

## THE BIG IDEAS



### Mindsets

Fixed vs. growth.

### Effort Is Good

Years of passion + toil + training.

### Genius Is Made

Not born.

### Loving What We Do

It's key!

### Feeling Depressed?

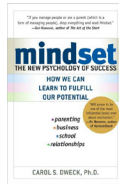
Put yourself in a growth mindset!

### Embrace Your Failures

Like Jordan and other greats.

### Concrete Plans

Are a really good idea.



# Mindset

The New Psychology of Success - How We Can Learn to Fulfill Our Potential

BY CAROL S. DWECK, PH.D. · BALLANTINE BOOKS © 2006 · 277 PAGES

“In this book, you’ll learn how a simple belief about yourself—a belief we discovered in our research—guides a large part of your life. In fact, it permeates every part of your life. Much of what may be preventing you from fulfilling your potential grows out of it.

No book has ever explained this mindset and shown people how to make use of it in their lives. You’ll suddenly understand the greats—in the sciences and arts, in sports, in business—and the would-have-beens. You’ll understand your mate, your boss, your friends, your kids. You’ll see how to unleash your potential—and your children’s.”

~ Carol S. Dweck, Ph.D. from *Mindset*

[Carol S. Dweck](#), Ph.D. is one of the leading researchers in the field of motivation and is a renowned Professor at Stanford University.

In her great book, *Mindset*, she employs rigorous science to help us understand why we do what we do.

Specifically, she tells us how we can move from what she calls a “fixed mindset” to a “growth mindset.” The difference? With a fixed mindset our self-worth is on the line with everything we do and failure is something to avoid at all costs. With a growth mindset, on the other hand, we embrace challenging opportunities because we know that we can only reach our highest potential by consistently playing at our edges and that the only failure is not really going for it and learning along the way!

The distinction between these two mindsets is HUGE and this book is packed with wisdom on how we can shift our mindsets and create more authentically awesome lives.

So... How ‘bout we take a quick look at a few of my favorite Big Ideas from this great book? :)

## FIXED MINDSET VS. GROWTH MINDSET

“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?”

The book is all about answering this question: “How can a simple belief have the power to transform your psychology and, as a result, your life?”

Let’s start by taking a quick look at how Dr. Dweck describes the two different mindsets we can adopt. First, the “fixed mindset”:

“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

“The message is this: You can change your mindset.”

~ Carol S. Dweck, Ph.D.

*"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."*

~ Carol S. Dweck, Ph.D.

*"It's startling to see the degree to which people with the fixed mindset do not believe in effort."*

~ Carol S. Dweck, Ph.D.

*"The other thing exceptional people seem to have is a special talent for converting life's setbacks into future successes."*

~ Carol S. Dweck, Ph.D.

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."

That's the fixed mindset. We're going to explore more on how that mindset can get us in (a lot of!) trouble. For now, let's take a quick look at the "growth mindset":

"In this mindset, the hand you're dealt is just the starting point for development. The 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."

In short, the fixed mindset believes that we're born with a certain amount of mojo. You've either got it or you don't. Every situation you face, from the fixed mindset perspective, is basically a test of whether you've got it. When we live from that place, we live with a \*lot\* of fear of screwing up and looking like an idiot. We try less stuff and enjoy our lives a lot less. Eek.

The growth mindset, on the other hand, is grounded in the idea that what we're born with is just a starting point. With diligent, patient, persistent effort (or, as Dweck calls it "years of passion, toil, and training") we can, OVER THE LONG RUN develop an extraordinary amount of mojo.

Fixed mindset vs. growth mindset. Powerful stuff.

## YEARS OF PASSION + TOIL + TRAINING

"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."

So, the point here isn't that we can do ANYTHING.

It's that our potential is unknown (and, as Dweck tells us, unknowable) and the only way we can even begin to see what we're capable of is to put in YEARS of PASSION, TOIL, and TRAINING.

Now, a person with a fixed mindset would never even *consider* putting in that much hard work because a) they need to be able to show results \*immediately\* and would interpret any potential failure to produce extraordinary results the first time out as proof that they're an idiot; and, b) the whole idea of even \*having\* to work hard would be a sign that they must not be great.

Living with the growth mindset, on the other hand, we know that it's ONLY through years and years of hard work that we can start to tap into our potential.

