great companies, they operated on the fixed-mindset premise that great geniuses do not need great teams. They just need little helpers to carry out their brilliant ideas.

Don't forget that these great geniuses don't *want* great teams, either. Fixed-mindset people want to be the only big fish so that when they compare themselves to those around them, they can feel a cut above the rest.

A Study of Group Processes

Those with the fixed mindset believed that: "People have a certain fixed amount of management ability and they cannot do much to change it." In contrast, those with the growth mindset believed: "People can always substantially change their basic skills for managing other people." *margin note: add to elevate*

Groupthink Versus We Think

Alfred P. Sloan, the former CEO of General Motors, presents a nice contrast. He was leading a group of high-level policy makers who seemed to have reached a consensus. "Gentlemen," he said, "I take it we are all in complete agreement on the decision here.... Then I propose we postpone further discussion of this matter until our next meeting to give ourselves time to develop disagreement and perhaps gain some understanding of what the decision is all about."

Herodotus, writing in the fifth century B.C., reported that the ancient Persians used a version of Sloan's techniques to prevent groupthink. Whenever a group reached a decision while sober, they later reconsidered it while intoxicated.

David Packard, on the other hand, gave an employee a medal for defying him. The co-founder of Hewlett-Packard tells this story. Years ago at a Hewlett-Packard lab, they told a young engineer to give up work on a display monitor he was developing. In response, he went "on vacation," touring California and dropping in on potential customers to show them the monitor and gauge their interest. The customers loved it, he continued working on it, and then he somehow persuaded his manager to put it into production. The company sold more than seventeen thousand of his monitors and repaped a sales revenue of thirty-five million dollars. Later, at a meeting of Hewlett-Packard engineers, Packard gave the young man a medal "for extraordinary contempt and defiance beyond the

normal call of engineering duty.”

The Praised Generation Hits the Workforce

—If the wrong kinds of praise lead kids down the path of entitlement, dependence, and fragility, maybe the right kinds of praise can lead them down the path of hard work and greater hardiness. We have shown in our research that with the right kinds of feedback even adults can be motivated to choose challenging tasks and confront their mistakes.

What would this feedback look or sound like in the workplace? Instead of just giving employees an award for the smartest idea or praise for a brilliant performance, they would get praise for taking initiative, for seeing a difficult task through, for struggling and learning something new, for being undaunted by a setback, or for being open to and acting on criticism. Maybe it could be praise for not needing constant praise!

Margin note - elevate

Are Negotiators Born or Made?

One of the key things that the successful business person must be good at is negotiation. In fact, it's hard to imagine how a business could thrive without skilled negotiator at the helm. Laura Kray and Michael Haselhuhn have shown that mindsets have an important impact on negotiation success. In one study, they taught people either a fixed or a growth mindset about negotiation skills. Half of the participants read an article called “Negotiation Ability, Like Plaster, Is Pretty Stable Over Time.” The other half read one called “Negotiation Ability Is Changeable and Can Be Developed.” To give you a flavor for the articles, the growth mindset article started by saying, “While it used to be believed that negotiating was a fixed skill that people were either born with or not, experts in the field now believe that negotiating is a dynamic skill that can be cultivated and developed over a lifetime.”

The participants were then asked to select the kind of negotiation task they wanted. They could choose one that showed off their negotiation skills, although they would not learn anything new. Or they could choose one in which they might make mistakes and get confused, but they would learn some useful negotiation skills. Almost half (47 percent) of the people who were taught the fixed mindset about negotiation skills chose the task that simply showed off their skills, but only 12 percent of those who were taught the growth mindset cared to produce this show off a task. This means that 88 percent of the people who learned a growth mindset wanted to dig into the tasks that would improve their negotiation skills.

In their next study, Kray and Haselhuhn monitored people as they engaged in negotiations. Again, half of the people were given a fixed mindset about negotiation skills and the other half were given a growth mindset. The people, two at a time, engaged in an employment negotiation. In each pair, one person was the job candidate and the other was the recruiter, and they negotiated on eight issues, including salary, vacation time, and benefits. By the end of the negotiation, those with the growth mindset were the clear winners, doing almost twice as well as those with the fixed mindset. The people who had learned that the growth mindset persevered through the rough spots and stalemates to gain more favorable outcomes.

