

## Employee Mindsets

### The Psychology of Success

*by Jon Craighead*

Mindset is defined as a person's way of thinking and their opinions. In her book *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success*, Stanford professor Carol Dweck makes a case for two potential mindset types that produce individual success or difficulties. One mindset type believes their success is based on their innate ability, and Dweck calls this mindset a *fixed* concept of intelligence. This fixed mindset can be formed unconsciously or reinforced by cultural norms. A second mindset type believes that hard work and learning have an incremental effect on their behavior, which Dweck refers to as a *growth* mindset.

The relevance of these two models is that those with a *fixed* mindset dread failure because it challenges their assumptions of their innate ability or intelligence, usually resulting in a pretense of always looking or being smart, even though or perhaps because they imagine differently. Meanwhile, the *growth* mindset group is less challenged because they realize that success is a developmental process, therefore it is a goal that can be achieved. They see it as a learning process and are less likely to be stymied or dismayed. Dr. Dweck suggests the growth mindset allows a person to live a less stressful and more successful life.

People with an unconscious fixed concept of intelligence are likely to have an unfulfilled record of accomplishment. Jo Boaler, a professor of mathematics at Stanford Graduate School of Education, has done extensive research that provides confirmed evidence that fixed-thinking individuals can achieve greater success when they are released from and able to jettison their obsession with perfection.

These two mindset representations are variations of a multi-faceted theme. The reality is that we human beings are a complex mystery, and consequently there is value in both concepts. Perfection has benefits, but if you cannot deal with imperfection, it becomes a handicap. Organizational leaders and teams from time to time are required to tailor training or developmental support by blending multiple mindsets. It is less complex when this work is focused on the mission's purpose. The good news is focusing on missions allows fixed thinking employees to overcome their intuitive setbacks by learning and thinking in different ways other than in terms of possible failure.

The benefit of developing employees to adopt a more diverse and expanded mindset allows an organization to obtain everyone's maximin contribution while simultaneously providing a sense of individual achievement. Leadership must be conscious of and

alerted to the possibility that, while we are responsible to pursue excellence, we may occasionally generate a burdensome obsessive anxiety for others. We must be aware our workforce demands may occasionally have unintended and undesirable consequences for fixed mindsets.

Reid Hoffman, the cofounder of LinkedIn, offers the following anecdote: Silicone Valley is a mindset not a location. This may be interpreted to mean that the valley represents a hotbed of discovery rather than simply a place on a map. A growth mindset is a system for detection and gratifying self-expression. It opens one up to a higher process of learning rather than obligatory course-changing. The leader who promotes this kind of joy of learning and discovery does a great service to the recipient, who benefits personally, as well as to society's advancement in the broader sense.

We all have mindsets, and it can be useful to identify which of these two mindsets impacts your world view. Once that is distinguished, we are likely to consciously choose a path to accomplishment by merely tweaking one or the other. Generally, our mindsets are automatically developed and operate outside our awareness while determining our world view. When they are identified, we're able to direct our thinking toward producing a more independent outcome. Being aware of our own thinking processes empowers us as leaders to recognize these mindsets in others for whose professional development we are responsible. Simply being consciously aware of our mindset empowers us to take charge of our lives and promotes our success.

This quote from an article in National Geographic's May 2017 issue titled "What is Genius?" expresses the possibility of this conversation: "Some minds are so exceptional that they change the world. We don't know exactly what makes these extraordinary people soar above the rest of us, but science offers us clues."