



Stepping Stones for the Good Life

#1 (July 2011)

Mindset: Fixed or Growth?

From the Desk of Glenda Haskell, *Life Coach*

In her ground-breaking book *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success*, Dr. Carol S. Dweck, the Lewis and Virginia Eaton Professor of Psychology at Stanford University, describes and richly illustrates the differences between a **fixed mindset** and a **growth mindset**.

A *fixed mindset* is based on an inner belief that people are born with a set of talents and aptitudes and that these things don't change much, if at all, over time. For this reason, people with fixed mindsets are constantly on the lookout for how they're being judged, how they measure up. They tend to seek affirmations. High grades, for example, confirm that you're smart. Bad grades show that you may not be as smart, after all, as you—or your parents or other people in your life--think you are.

Dweck contrasts this with the concept of a *growth mindset*. People with a growth mindset believe that they can improve and grow. They're often just as ambitious as people with fixed mindsets but react to less than stellar performance, including failure, quite differently. Instead, they ask themselves such questions as these: What can I learn? How can I improve? Where can I grow? And what's my next step?

This admittedly too-simple explanation just touches the surface of the rich material that Dweck covers in her book across a range of topics, including relationships, sports, business, parenting and teaching.

Below is a list of ten interesting insights I gleaned from the book *Mindset* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2006), which I hope will lead you to want to learn more:

1. In general, people are quite inaccurate when they rate their abilities. (Just as in Lake Woebegone, most of us believe we really are above average.) But people with growth mindsets tend to be more accurate about their abilities. Since they believe they can grow and improve, they may be more able to see the truth of where they currently stand.
2. First and foremost, people with a fixed mindset look for proof of their success, whereas people with a growth mindset look for opportunities to stretch themselves.
3. When people with a fixed mindset don't get proof of their success right away, they tend to become disinterested. But people with a growth mindset tend to stay interested for much longer and can become even more determined.
4. Evaluations such as the IQ test promote a fixed mindset. (Dweck tells a frightening story about her sixth grade teacher, who seated students from the front of the class to the back in order of their IQs and treated them accordingly. Ironically, Alfred Binet, the inventor of the IQ, developed the test to help identify--and then help--students who were not doing well in school.)
5. Our culture tends to translate failed action (you failed at a particular *activity*) into failure identity (*you are a failure*). This seems to contribute to the wary vigilance of a fixed mindset.

6. People tend to exercise a blend of fixed and growth mindset, sometimes in different areas of their lives.
7. When students in the mindset workshop that Dweck and her colleagues offer learn that the brain is like another muscle that they can exercise and make stronger, they often shift to more of a growth mindset in how they approach learning. Dweck quotes one young man as asking, “You mean I don’t have to be dumb?”
8. Just the process of learning about mindset appears to have a positive, motivating effect on people.
9. There are good reasons why people—especially young children—adopt a fixed mindset. This means that shifting toward a growth mindset can result in—well, “growing pains.” But the potential reward is the benefits that Dweck and others have identified among people who shift toward a growth mindset.
10. We all hit bumps in the road as we strive toward our goals. Here are a few questions to ask after you’ve hit such a bump (even—or perhaps especially—if you’re feeling badly). What can I learn from this? If I had the chance to do it over again, what would I do differently? What concrete steps can I take in the next few days to move ahead from here? What will you do? When will you do it? [These are questions that as a coach I ask my clients before the end of each coaching session.]

**Tips for Adopting More of a Growth Mindset
(and encouraging it in others)**

Questions to ask yourself at the beginning of the day

- What are my opportunities for growth and learning today?
- For myself?
- For the people around me?
- What concrete steps will I take today toward my important goals?

Questions to ask yourself (or others) at the end of the day:

What did I (you) try hard at today?
 What did I (you) learn today?
 Did I (you) experience any “missteps” today? (Isn’t *misstep* a more helpful word than *mistake*?)
 If so, what did I (you) learn and what might I (you) do differently next time?
 Even if my (your) feelings are bruised, what helpful information can I (you) take away from this experience?
 How can I (you) turn this experience to my (your) advantage?

Question to Ponder

How might opening up to continual learning and growth make me more of who I am?

Grow Your Mindset: A Set of Questions From Carol Dweck

On pages 12-13 of *Mindset*, Carol Dweck offers the two sets of questions provided below. Your answers to these questions may give you a sense of your general mindset.

Intelligence

Read the statements below and decide whether you basically agree or disagree with them. After you’ve answered the questions, see below.

1. Your intelligence is something very basic about you that you can't change very much.

I basically agree

I basically disagree

2. You can learn new things, but you can't really change how intelligent you are.

I basically agree

I basically disagree

3. No matter how much intelligence you have, you can always change it quite a bit.

I basically agree

I basically disagree

4. You can always substantially change how intelligent you are.

I basically agree

I basically disagree

Other abilities

1. You are a certain kind of person, and there is not much that can be done to really change that.

I basically agree

I basically disagree

2. No matter what kind of person you are, you can always change substantially.

I basically agree

I basically disagree

3. You can do things differently, but the important parts of who you are can't really be changed.

I basically agree

I basically disagree

4. You can always change basic things about the kind of person you are.

I basically agree

I basically disagree

Online Resources

<http://www.mindsetonline.com>

"Fixed versus growth intelligence mindsets: It's all in your head, Dweck says," a press release from Stanford University by Lisa Trei

<http://news.stanford.edu/pr/2007/pr-dweck-020707.html>

(Intelligence: Questions 1 and 2: fixed mindset. Questions 3 and 4: growth mindset)

(Other abilities: Questions 1 and 3: Fixed mindset. Questions 2 and 4: Growth mindset.)

This piece is part of a series written as companions to Glenda's monthly newsletters and as stand-alones. Each piece, which is styled with busy people in mind, provides ideas and action steps for some aspect of greater self-awareness and how to bring about energizing changes in your life. Drawn from the author's personal experience and other people's work.

Glenda Haskell is a life coach who lives in Ann Arbor, Michigan. Since she coaches by telephone, Glenda is pleased to offer coaching to clients across the U.S. and beyond. She will gladly provide a no-fee sample coaching session to anyone who wants to learn more about coaching or who may be interested in her services. Contact Glenda at coach@glendahaskell.com. Life coaching is for people who are ready to invest in themselves and what's most important to them in life.