Finally, a growth mindset promoted greater learning. Those MBA students who endorsed a growth mindset on the first day of the negotiation course earned higher final grades in the course weeks later. This grade was based on performance on written assignments, in class discussions, and during class presentations, and reflected a deeper comprehension of negotiation theory and practice.

Corporate Training: Are Managers Born or Made?

Millions of dollars and thousands of hours are spent each year trying to teach leaders and managers how to coach their employees and give them effective feedback. Yet much of this training is ineffective, and many leaders and managers remain poor coaches. Is that because this can't be trained? No, that's not the reason. Research sheds light on why corporate training often fails.

Studies by Peter Heslin, Don VandeWalle, and Gary Latham Show that many managers do not believe in personal change. These fixed-mindset managers simply look for existing talent—they judge employees as competent or incompetent at the start and that's that. They do relatively little developmental coaching and when employees do improve, they may fail to take notice, remaining stuck in their initial impression. What's more (like managers at Enron), they are far less likely to seek or accept critical feedback from their employees. Why bother to coach employees if they can't change and why get feedback from them if you can change?

Managers with a growth mindset think it's nice to have talent, but that's just the starting point. These managers

are more committed to their employees development, and to their own. They give a great deal more developmental coaching, they notice Improvement in an employee's performance, and they welcomed critiques from their employees.

Most exciting, the growth mindset can be taught to managers. Heslin and his colleagues conducted a brief Workshop based on well-established psychological principles. (By the way, with a few changes, it could just as easily be used to promote a growth mindset in teachers or coaches.) The workshop starts off with a video and a scientific article about how the brain changes with learning. As with our “Brainology” workshop (described in chapter 8), it’s always compelling for people to understand how dynamic the brain is and how it changes with learning. The article goes on to talk about how change is possible throughout life and how people can develop their abilities at most tasks with coaching and practice. Although managers, of course, want to find the right person for a job, the exactly right person doesn't always come along. However, training and experience can often draw out and develop the qualities required for successful performance.

The workshop then takes managers through a series of exercises in which a) they consider why it's important to understand that people can develop their abilities, b) they think of areas in which they once had low ability but now perform well, c) they write to a struggling protege about how his or her abilities can be developed, and d) they recall times they have seen people learn to do things they never thought these people could do. In each case, they reflect upon why and how change takes place.

After the workshop, there was a rapid change and how readily the participating managers detected Improvement in employee performance, and how willing they were to coach a poor performer, and in the quantity and quality of their coaching suggestions. What's more, these changes persisted over the six-week period in which they were followed up.

What does this mean? First, it means that our best bet is not simply to hire the most talented managers we can find and turn them loose, but to look for managers who also and body a growth mindset: a zest for teaching and learning, and openness to giving and receiving feedback, and an ability to confront and surmount obstacles.

It also means we need to train leaders, managers, and employees to believe in growth, in addition to training them in the specifics of effective communication and mentoring. Indeed, a growth mindset workshop might be a good first step in any major training program.

Finally, it means creating a growth mindset environment in which people can Thrive. This involves:

- Presenting skills as learnable
- Conveying that the organization values learning and perseverance, not just ready-made genius or talent
- Giving feedback in a way that promotes learning and future success
- Presenting managers as resources for learning

Without a belief in human development, many corporate training programs become exercises of limited value. With a belief in development, such programs give meaning to the term human resources and become a means of tapping enormous potential.

Are Leaders Born or Made?

___The lesson is: Create an organization that prizes the development of ability--and watch the leaders emerge.

Margin note: Lindsey dev?

Organizational Mindsets *Margin note - focus group assessment*

___An organization mind embody a fixed mindset, conveying that the employees either “have it” or they don’t: We called this a “culture of genius.” Or it might embody more of a growth mindset, conveying that people can grow and improve with effort, good strategies, and good mentoring. We call this a “culture of development.”

