

What Every (Great) Parent Should Know About the Mindset of Success

by *Sumitha Bhandarkar*.

(This article is part of the **Mindset** series. Get free article updates [here](#).)

- See more at: <http://afineparent.com/mindset/growth-mindset-introduction.html#sthash.kSV8oI1f.dpuf> -

How many of you woke up this morning thinking “*I wonder what I can do today to undermine my children, subvert their effort, turn them off learning and limit their achievement*”?

Not one of you, I bet!

Almost universally, what we parents want is — a) for our kids to grow up to be happy, healthy and well-adjusted in life and b) to find success in whatever it is they do. And we want to do our best to help them get there.

Yet, according to Dr. Carol Dweck, psychologist and author of the book **Mindset: The New Psychology of Success**, many of the techniques we use to “help” our kids, boomerang. Often, we end up sending our kids the exact opposite message than what we intend to!

[Note: If reading the lines above gave rise to a sudden uneasy feeling in you and your fingers are twitching to hit the back button or close this browser page, hang in there. This article may be more helpful to you than you expected...]



The Big Idea

Dr. Carol Dweck is a professor of psychology at Stanford University and her book *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success* has created quite a stir among social/behavioral psychologists, education reformers, business leaders and parents alike.

The idea presented in this book is profound. And yet, like many profound ideas, at it's core, it is very simple. According to Dr. Dweck, most people have one of the two possible mindsets — a *fixed* mindset or a *growth* mindset.

A *fixed* mindset is one where we believe that our core personality, character, talent, abilities and intelligence are fixed. We are either smart, or dumb. We are either talented at something (art, music, sports, math, logic, etc.) or we aren't. The world is made of some gifted people, whom the rest admire from the sidelines. In the fixed mindset world, we have no problems issuing statements like — “*He couldn't dance if he tried — he's got two left feet*” or “*She's got a green thumb — anything she touches, blooms*” or “*She couldn't fry an egg without burning the house down*” and so on.

A *growth* mindset on the other hand, is the opposite, where we believe that everything about a person is malleable. Through resilience and effort, anyone can build themselves into anything they want to be. So, there are no smart or dumb people — only those who have unlocked the potential of their intellect and those who haven't. There are no talented geniuses, only hard-working ones who have chosen to take their abilities to the next level. You don't have to ever stand in the sidelines merely admiring someone — you could turn yourself into that person if you are really passionate about it as they are and willing to put in the effort. And just about anyone can learn to dance, garden or cook.

How Our Mindset Impacts Our Life

As you may expect, the particular mindset we have shapes the lens through which we view our world and impacts *every single thought and action we take*. For instance consider how the different mindsets deal with success/failure –

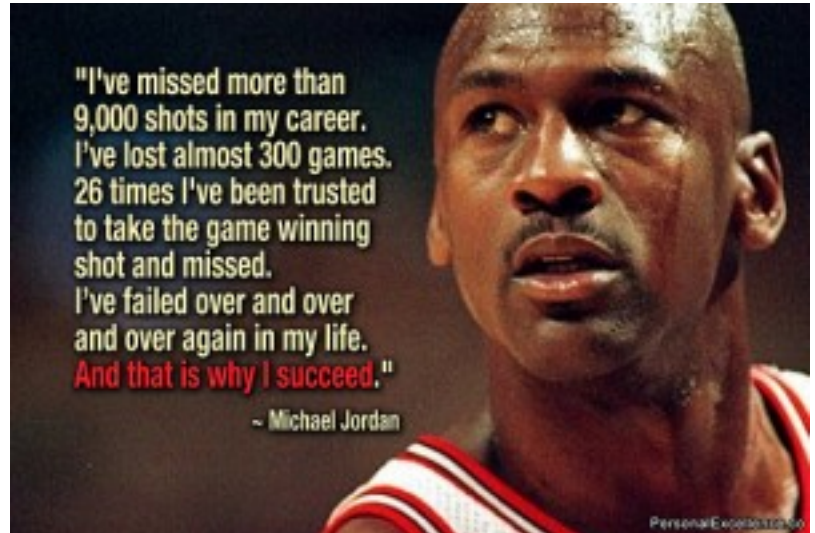
In the *fixed* mindset, since people believe that they are one thing or the other, every little success validates them as a person and every little failure tears them down. Consequently, they have the need to look smart at all costs. Success makes them bloat up with pride. When they fail, it's the opposite.

