

Education Support Cell (ESC)/TLDE Tips & Strategies

The Growth Mindset Challenge

In our culture, we are all about a good challenge. Chug a gallon of milk? Check! Eat a mouthful of red pepper flakes? Absolutely! How about an ice-cold bucket of water over your head? Too easy.

So here's a challenge that can improve your performance...in ALL areas of your life—the Growth Mindset Challenge! <Full disclosure: I just fabricated the challenge, so #growthmindset won't get you anywhere. >

The Genesis of the Growth Mindset

Growth Mindset: the belief that, with effort it is possible to increase intelligence, talents, and abilities

Opposite of

Fixed Mindset: the belief that intelligence is static; accepting that success is based on what abilities one currently possesses and "that's all I can do"

The idea of the *Growth Mindset* stems from the work of Dr. Carol Dweck, a Professor of Psychology at Stanford University. With a focus on the processes of learning, she wrote "*Certainly, effort is key for students' achievement, but it's not the only thing. Students **need to try new strategies and seek input from others when they're stuck. They need this repertoire of approaches—not just sheer effort—to learn and improve.***" Read this [Edweek article by Dr. Dweck](#) as she revisits her research on mindsets in education.

A person with a growth mindset will more likely embrace a challenge and work through setbacks. It may be taking a challenge and looking at it as an opportunity. A person with a fixed

mindset will just see the obstacle and may even avoid the effort to overcome it

for fear of failure, or may decide to cheat rather than to fail. SOF requires flexible thinking and a mindset of continual learning and growth. We depend on it. Growth mindsets find the opportunities in challenges rather than seeing them as total fails.

[Follow this link to hear Eduardo Briceno's TedTalk on Mindset.](#)



The ESC provides support for the uniform application of USAJFKSWCS educational processes across the Institution.

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The Challenge: How does this apply to us?

Focusing on the Growth Mindset with our students is a shift from concentrating our feedback on the outcome ("Good job, you hit 20 of 23") to focusing on the process or the work of improvement ("Good work, but what can you do differently next time?" or "What other solutions may have worked?") By providing an opportunity for reflection and self-assessment, students will learn to work through obstacles rather than simply settle for an easy (but negative) outcome. In the SOF

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environment, building the skill of considering approaches and strategies instead of correct outcomes is suited for thriving in ambiguous and ever-changing environments where failure is not an option. To implement this approach in teaching, we must take time for reflection and self-assessment in our course structures. Focus has to be on the processes of thinking not just the outcome. Following this avenue of thought, mistakes should be expected, and there should be a concerted effort to develop students along with the belief that they *can* be developed.

Key here is that to encourage a growth mindset in students, instructors need to foster one as well. A growth mindset induces a continued effort for self-improvement--trying new techniques, taking ownership of student performance, and welcoming feedback and critiques in order to improve. Instructors with a fixed mindset tend to have an “evaluator” view and focus most energy on detailing what students do incorrectly vs. working with them to improve. A fixed mindset instructor doesn’t believe students can be developed and then works to prove this point.

Beyond the Classroom

The additional bonus of a Growth Mindset is that it is not limited to just student environments. Within our cubicles and offices, homes and relationships, we can assess which mindset we tend toward and then work to ensure we are challenging ourselves to grow. To get some ideas on how this might work both inside and outside of the classroom, refer to the chart below, and for more, watch the hyperlinked Ted Talk... and always, monitor your self –talk!

WHICH ONE ARE YOU?	
Fixed Mindset	Growth Mindset
I avoid challenges. I don't want to fail.	I embrace challenges. I may fail initially, but I'll learn some things in the process.
I ignore any feedback that is negative.	I can learn from criticism.
I did not receive enough guidance.	This is an opportunity to learn how to become comfortable with the uncomfortable.
I was not given a format.	I will use my own brain power to translate this into something useful to everyone.
I feel threatened by the success of others.	I find lessons and inspiration in the success of others.

Watch an engaging TED Talk [where Adam Kreek, Olympic Gold Medalist](#), explains how the growth mindset applies to his life.

Final Thoughts

A Growth Mindset is not a 100% magic pill for success, but it will increase your odds. A key for you might be to recognize when you are having “fixed mindset self-talk” and then pull yourself out of that self-defeating cycle, replacing that “fixed voice” with something more performance-oriented and positive. For our classes and courses here at the Center of Excellence, it is about taking the time to ensure that our students are reflecting and discussing the processes and thinking patterns and not just the outcome or final status of the learning or event. For us it is believing they can develop and ensuring we are giving them the time for reflection and the space for mistakes. By reframing mistakes and failures as learning opportunities, we can all take the #growthmindset challenge.