Dweck puts it brilliantly:

"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.

In one world, failure is about having a setback. Getting a bad grade. Losing a tournament. Getting fired. Getting rejected. It means you're not smart or talented. In the other world, failure is about not growing. Not reaching for things you value. It means you're not fulfilling your potential.

In one world, effort is a bad thing. It, like failure, means you're not smart or talented. If you were, you wouldn't need effort. In the other world, effort is what makes you smart or talented.

You have a choice. Mindsets are just beliefs. They're powerful beliefs, but they're just something in your mind, and you can change your mind."

[Joseph Campbell](#) comes to mind here. In [The Power of Myth](#) (see Notes), Campbell

complements this idea brilliantly. I come back to this thought often as I remind myself of my own commitment to do great work over the long run: “When I taught in a boy’s prep school, I used to talk to the boys who were trying to make up their minds as to what their careers were going to be. A boy would come to me and ask, ‘Do you think I can do this? Do you think I can do that? Do you think I can be a writer?’ ‘Oh,’ I would say, ‘I don’t know. Can you endure ten years of disappointment with nobody responding to you, or are you thinking that you are going to write a best seller the first crack? If you have the guts to stay with the thing you really want, no matter what happens, well, go ahead.’”

So, how are you approaching *your* potential (and your kids’ and colleagues’ potential)?

From the fixed mindset where any given performance is a sign of ultimate potential?

Or from the growth mindset where you know that, with diligent, patient, persistent and playful work we can do amazing things over the long run?

## GENIUS IS MADE, YO

*“Is it ability or mindset?  
Was it Mozart’s musical  
ability or the fact that he  
worked till his hands were  
deformed? Was it Darwin’s  
scientific ability or the fact  
that he collected specimens  
non-stop from early  
childhood?”*

~ Carol S. Dweck, Ph.D.

“Malcolm Gladwell, the author and *New Yorker* writer, has suggested that as a society we value natural, effortless accomplishment over achievement through effort. We endow our heroes with superhuman abilities that lead them inevitably toward their greatness. It’s as if Midori popped out of the womb fiddling, Michael Jordan dribbling, and Picasso doodling. This captures the fixed mindset perfectly. And it’s everywhere.”

We live in a world that cherishes “natural” talent and that believes we’re either BORN a genius or we’ve got no hope. But, that’s just NOT TRUE.

Period.

As Dweck tells us: “Do 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 twentieth century, *failed* her first photography course? That Geraldine Page, one of our greatest actresses, was advised to give it up for lack of talent?”

Love that.

Dweck has a whole chapter on “Sports: The Mindset of a Champion” where she profiles a number of great athletes who were NOT naturals—from Muhammad Ali and Babe Ruth to Michael Jordan, Mia Hamm and Jackie Joyner-Kersey. These athletes worked EXTREMELY hard.

As [Michael Gelb](#) tells us in [How to Think Like Leonardo da Vinci](#) (see Notes): “Genius is made, not born.”

So, let’s get to work on developing our genius and support others in engaging in the hard work it takes to rock it.

## LOVING WHAT WE DO

“The growth-minded athletes, CEOs, musicians, or scientists all loved what they did, whereas many of the fixed-minded ones did not.

Many growth-minded people didn’t even plan to go to the top. They got there as a result of doing what they love. It’s ironic: The top is where the fixed-mindset people hunger to be, but it’s where many growth-minded people arrive as a by-product of their enthusiasm for what they do.

This point is also crucial. In the fixed-mindset, everything is about the outcome. If you fail—or if you’re not the best—it’s all been wasted. The growth mindset allows people to value what they’re

*“People with the growth  
mindset know that it  
takes time for potential to  
flower.”*

~ Carol S. Dweck, Ph.D.

*"Whether we're talking about Darwin or college students, important achievements require a clear focus, all-out effort, and a bottomless trunk full of strategies."*

~ Carol S. Dweck, Ph.D.

doing regardless of the outcome."

This is another theme we hit on often.

[Ayn Rand](#) puts it this way in *The Fountainhead* (see Notes): "You must be the kind of man who can get things done. But to get things done, you must love the doing, not the secondary consequences."