Consequently, as soon as they face a setback, they scramble to find someone/something to fix the blame on and are constantly making excuses. Since success/failure are so tightly tied to a sense of identity, people with



the fixed mindset tend to develop an irrational fear of failure and tend to take less risks. This in turn limits how successful they can potentially be. In case they do go on to be successful, that success is extremely tormented and needs to be guarded fiercely. Think for example, the cantankerous tennis champion **John McEnroe**.

In the *growth* mindset, people believe that success is a result of effort rather than just raw talent. So, people with the growth mindset work hard to constantly grow and improve. Success is earned and never taken for granted. On the flip side, setbacks are seen as the inevitable side-effects of pursuing any endeavor. They are treated as opportunities for further improvement. Since success and failure are seen as separate events that are not directly tied to their identities, people with the growth mindset tend to wear their success with humility and handle failures gracefully. Think for example, the charismatic basketball champion **Michael Jordan**.



Here are some other examples of how the fixed vs. growth mindset impact our lives –

The Situation	People with Fixed Mindset	People with Growth Mindset
When faced with a new situation...	They generally prefer to stay out of unfamiliar situations and would rather not take a chance or risk failure. Alternately, they may jump into it with false bravado,	They are better able to judge the situation based on its merits and decide more objectively whether to jump in or not. If jumping in, they will be more comfortable leaning

	feeling queasy and uncomfortable the entire time, until they come out the other end with a victory.	into the uncertainty of the situation and working through setbacks until they eventually reach a desired outcome.
When something needs effort...	They snicker. Because those who are smart and talented don't need to put in effort. Things are supposed to come naturally to them.	They roll up the sleeves and get cracking. Anything worth having is worth striving for.
When faced with criticism...	They lash back. Deny. And try to make the source of criticism go away. Criticism brings out a deep fear of "I'm not good enough". (Remember the little "Note" at the top of this article?)	They take a deep breath. And then evaluate the criticism for any merit. If baseless, they brush it off and move on. If it contains merit, they accept the criticism as feedback and learn what they can from it.
In the classroom/learning setting...	They will not ask any questions that might make them look dumb. On the other hand, you can't stop them from asking questions that make them look like they have a better grasp on the material than the others in the classroom. The goal is to look smart at all costs.	If they have not understood the material, they will not hesitate to ask questions — irrespective of whether it makes them look smart or dumb. Understanding something is more important. Most often they are not even aware of how dumb or smart asking the questions makes them look.

What This Means to Us...

In view of these examples, two things become immediately obvious –

#1) We want to raise our kids to have a growth mindset. As parents we don't just want our kids to be successful... we want them to enjoy the journey to that success. We want them to be successful for all the right reasons. We want them to be resilient in getting to that success and handle any setbacks on the way gracefully. And when they are eventually successful, we want it to bring them deep satisfaction and fulfillment, instead of giving rise to fear, paranoia, arrogance or self-conceitedness.

#2) We can't raise our kids to have a growth mindset unless we have a growth mindset ourselves. You knew this one was coming, didn't you? It's sad, but some of us inherently have a fixed mindset. And unless we change our own mindset first, we *cannot* raise children to have a growth mindset.

Do you ever **treat the way your kids behave as a validation** of the kind of parent you are? Are you **plagued by self-doubt** when you mess up as a parent and some random stranger gives you “the look”? When your kids misbehave, does it trigger in you an **inherent urge to “discipline” them**? Do you find it hard to **stop nagging and instead look for ways to motivate your kids**?

