

BOOK REVIEW

A Review of "Mindset: the New Psychology of Success"

Carol Dweck, Ph.D., New York, NY: Penguin Random House LLC (2016 Updated Version)

Review By: Steven Lipinski, Lt Col, USAF

Air Force Chief of Staff Gen. Charles Q. Brown, Jr's strategic approach, entitled *Accelerate Change or Lose*, is a call to action as well as a guide for change needed to confront our service's next generation of challenges. Success will require nurturing a culture that rewards improvement and innovation. For this, we will need to display values consistent with a growth mindset outlined in *Mindset* (2006) by Dr. Carol Dweck.

Carol Dweck, Ph.D., the Lewis and Virginia Eaton Professor of Psychology at Stanford University, argues we all operate within fixed and growth mindsets. When operating in a fixed mindset, we place significance on natural ability and believe competencies are concrete. If we adopt a growth mindset, however, we value human development through the cultivation of our abilities.

Mindset is thoroughly researched and written in an approachable story-telling manner, leaving the reader at ease with the offerings from this prominent researcher. Dweck, who relies on recent research from the fields of Psychology and Education, dedicates most of the work to illustrating fixed and growth mindsets through the lens of accomplished figures. Her examples come from areas as diverse as sports, education, and business; though she touches on personal relationships and mixes in personal anecdotes as well. And while the background and achievements of Dweck's subjects vary, several themes emerge.

Someone with a fixed mindset believes abilities are static and improvement is unnecessary. Additionally, labels predict results and must be guarded; for example, a person labeled smart will avoid failure to maintain the facade of invincibility. They also blame others for poor results and rarely ask for input. One of Dweck's favorite fixed-mindset subjects is former tennis star John McEnroe, and she is unsparing when taking him to task for a lack of personal responsibility. McEnroe was notorious for his on-court temper tantrums directed at others when matches weren't going his way.

Individuals with a growth mindset, however, are more likely to value personal development, seek honest and constructive feedback, and approach life's challenges as pathways to improvement. A section on growth mindset leaders in business links the cultures of personal development built by former CEOs Jack Welch (GE), Lou Gerstner (IBM), and Anne Mulcahy (Xerox) with their firms' long-term organizational success. These examples, along with a discussion on organizational mindsets in the updated text, should prove useful to leaders seeking increased levels of trust and innovation in their organizations.

The final chapter helps answer the question of changing mindsets. Dweck introduces the reader to several fictional dilemmas, and compares fixed and growth mindset responses. A welcome update in 2016 includes a conceptual journey toward a growth mindset, helping to address some common misunderstandings in the field after publishing the first edition. Finally, Dweck argues we all have both mindsets. Switching them is neither easy, nor permanent, and everyone (including the author herself) experiences setbacks.

Mindset is a welcome addition to the literature addressing the question of whether great leaders are born or made. If we believe the former, our robust resourcing of leadership development is better used on other challenges. If we believe the latter, however, growth mindsets could be a pathway for young leaders to realize their true potential. Or as Dweck puts it, "Create an organization that prizes the development of ability--and watch the leaders emerge" (p. 142).

Leader developers would benefit from many of Dweck's recommendations, and fostering a growth mindset requires discipline. Avoid using labels such as "smart" or "natural leader," as they plant beliefs in fixed traits and can inhibit future development. Praise effort and growth of ability instead of talent as they relate to outcomes, and reward the process of trying differing

strategies to achieve success. The hard work one puts in to understanding math concepts, for example, is what leads to growth and achievement, not the test score itself. Finally, reward reasonable risk-taking and begin viewing failure as a doorway to growth, not as a limit of a person's potential.

We ought to contemplate this last item at length given General Brown's strategic approach. We have been challenged to develop a generation of innovative leaders, but that is achievable only with hard work and support for sensible risk-taking. It would be wise to embrace these growth mindset principles across our service; otherwise, we will fail in our mission to compete in today's rapidly competitive defense environment.

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