While [George Leonard](#) (see Notes on *Mastery*) tells us that the path of the Master (aka the ultimate learner!!) is so rich with opportunities for growth and enjoyment that "For a master, the rewards gained along the way are fine, but they are not the main reason for the journey. Ultimately, the master and the master's path are one. And if the traveler is fortunate—that is, if the path is complex and profound enough—the destination is two miles farther away for every mile he or she travels."

And, finally, [Tom Morris](#) tells us this in his great book *True Success* (see Notes): "The happiest people in the world are people who love what they are doing, regardless of whether wealth, fame, power and elevated social status ever come their way. The most fulfilled people are individuals who delight in their work, whatever it might be, and strive to do it well."

Here's to loving what we do and embracing the opportunities to grow as we let the results come simply as by-products of our dedication to giving our greatest gifts in greatest service to the world.

## FEELING DEPRESSED? PUT YOURSELF IN A GROWTH MINDSET!

*"Those with the growth mindset found setbacks motivating. They're informative. They're a wake-up call."*

~ Carol S. Dweck, Ph.D.

"How do you act when you feel depressed? Do you work harder at things in your life or do you let them go? Next time you feel low, put yourself in a growth mindset—think about learning, challenging, confronting obstacles. Think about effort as a positive, constructive force, not as a big drag. Try it out."

This is huge.

First, I'm gonna come back to an idea we talk about a lot in these Notes: NO ONE is happy \*all the time.\*

We all have our ups and downs and the sooner we embrace that, the better. No need to suffer our suffering by telling ourselves that we \*shouldn't\* be feeling funky, eh?

Now, although our tendency to experience funky feelings don't ever *completely* go away, as we evolve and mature our lows tend to not be quite as low nor to last quite as long.

One of THE key ways to make sure we don't slide down the slippery slope of a funky moment/mood/hour/day into a depressed ick that last days/weeks/months/years is to make sure that we hit our funk head on. If we crawl into a helpless little complaining ball, we're in trouble. But if we can courageously confront our challenges, we've got the opportunity to learn about what behaviors are working for us and which aren't and we can DO SOMETHING about it!

(Sidenote: I speak as an expert on this! I intimately know what it's like to go the wrong direction with a funk into depression. And it sucks. I'm also blessed to have some sensitive genes and less than stellar conditioning as a kid (my father was an alcoholic and his father was an alcoholic who killed himself). All of that makes me super sensitive to how easily I can go sideways—which is one of the reasons why I'm so committed to doing the fundamental things that keep me healthy—from eating well, exercising regularly, working on my mindset pretty much all the time, etc. I know who I am when I *don't* pay attention to these things and it's not pretty! Now, I like to proactively solve my potentially depressive moods IN ADVANCE by taking care of myself. And, when I feel funky, I know it's time for me to work even harder! :)

So, if you're feeling funky: How are you approaching it? Are you *avoiding* challenges? If so, can

you shift your perspective and get excited about what you can learn from your current obstacles as you commit to working hard at doing the things you KNOW work for you?!

Specifically: What's THE #1 thing you could start doing TODAY that will have *the* most positive impact in your life?

Sweet. Now get on that! :)

## EMBRACE YOUR FAILURES

*"People in the growth mindset don't just \*seek\* challenge, they thrive on it."*

~ Carol S. Dweck, Ph.D.

"Michael Jordan embraced his failures. In fact, in one of his favorite ads for Nike, he says: "I've missed more than nine thousand shots. I've lost almost three hundred games. Twenty-six times, I've been trusted to take the game-winning shot, and missed." You can be sure that each time, he went back and practiced the shot a hundred times."

Have you seen that Nike ad? If not, I \*highly\* recommend it. To watch it, click here or Google "YouTube + Jordan + Nike + Failure" and check it out! :)

To repeat: The person with a fixed mindset sees failure as a sure sign that they're a moron. Most of the time, even the *thought* that they might fail and be "found out" leads to inaction.

On the other hand, when we're living with the growth mindset, we see failure as an opportunity to learn, to grow and to become a better person. So, let's embrace our mis-steps and GROW!!

And, how about some more growth-mindset mojo on approaching failure?!

*"In the fixed mindset it's not enough just to succeed.*

*It's not enough just to look smart and talented. You have to be pretty much flawless. And you have to be flawless right away."*

~ Carol S. Dweck, Ph.D.