Well, that's the fixed mindset in action. As it turns out however, you are not alone. Here, in the AFP community, none of us were born perfect. Neither do we have the perfectly right mindset (yet).

Alright so now we have two things to pursue – (a) how do we cultivate the growth mindset in ourselves and (b) how do we raise kids to have the growth mindset. This is what we will focus on through the rest of this month (If you haven't already done so, **sign up here** to receive free notification of the followup articles directly in your mailbox.)

4 Steps to Cultivate the Growth Mindset

On [her website](#), Dr. Dweck suggests these 4 steps to cultivate the growth mindset.

- Step #1: Learn to hear your fixed mindset “voice.”
- Step #2: Recognize that you have a choice.
- Step #3: Talk back to it with a growth mindset voice.
- Step #4: Take the growth mindset action.

To be able to make any progress, the first thing then, that we need to do is get better at *identifying* the fixed mindset in action. Let’s do just that this week. Let’s focus on being more mindful about what mindset is in play in any given situation. If you get a chance, grab a copy of the book [Mindset: The New Psychology of Success](#) from your local library. If you are pressed for time and can’t do that just yet – not a problem. As long as you do your best to implement whatever possible from what we talk on this blog through the rest of the month in *your* life and *your* family, *I promise you, you will find a noticeable change in the way you and your family deals with stressful situations and setbacks!*

The 2-Minute Action Plan for Fine Parents

Alright, it’s reflection time. Take the next 2 minutes to answer these questions honestly. Remember, this is not a test. There are no right or wrong answers. All we are trying to do is get a handle on the kind of mindset we have and how we can improve for the better!

- Suppose your child flunked *a* test. Would that be an indication that your child is dumb or lazy? Would that be an indication that you are not a good parent? Suppose your child consistently flunks a few tests, what then?
- Suppose you are learning something new (eg., pottery, patience, mindset...). And after a few weeks you find yourself failing miserably. Does it mean you are not “cut out” for this? Would you be tempted to give up and justify your

way out?

- Your spouse forgets your birthday. Does it make him/her an uncaring, unloving monster who takes everything you do too much for granted?
- One of your friends has great marital relationship and the most well-behaved kids ever. Is that person lucky and more fortunate than others?
- If someone was raised in a strict, stifling environment, or if they were raised in a very toxic, self-defeating, negative environment, do you think they are doomed to repeat the mistakes of their parents?

If you answered “yes” to any of these questions, you may have a fixed mindset.

The intensity of the “yes” will give you a hint of how strong or entrenched the fixed mindset is, and how much effort you will need to put in to grow into the growth mindset.

The Ongoing Action Plan for Fine Parents

Next week we will look at ways for us (the parents!) to grow into the growth mindset – for instance with the above questions we’ll start to see that flunking tests has nothing to do with intellect; when you learn something new, failing a few times is par for the course; your spouse is just forgetful or cares about different things; your friend made a set of choices and has an attitude that makes her reality what it is; and no matter what the past, the future can be different.

And in the weeks after that, we’ll focus on finding ways to help our kids grow into the growth mindset as well — specifically, we’ll focus on the two cases of how best to praise our kids and how to handle their setbacks with tonnes of examples. For this week though, let’s focus simply on awareness and our ability to identify the *fixed* mindset when it starts to wreak havoc in the little mundane everyday situations. Pay attention to when you are being defeatist or judgmental, and stop to think — *is this really a fixed situation with a fixed outcome?*

Click here for more from the series **Mindset**



About Sumitha Bhandarkar

Sumitha Bhandarkar is the founder of A Fine Parent. After making a bunch of mistakes and feeling perpetually like a crappy parent, one day she had the epiphany that *Great Parents are Made, Not Born*. She is now on a journey to become a better person, and a better parent one itty-bit at a time and warmly invites you to join her in this journey!