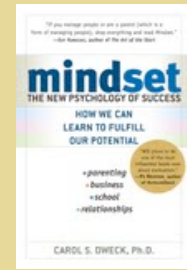




# THE MAIN IDEA

*current education book summaries*



File: Student  
Motivation

Mindset: The New Psychology of Success  
By Carol Dweck, Ph.D. (Ballantine Books, 2008)

## *BOOK GROUP QUESTIONS*

*for*

*SCHOOL LEADERS, TEACHERS, and PARENTS*

**Principals:** Would the parents of your students appreciate a conversation about ways to better motivate their children and encourage them to put more effort into their work? If so, consider conducting a breakfast book group discussion with parents about Carol Dweck's *Mindset*.

## THE MAIN IDEA's Book Group Questions for School Leaders, Teachers, or Parents

These questions only cover the chapters that relate to school issues. There are no questions for the chapters on relationships and sports.

### Discussion Questions for Chapter One

1. In your own words, explain what you understand about the *growth* mindset and the *fixed* mindset.
2. How is the nature-nurture debate about intelligence central to the whole idea of mindsets?
3. Be honest, where do you fall in your belief about whether intelligence can be attributed to genes or the environment on a scale of 1 (genes) to 10 (environment)?
4. Can you think of an example of a time your own mindset has affected how you lead your life?
5. Think about your students. Do you think a certain mindset is particularly affecting certain individuals and their approach to learning?
6. It is during particularly challenging times that our mindsets kick in. Think of a challenge you have recently faced (not a catastrophic one, just a regular setback). How did you react?
7. What might be the impact of teaching your students the growth mindset?
8. Why do you think formative assessment is so important to those with the growth mindset? How could you use formative assessment to begin to chip away at the fixed mindset of those students who have this outlook.

### Discussion Questions for Chapter Two

1. This chapter explores how your mindset shapes the way you view success, failure, intelligence, effort, and more. Either discuss the ways the different mindsets affect your views or use the chart below to fill in your answers.

How would you view...	...if you had a <i>fixed</i> mindset	... if you had a <i>growth</i> mindset
Success		
Failure		
Ability/Intelligence		
Enjoyment of a challenging activity		
Learning		
Effort		
Other:		

2. Not only does mindset affect your beliefs, but it affects your *actions* as well. Look at your answers above. If a student had a **fixed** mindset, how would this affect the student's *actions* when the student received a bad grade? When the student was faced with a challenging task? When the student had to study for a test?
3. Again, look at your answers from Question 1. If a student had a **growth** mindset, how would this affect his/her *actions* when the student received a bad grade? When the student was faced with a challenging task? When the student had to study for a test?
4. Why might students with a fixed mindset be more likely to lie about academic performance or blame others?
5. Think of five statements you might hear from students with a fixed mindset and five statements from students with a growth mindset about the topics listed above (success, failure, effort, etc.) For example, "There's no use in studying because if you're smart you'll do well on the test anyway."

Five examples of student fixed-mindset statements    Five examples of student growth-mindset statements

6. Learning about mindsets is the first step to changing them. As a teacher (or a parent), how might you introduce the concept of mindsets to your students? Brainstorm a few ideas. Below are two examples:

- Give your students some jigsaw or other age-appropriate puzzles, and then discuss who wanted to work on the more challenging puzzles and how these choices are related to their mindsets.
- Present your students with the 10 statements you came up with for Question 5. Ask them which statements they most identify with and discuss how the statements reflect a growth and fixed mindset.

Whatever activities you come up with, emphasize to your students that mindsets can be changed!

7. What are some ways that mindset might affect your students *outside* of school?

8. At this point in the book, how do you think you could *teach* your students the growth mindset?

*For principals or other school leaders*

9. Do you surround yourself with “worshippers” in the form of assistant principals, leadership team members, etc. who validate your actions or do you have people in leadership positions who challenge and disagree with you?

10. Are you comfortable discussing your short-comings with your colleagues? Can you provide an example of a time you did this?

11. Do you put the short-term success of your school (like a quick bump up in test scores) ahead of the longer and slower type of long-term growth that might not make you look like as much of a hero?

12. Have you ever considered using mindset as one criterion for hiring teachers? If so, what interview questions might help you determine which mindset a teacher candidate has?

