

## Mindset & Mindfulness

What we think shapes how we see the world and how we react to the many events we encounter each day. Research shows that what we think or believe has a big **impact** on our lives. Many people have the false **assumption** that the number one **factor** for success is either talent or **intelligence**. However, one's "mindset" and the efforts one makes are much more important than talent to reach one's goals (Dweck, 2006; Duckworth, 2016). Any person can train their brain to change their mindset by using techniques from **cognitive behavior therapy** (CBT) and by practicing mindfulness.

In her now-famous research, Stanford University professor Carol Dweck, has shown that there are two very different beliefs about learning: the "fixed mindset" and the "growth mindset". People with a fixed mindset believe that they are born with certain **traits** or talents or a certain level of **intelligence** and that these cannot be changed or improved upon, but people who have a growth mindset understand that they can develop their skills and abilities as they learn new things (Dweck, 2006). No one has either one or the other type of thinking, but people tend to one mindset more often. This influences how they approach new activities and learning.

Dweck (2006) has shown that students who tend to have a fix mindset focus more on trying to look smart; they believe that success comes not from effort but from natural ability. Such students often avoid new challenges for fear of failure and may even feel threatened by a learning opportunity (Dweck, 2006). According to Dweck (2006), this mindset causes students to avoid risk-taking, and they therefore miss chance to improve. On the other hand, students with a growth mindset approach new challenges with excitement and view them as a valuable learning experience—even when they fail, there is something new to learn from the experience (Dweck, 2006). Students can change their mindset and become more open to new challenges and to improve learning.

Having a growth mindset includes accepting failure as part of the learning process, but failure does not mean giving up (Dweck, 2006; Duckworth, 2016).

According to Duckworth (2016), two **factors** for success are: 1) **pursuing** one's passion, and 2) making continuous efforts to improve one's skills. For example, if a student loves dance and practices every day, they will greatly improve their skills over time. Conversely, a student who has significant talent but never practices will **stagnate** or even lose some of the skills they had. Duckworth (2016) suggests that to be

successful students and adults, they should focus on the things they love to do and make efforts to improve on them rather than struggle doing activities that they do not enjoy.

Within a larger goal, there may be some tasks that a person does not want to do; however, focusing on the larger goal helps a person to complete the tasks they are not so interested in but must do to achieve a goal (Duckworth, 2016). One example is studying in university. A student may have a passion for literature and enjoy studying in their major, but they may not want to take an academic writing class that is required for graduation. If the student focuses on the larger goal of attaining their degree, it will make the academic writing class more **bearable**.

Growth mindset has many benefits. Individuals with a growth mindset tend to learn more deeply and develop flexible and critical thinking (Dweck, 2006). In fact, Dweck (2006) claims that people with a growth mindset can increase their **intelligence** when they make efforts towards their goals. A growth mindset is essential in today's fast-changing world and can help people develop **resiliency**.

Most importantly, we can *choose* which mindset to have. In other words, each mindset is a belief that can be changed with practice. Do you know what you are usually thinking about and focusing on? What is the voice in your head saying? Often people

have negative self-talk; they tell themselves that they are not good at certain things.

Even worse is saying the negative thoughts out loud. In an interview, Moawad states that expressing a negative thought verbally is ten times more powerful than just thinking it, but people can change their behavior and their mindset (Bilyeu, 2020, Mar. 3).

Two techniques one can use to cultivate a growth mindset are mindfulness training and CBT. There are various exercises people can use to become more **mindful**.

One easy way to develop mindfulness is to sit quietly with eyes closed for a few minutes and focus on the sounds around you. When doing mindful activities, merely observe your surroundings, actions or self-talk without judgement (McGrath & Middleton 2019; Langer, 1989). Breathing exercises and body **scans** are also exercises to help a person become more mindful. When using a body **scan**, sit upright and place your feet on the ground, or lay in a comfortable place on the floor, and focus your attention on each part of your body: notice any **sensation** from your feet to your head (McGrath & Middleton 2019). Doing these types of exercises will help you become more aware and help you understand your thinking—how you think—better.

CBT is another technique to help a person understand the way they think, especially about the faulty logic, people often use. According to Lukianoff and Haidt

(2018), **cognitive distortions** are common ways of thinking that are mostly untrue.

Some examples to Lukianoff and Haidt (2018) give are:

...**dichotomous** thinking (also known variously as black-and-white thinking, all-or-nothing thinking or **binary** thinking) ...mindreading: assuming that you know what people think without having sufficient evidence of their thoughts: ... [and] negative filtering: You focus almost exclusively on the negatives and seldom notice the positives” (chapter 2).

Lukianoff and Haidt (2018) explain that merely being aware of these **cognitive distortions** can help people change their faulty ways of thinking; they go on to explain Aaron Beck’s research that these ways of thinking commonly cause depression and anxiety, but by weighing the evidence to see if the thought is true or false, people can see a more accurate view of the world and of themselves. For example, if you say hello to an acquaintance passing by in the hallway, but they do not reply, you might think, “They don’t like me!”. However, many other reasons for not replying are possible. Perhaps they were deep in thought about a problem they are trying to solve.

The thoughts we think have a powerful influence on not only our thinking, but also our actions. If we have negative thoughts about ourselves or inaccurate beliefs

about the world, it is possible to change these ways of thinking using mental exercises describe above. Check your own thoughts and make the changes you think are necessary by using mindfulness training or CBT. Mistakes are OK and change will probably be slow. It takes weeks to change habits. The important point is to make continuous efforts.

(1,162 words)

#### Works Cited

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Vocabulary

assumption	dichotomous	resiliency
bearable	factor	scan
binary	impact	sensation
cognitive behavior therapy	intelligence	stagnate
cognitive distortions	pursue (pursuing)	traits

Activities

Sort the ideas below into the matching mindset:

- You either born talented or not.
- Making an effort is a way we can improve.
- It's important for others to think I am smart.
- It's OK to make mistakes.
- We can learn from criticism.
- We can get inspiration from other people's successes.
- It's best to avoid new challenges.
- Failure is a great teacher.

Fixed Mindset	Growth Mindset

### Discussion

Is there a talent or ability that you would like to improve? What are some things you could do to get better at it?

Who are some people you know that are talented or intelligent, but not successful? Who are some people you admire that became successful from hard work and effort?

What is some growth-mindset praise that you can train your inner voice\* to say?

\* Your inner voice, also known as self-talk, is the voice you hear in your head that is almost constantly talking and telling you how you are doing.