

Article for Module 4

How Your Fixed Mindset is Limiting Your Career and How to Change it

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When you face feedback and constructive criticism, does it feel like a personal attack on your worth? When your progress hits a roadblock, are you turned off and filled with defeat? Do you find yourself giving up on an idea before you even start simply because you've never done it before?

If these questions hit close to home, you, my friend, may have a fixed mindset that is holding you back from experiencing the success you crave. We all want to know the secret to success, to find that one beacon of light guiding you straight to the top. You could say it's hard work and dedication, but, the reality is, there is so much more to it than that. One thing I've found to be true is, a growth mindset goes a long way in navigating the road to success. The alternative? A fixed mindset, one that tells you that you are your failures, and one that stifles you from trying again.

The thoughts going on in your mind are the difference between landing the job you love and staying stuck in your career.

So, what is a fixed mindset?

Fixed vs. Growth: A breakdown

The fixed mindset revolves around the idea that our intelligence, talents, character, and even our creativity are innate, and given to us at birth. This mentality believes that these traits are mostly unchangeable, you are who you are and there isn't anything you can do about it. If you're operating from this frame of mind, chances are, that you probably don't take too many risks, and feel as though life is one giant struggle.

On the flipside, a growth mindset sees challenges as opportunities for growth, and that with determination and hard work, you can expand your abilities and skills. A recent study found that students who held a growth mindset were three times more likely to score in the top 20% on tests.

Living with a growth mindset makes it possible to embrace the challenges that come your way, in life, and at work. Failures become opportunities to evolve, grow, and flourish.

Using a growth mindset to excel at work, and in life

If you're operating with a fixed mindset, chances are that you probably don't take too many risks, or feel as though you may be struggling in life. But by believing that your abilities are immutable and set in stone, you can potentially create situations that are, in some ways, shaped by the way we think; the more negative our thought patterns, the closer it brings us to stagnation.

It can be tricky to detect a fixed mindset, since there is a great feeling of comfort that comes from operating in the same safe thoughts, and thus, patterns. Unfortunately, this can impact your career trajectory in the long run, and leave you floundering in your career and goals — or worse. Fortunately, each of us has the power to guide our thinking in the best direction possible. From how you manage your employees to your willingness to take on leadership opportunities, even how you receive constructive criticism, your mindset has significant effects on how you interact with others. Here are four tips on how to cultivate a growth mindset rich in positive vibes.

1. Start noticing your fixed thinking habits

By identifying specific patterns and narratives that play out in your mind. It's all about how you react to particular situations at the moment. Be aware when you respond defensively to feedback, acknowledge when you choose to try something new instead of sticking to your comfort zone.

As Carol Dweck, author of *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success* writes, “the view you adopt for yourself profoundly impacts 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.” To get started, consider how you approach your work and your interests. I suggest keeping a notebook or a note on your phone handy to jot down what thoughts come up throughout the day, especially in moments where you feel discomfort. The more you become aware, the easier it is to make adjustments. Digging deeper to figure out different ways to respond can help you move from fixed to growth in no time. Notice how a fixed versus a growth mindset will sound very different:

Receiving feedback:

Fixed Mindset: “This is a personal attack on me. I will never be good enough.”

Growth Mindset: “I can learn from what this person is telling me.”

Experiencing failure:

Fixed Mindset: "I give up, this is clearly the limit to what I can do."

Growth Mindset: "Although it didn't work out, I've learned so much and will use this as an opportunity to grow."

Considering your career growth:

Fixed Mindset: "I will never improve, I'm not smart enough."

Growth Mindset: "I am determined to keep trying and will never give up."

Watching a coworker succeed:

Fixed Mindset: "They just got lucky, that'll never be me."

Growth Mindset: "I am inspired by their success, I know, with a little more commitment that will be me one day."

Never forget, your success in the world all starts and ends with your thinking!

2. Let feedback fuel your growth

Feedback is scary to receive. It makes you vulnerable and exposes weaknesses that may currently exist within your skillset. Nevertheless, the higher you rise in your career, the more your work, ideas and performance will be vulnerable to feedback. The goal as you grow, should be to invite in more feedback, not shy away from it. It's all about learning how to adjust the way you view feedback.

The next time a coworker or manager offers constructive criticism or insight, take a moment before engaging in conversation to remind yourself they have good intentions and want to help you grow. While they speak, listen as though what they are saying is gold. And instead of responding defensively, jot down notes to make sure you take it all in. Afterwards, give yourself some time to process the information. Ask yourself, what can you change based upon this feedback?

If you're taken aback by their feedback, resist the urge to react defensively. It is completely okay to say, "Thank you so much for sharing this, I am going to keep this in mind and if any questions come up I will let you know."

It isn't the feedback that defines you, it's what you do with it that does.

3. Be open to more opportunities to fail

We are all guilty of holding onto set beliefs of who we are and what we are capable of.

Those who possess a growth mindset are inclined to take on challenges and believe that hard work, and a strong belief in themselves will help them excel in life. These are attractive characteristics to see in an employee. This is what I want for you!

Seeing failures as an opportunity to learn and evolve can signal to those around you that you are open to bettering yourself. A growth mindset recognizes that failure is not a detriment, but a springboard to success at work. Failure, big or small, is really in itself a powerful form of learning that will push you to grow.

The next time a new project is offered at work, step up and sign yourself up to be a part of it. If stepping forward at work feels like too much, start smaller. Sign up for something you have never done before, but are interested in, like a pottery class or 10k run. Join a toastmasters club or go to a networking event alone. Start doing things you have never done before that could place you in a position of failure. You may be surprised to see that you fail less than you think. The more you can become comfortable in the uncomfortable, the easier it is to grow. It's a muscle you build.

4. Equip yourself with the power of "yet"

When you come head-to-head with an insurmountable hurdle, rather than saying, "I can't do this," empower yourself by reframing the sentence to include "yet." In the same way that failure can help us grow, tricky challenges can be a test of our commitment to growth. By reminding yourself that you can't do something "yet," you can create a lasting impact on how you solve problems and push yourself to continue working towards goals, instead of giving up when times get tough. Begin to view life as though you are a lifelong learner. Just because you aren't strong enough (yet), just because you don't understand it (yet) and just because you aren't good at it (yet) doesn't mean that you won't be.

By cultivating a growth mindset, you can trend towards success at work, in your relationships, and in all other aspects of life. It may feel uncomfortable at first, but remember, if it doesn't make you feel uncomfortable, you're not growing!