To determine a company’s mindset, we asked a diverse sample of employees at each organization how much they agreed with statements like these: *When it comes to being successful, this company seems to believe that people have a certain amount of talent, and they can’t really do much to change it (fixed mindset). This company values natural intelligence and business talent more than any other characteristics (also fixed mindset). This company genuinely values the personal development and growth of its employees (growth mindset).*

We then compiled the responses and they revealed something important: there was a strong consensus within each company about whether the company had fixed- or growth-mindset beliefs and values. We were now ready to

examine the impact of the company's mindset--on employee's trust in the company, on their sense of empowerment and commitment, and on the level of collaboration, Innovation, and ethical behavior that was embraced in the organization.

What we found was fascinating. People who work in growth-mindset organizations have far more trust in their company and a much greater sense of empowerment, ownership, and commitment. For example, when employees were asked to rate statements such as *"People are trustworthy in this organization,"* those in growth-mindset companies expressed far higher agreement. Right in line with this, employees in growth-mindset companies also reported that they were much more committed to their company and more willing to go the extra mile for it. *"I feel a strong sense of ownership and commitment to the future of this company."* Those who worked in fixed mindset companies, however, expressed greater interest in leaving their company for another.

It's nice that employees in growth mindset-organizations field trusting and committed, but what about agility and innovation? That's something that organizations should and do care greatly about these days. Perhaps a company has to sacrifice some comfort and loyalty to be on the leading edge. Perhaps a belief in fixed talent motivates innovation.

It doesn't look that way.

It's actually the employees in the growth-mindset companies who say that their organization supports (reasonable) risk-taking, innovation, and creativity. For example, they agreed *far* more strongly with statements like this: *"This company genuinely supports risk-taking and will support me even if I fail"* and *"People are encouraged to be innovative in this company--creativity is welcomed."*

Employees in the fixed-mindset companies not only say that their companies are less likely to support them in risk-taking and innovation, they are also far more likely to agree that their organizations are rife with cutthroat or unethical behavior: *"In this company there is a lot of cheating, taking shortcuts, and cutting corners"* or *"In this company people often hide information and keep secrets."* It makes a lot of sense when you think about it. When organizations put the premium on natural talent, then everyone wants to be the superstar, everyone wants to shine brighter than the others, and people may be more likely to cheat or cut corners to do so. Teamwork can take a nosedive.

So, employees in growth-mindset companies have more positive views of their organizations, but is that admiration reciprocated? Yes, it is. Supervisors in growth-mindset companies had significantly more positive views of their employees--and on dimensions companies should care about. Supervisors in growth-mindset companies rated their employees as more collaborative and more committed to learning and growing. And as more innovative. And as having far greater management potential. These are all things that make a company more agile and more likely to stay in the vanguard.

I love this last finding: Supervisors in growth-mindset companies saw their team members as having far greater management potential than did supervisors in fixed-mindset companies. They saw future leaders in the making. I love the irony. The fixed-mindset companies presumably searched for the talent, hired the talent, and rewarded the talent--but now they were looking around and saying, *"Where's the talent?"* :The talent wasn't flourishing.

Our findings tell us it's possible to weave a fixed or growth mindset into the very fabric of an organization to create a culture of genius or a culture of development. Everybody knows that the business models of the past are no longer valid and that modern companies must constantly reinvent themselves to stay alive. Which companies do you think have a better chance of thriving in today's world?

Grow Your Mindset

- Are you in a fixed mindset or a growth mindset workplace? Do you feel people are just judging you or are they helping you develop? Maybe you could try making it a more growth-mindset Place, starting with yourself. Are there ways you could be less defensive about your mistakes? Could you profit more from the feedback you get? Are there ways you can create more learning experiences for yourself?
- How do you act toward others in your workplace? Are you a fixed-mindset boss, focused on your power more than on your employees well-being? Do you ever reaffirm your status by demeaning others? Do you ever try to hold back high-performing employees because they threaten you?