John W. Gardner tells us: "*We pay a heavy price for our fear of failure. It is a powerful obstacle to growth. It assures the progressive narrowing of the personality and prevents exploration and experimentation. There is no learning without some difficulty and fumbling. If you want to keep on learning, you must keep on risking failure - all your life.*"

While Teddy Roosevelt tells us: "*Far better it is to dare mighty things, to win glorious triumphs, even though checkered by failure, than to take rank with those poor spirits who neither enjoy much nor suffer much, because they live in the gray twilight that knows not victory nor defeat.*"

And George Bernard Shaw gives us this goodness: "*When I was a young man I observed that nine out of ten things I did were failures. I didn't want to be a failure, so I did ten times more work.*"

## CONCRETE PLANS

"Think of something you need to do, something you want to learn, or a problem you have to confront. What is it? Now make a concrete plan. *When* will you follow through on your plan? *Where* will you do it? *How* will you do it? Think about it in vivid detail.

These concrete plans—plans you can visualize—about *when*, *where*, and *how* you are going to do something lead to really high levels of follow-through, which, of course, ups the chances of success.

So the idea is not only to make a growth-minded plan, but also to visualize, in a concrete way, how you're going to carry it out."

Planning. It's huge.

We know it, but do we *do* it!?!?

How about this wisdom from [The Power of Full Engagement](#) (see Notes) to really bring the point home? "*A broad and persuasive array of studies confirms that specificity of timing and precision of behavior dramatically increase the likelihood of success. The explanation lies once again in the fact that our conscious capacity for self-control is limited and easily depleted. By*

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

~ Carol S. Dweck, Ph.D.

determining when, where and how a behavior will occur, we no longer have to think much about getting it done. A series of experiments have confirmed this pattern...

In perhaps the most dramatic experiment of all, a group of drug addicts were studied during withdrawal—a time when the energy required to control the urge to take drugs severely compromises their ability to undertake nearly any other task. As part of the effort to help them find employment post-rehabilitation, one group was asked to commit to writing a short résumé before 5:00 P.M. on a particular day. Not a single one succeeded. A second group was asked to complete the same task, but also to say exactly when and where they would write the résumé. Eighty percent of that group succeeded."

Wow. So, as Dweck advises, think of something you need to do, something you want to learn, or a problem you have to confront.

Make a detailed plan with the *when*, *where*, and *how* you're going to rock it.

And get on that! :)

B

**Brian Johnson,**  
*Chief Philosopher*

P.S. Why not make changing your mindset one of your primary projects!? What would you need to do to re-wire your brain and create a growth mindset?!

P.P.S. Oh, and when/if things don't go quite as you had in mind and life kicks your butt and you're tempted to give up on your plan? Remember this gem from Dr. Dweck: "It would be nice if this didn't happen, but it's irrelevant. It might be easier to mobilize for action if I felt better but it doesn't matter. The plan is the plan. Remember the depressed students with the growth mindset? The worse they felt, the more they did the constructive thing. The less they felt like it, the more they made themselves do it. The critical thing is to make a concrete, growth-oriented plan, and to stick to it."

If you liked this Note,  
you'll probably like...

[The Talent Code](#)

[Constructive Living](#)

[The Power of Full Engagement](#)

[The Pursuit of Perfect Flow](#)

[The How of Happiness](#)

## About the Author of "Mindset"

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Carol S. Dweck, Ph.D., is one of the world's leading researchers in the field of motivation and is the Lewis and Virginia Eaton Professor of Psychology at Stanford University. Her research has focused on why people succeed and how to foster success. She has held professorships at Columbia and Harvard Universities, has lectured all over the world, and has been elected to the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. Her work has been featured in such publications as *The New Yorker*, *Time*, *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, and *The Boston Globe*, and she has appeared on Today and 20/20. (from [www.MindsetOnline.com](http://www.MindsetOnline.com) where you can learn more!)

## About the Author of This Note

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Brian Johnson loves helping people optimize their lives as he studies, embodies and teaches the fundamentals of optimal living—integrating ancient wisdom + modern science + common sense + virtue + mastery + fun. Learn more and optimize your life at [brianjohnson.me](http://brianjohnson.me).