Consider ways to help your employees develop on the job: Apprenticeships? Workshops? Coaching sessions? Think about how you can start seeing and treating your employees as your collaborators, as a team. Make a list of strategies and try them out. Do this even if you already think of yourself as a growth-

mindset boss. Well-placed support and growth promoting feedback never hurt.

- If you run a company, look at it from a mindset perspective. Does it need you to do a Lou Gerstner on it? Think seriously about how to root out elitism and create a culture of self-examination, open communication, and teamwork. Read Gerstner's excellent book *Who Says Elephants Can't Dance?* To see how it's done.
- Is your workplace set up to promote groupthink? If so, the whole decision-making process is in trouble. Create ways to foster alternative views and constructive criticism. Assign people to play the devil's advocate, taking opposing viewpoints so you can see the holes in your position. Get people to wage debates that argue different sides of the issue. Have an anonymous suggestion box that employees must contribute to as part of the decision-making process. Remember, people can be independent thinkers and team players at the same time. Help them fill both roles.

Chapter 7: Parents, Teachers, and Coaches: Where do Mindsets Come From?

Parents (and Teachers): Messages about Success and Failure

Messages about Success

Praising children's intelligence harms their motivation and it harms their performance.

Parents think they can hand children permanent confidence--like a gift--by praising their brains and talent. It doesn't work, and in fact has the opposite effect. It makes children doubt themselves as soon as anything is hard or anything goes wrong. If parents want to give their children a gift, the best thing they can do is to teach their children to love challenges, be intrigued by mistakes, enjoy effort, seek new strategies, and keep on learning. That way, their children don't have to be slaves of praise. They will have a lifelong way to build and repair their own confidence.

Sending Messages About Process and Growth

Does this mean we can't praise our children enthusiastically when they do something great? Should we try to restrain our admiration for their successes? Not at all. It just means that we should keep away from a certain *kind* of praise--praise that judges their intelligence or talent. Or praise that implies that we're proud of them for their intelligence or talent rather than for the work they put in.

We can appreciate them as much as we want for the growth-oriented process--what they accomplished through practice, study, persistence, and good strategies. And we can ask them about their work in a way that recognizes and shows interest in their efforts and choices.

"You really studied for your test and your improvement shows it. You read the material over several times, you outlined it, and you tested yourself on it. It really worked!"

"I like the way you tried all kinds of strategies on that math problem until you finally got it. You thought of a lot of different ways to do it and found the one that worked!"

"I like that you took on that challenging project for your science class. It will take a lot of work--doing the research, designing the apparatus, buying the parts, and building it. Boy, you're going to learn a lot of great things."

"I know school used to be easy for you and you used to feel like the smart kid all the time. But the truth is that you weren't using your brain to the fullest. I'm really excited about how you're stretching yourself now and working to learn hard things."

"That homework was so long and involved. I really admire the way you concentrated and finished it."

"That picture has so many beautiful colors. Tell me about them."

"You put so much thought into this essay. It really makes me understand Shakespeare in a new way."

"The passion you put into that piano piece gives me a real feeling of joy. How do you feel when you play it?"

What about a student who worked hard and *didn't* do well?

"We all have different learning curves. It may take more time for you to catch on to this and be comfortable with this material, but if you keep at it like this you will."

"Everyone learns in a different way. Let's keep trying to find a way that works for you."

Sometimes people are careful to use growth-oriented praise with their children but then ruin it by the way they talk about others.

One more thing about praise. When we say to children, "Wow, you did that so quickly!" or "Look, you didn't make any mistakes!" what messages are we sending? We are telling them that what we prize are speed and perfection. Speed and perfection are the enemy of difficult learning.

Should we deny them the praise they have earned? Yes. When this happens, I say, "Whoops. I guess that was too easy. I apologize for wasting your time. Let's do something you can really learn from!"

Reassuring Children

Messages About Failure

Praising success should be the least of our problems, right? Failure seems like a much more delicate matter. Children may already feel discouraged and vulnerable. Let's tune in again, this time to the messages parents can send in times of failure.

Nine-year-old Elizabeth was on her way to her first gymnastics meet. Lanky, flexible, and energetic, she was just right for gymnastics, and she loved it. Of course, she was a little nervous about competing, but she was good at gymnastics and felt confident of doing well. She had even thought about the perfect place in her room to hang the ribbon she would win.

In the first event, the floor exercises, Elizabeth went first. Although she did a nice job, the scoring changed after the first few girls and she lost. Elizabeth also did well in other events, but not well enough to win. By the end of the evening, she had received no ribbons and was devastated.

What would you do if you were Elizabeth's parents?

1. Tell Elizabeth *you* thought she was the best.
2. Tell her she was robbed of a ribbon that was rightfully hers.
3. Reassure her that gymnastics is not that important.
4. Tell her she has the ability and will surely win next time.
5. Tell her she didn't deserve to win.

There is a strong message in our society about how to boost children's self-esteem, and a main part of that message is: *Protect them from failure!* While this may help with the immediate problem of a child's disappointment, it can be harmful in the long run. Why?

Let's look at the five possible reactions from a mindset point of view and listen to the messages:

The first (*you* thought she was the best) is basically insincere. She was not the best--you know it, and she does, too. This offers her no recipe for how to recover or how to improve.

The second (she was robbed) places blame on others, when in fact the problem was mostly with her performance, not the judges. Do you want her to grow up blaming others for her deficiencies?

The third (reassure her that gymnastics doesn't really matter) teaches her to devalue something if she doesn't do well in it right away. Is this the message you want to send?

The fourth (she has the ability) may be the most dangerous message of all. Does ability automatically take you where you want to go? If Elizabeth didn't win this meet, why should she win the next one?

The last option (tell her she didn't deserve to win) seems hardhearted under the circumstances. And of course you wouldn't say it quite that way. But that's pretty much what her growth-minded father told her.

Here's what he actually said: "Elizabeth, I know how you feel. It's so disappointing to have your hopes up and to perform your best but not to win. But you know, you haven't really earned it yet. There were many girls there who've been in gymnastics longer than you and who've worked a lot harder than you. If this is something you really want, then it's something you'll really have to work for."

He also let Elizabeth know that if she wanted to do gymnastics purely for fun, that was just fine. But if she wanted to excel in the competitions, more was required.

Elizabeth took this to heart, spending much more time repeating and perfecting her routines, especially the ones she was weakest in. At the next meet, there were eighty girls from all over the region. Elizabeth won five ribbons for the individual events and was the overall champion of the competition, hauling home a giant trophy. By now, her room is so covered with awards, you can hardly see the walls.

In essence, her father not only told her the truth, but also taught her how to learn from her failures and do what it takes to succeed in the future. He sympathized deeply with her disappointment, but he did not give her a phony boost that would only lead to further disappointment.

Constructive Criticism: More About Failure Messages

Sometimes children will judge and label themselves. Ginott tells of Philip, age fourteen, who was working on a project with his father and accidentally spilled nails all over the floor. He guiltily looked at his dad and said:

Phillip: Gee, I'm so clumsy

Father: That's not what we say when nails spill.

Philip: What do you say?

Father: You say, the nails spilled--I'll pick them up!

Philip: Just like that?

Father: Just like that.

Philip: Thanks, Dad.

Children Learn the Messages

All kids misbehave. Research shows that normal young children misbehave every three minutes. Does it become an occasion for judgement of their character or an occasion for teaching?

Children learn these lessons early. Children as young as toddlers pick up these messages from their parents, learning that their mistakes are worthy of judgement and punishment. Or learning that their mistakes are an occasion for suggestions and teaching.

Teachers (And Parents): What Makes a Great Teacher (or Parent)?

More on High Standards and a Nurturing Atmosphere

When Benjamin Bloom studied his 120 world-class concert pianists, sculptors, swimmers, tennis players, mathematicians, and research neurologist, he found something fascinating. For most of them, their first teachers were incredibly warm and accepting. Not that they set low standards. Not at all, but they created an atmosphere of trust, not judgment. It was, "I'm going to teach you," not "I'm going to judge your talent."

Hard Work and More Hard Work

When students don't know how to do something and others do, the gap seems unbridgeable. Some educators try to reassure their students that they're just fine as they are. Growth-minded teachers tell students the truth and give them the tools to close the gap. As Marva Collins said to a boy who was clowning around in class, "You are in sixth grade and your reading score is 1.1. I don't hide your scores in a folder. I tell them to you so you know what you have to do. Now your clowning days are over." Then they got down to work.

Students Who Don't Care

When teachers are judging them, students will sabotage the teacher by not trying. But when students understand that school is for them--a way for them to grow their minds--they do not insist on sabotaging themselves.

False Growth Mindset

What a Growth Mindset Is and Is Not

Misunderstanding #2. Many people believe that a growth mindset is only about effort, especially praising effort. I talked earlier about how praising the process children engage in--their hard work, strategies, focus, perseverance--can foster a growth mindset. In this way, children learn that the process they engage in brings about progress and learning, and that their learning does not just magically flow from some innate ability.

The first important thing to remember here is that the *process* includes more than just effort. Certainly, we want children to appreciate the fruits of hard work. But we also want them to understand the importance of trying new strategies when the one they're using isn't working. (We don't want them to just try harder with the same ineffective strategy.) And we want them to ask for help or input from others when it's needed. This is the *process* we want to appreciate: hard work, trying new strategies, and seeking input from others.

Another pitfall is praising effort (or any part of the process) that's not there. More than once, parents have said to me, "I praise my child's effort but it's not working." I immediately ask, "Was your child *actually* trying hard?" "Well, not really," comes the sheepish reply. We should never think that praising a process that is not there will bring good results.

But a problem that's an even greater concern to me is the fact that some teachers and coaches are using effort praise as a consolation prize when kids are *not* learning. If a student has tried hard and made little or no progress, we can of course appreciate their effort, but we should never be content with effort that is not yielding for their benefits. We need to figure out *why* that effort is not effective and guide kids toward other strategies and resources that can help them resume learning.

Finally, when people realize I'm the mindset person, they often say, "Oh yea! Praise the process not the outcome, right?" Well, not quite. This is such a common misconception. In all of our research on praise, we indeed praise the process, but we *tie it to the outcome*, that is, to children's learning, progress, or achievements. Children need to

understand that engaging in that process helped them learn.

How Do You Pass a Growth Mindset On?

Second, it's the way adults respond to children's mistakes or failures. When a child has a setback and the parent reacts with anxiety or with concern about the child's ability, this fosters more of a fixed mindset in the child. The parent may try to gloss over the child's failure but the very act of doing so may convey that the failure is an issue. So, although parents may hold a growth mindset, they may still display worry about their child's confidence or morale when the child stumbles.

It's the parents who respond to their children's setbacks with interest and treat them as opportunities for learning who are transmitting a growth mindset to their children. These parents think setbacks are good things that should be embraced, and that setbacks should be used as a platform for learning. They address the setback head-on and talk to their children about the next steps for learning.

In other words, every single day parents are teaching their children whether mistakes, obstacles, and setbacks are bad things or good things. The parents who treat them as good things are more likely to pass on a growth mindset to their children.

Other studies paint a similar picture. In one study, high school students talked about their math teachers. Some of them said that when they were stuck, their teacher sat down with them and said things like this: "Show me what you've done, let's try to understand how you're thinking, and then let's figure out what you should try next." The students who were treated like this--as though understanding was of paramount importance and could be achieved with support from the teacher--were moving toward a growth mindset in math.

Chapter 9: Changing Mindsets

Brainology

Changing Your Child's Mindset

The Precocious Fixed Mindsetter

The Growth-Minded Step. You decide that, rather than trying to talk him out of the fixed mindset, you have to live the growth mindset. At the dinner table each evening, you and your partner structure the discussion around the growth mindset, asking each child (and each other): "What did you learn today?" "What mistake did you make that taught you something?" "What did you try hard at today?" You go around the table with each question, excitedly discussing your own and one another's effort, strategies, setbacks, and learning.