### Discussion Questions for Chapter Three

1. Why is middle school so challenging for students with a fixed mindset? Are there other transitions in students’ lives where mindset might be particularly important?

2. After Dweck taught some students the growth mindset, one student looked up with tears in his eyes and said, “You mean I don’t have to be dumb?” Can you explain what he learned and what he means by this statement?

3. How do students with different mindsets study differently?

4. How did the example of Jaime Escalante changing the questions he asked himself about his students affect his whole outlook and approach to teaching? Rather than asking, “*Can I teach them?*” or “*Can they learn?*” he asked, “*How can I teach them?*” and “*How can they learn best?*”

5. Do you believe almost any student can learn almost anything? What do you think about Benjamin Bloom’s words, “What any person in the world can learn, *almost* all persons can learn, *if* provided with the appropriate prior and current conditions of learning.”

6. How would a teacher who acted as a ‘judge’ (with a fixed mindset) act differently in the classroom than a teacher described as an ‘ally’ (with the growth mindset)? How would these two classrooms look different?

7. Why might praising for ability push students toward a fixed mindset?

8. How is mindset connected to how much students enjoy school activities?

9. How does regularly checking in with your students about what they understand and need help with help to foster the growth mindset?

10. How do students with fixed and growth mindsets respond differently when they are stereotyped by others?

11. This chapter describes the way growth-oriented students study for a test. How can you teach your students to study for a test in a way that helps them truly understand the knowledge the way those with a growth mindset would study?

*For principals or other school leaders*

12. How do you think teacher mindset affects student performance?

13. How would giving teachers this book affect their mindset? How might it affect the expectations they hold for their students?

14. On p.69 of the book there are some *before* and *after* drawings by people who said they had no artistic talent, but then took a 5-day class to learn to draw. The *after* drawings are a powerful indictment of the fixed mindset. How could you use these pictures, or other evidence, with your teachers to debunk the fixed mindset? How else could you help your teachers understand the powerful potential of instilling the growth mindset in their students (and themselves)?

## Discussion Questions for Chapter Five

Because this chapter is about leadership, most of these questions are aimed at school leaders, but teachers will benefit from discussing them as well.

1. Would you describe your school (or classroom) environment as more in line with the growth or fixed mindset? Look at the questions below to help you answer this initial question:

- Is there room for staff (or students) to make mistakes and learn from them?
- Does your school (both staff and teachers) look honestly at the brutal realities and areas of concern? Do they ask tough questions to get at this reality?
- Do teachers and staff receive regular feedback? Is this feedback judgmental or presented in a way that promotes learning?
- Do the principal and the school leaders receive regular feedback?
- How does the staff generally respond to this feedback?
- Is there a big emphasis on staff graduating from a fancy college? Is there an emphasis on talent? Or does the school send the message that learning and perseverance are valued?
- Have resources (time, money) been put into developing a leadership team? Have mentoring or other programs been put into place to develop staff? (suggesting a belief in the potential of people to grow) Or does the school operate with the belief that there is one great genius at the top and the rest of the staff are there to carry out the leader's vision?
- Does the leader surround him/herself only with people who support the leader? Or are there any critics in leadership positions at the school?
- Are the school's leaders presented as resources for learning?

2. As the leader, what are some things you could do tomorrow to show you value development (that teachers and staff and students *can* develop their abilities)? What could you do within the next 6 months?

3. Feedback seems to be an important aspect of the growth mindset. Look carefully at the feedback given to both students and staff at your school. Is it clear? Timely? Regularly implemented? Part of the school structures or just implemented on an individual and ad-hoc nature? Are there clear criteria? Is there a concrete plan to incorporate that feedback?

4. Explore your feelings about human potential and development. Do you believe in your own potential to grow as a leader? Do you believe in your teachers' potential to become better teachers?

5. Jack Welch learned to hire people based on their growth mindset. What kinds of interview questions could you develop to use when interviewing potential teacher candidates? What might you ask when you call their references?

6. Read any of the three case studies about leaders in the business world (pp.125-133). What lessons can you learn that might apply to school leadership and schools?

7. A big part of a growth-mindset for leaders is opening lines of communication and creating a culture where feedback is regular, expected, and acted upon. How could you foster this at your own school?

8. One growth-mindset leader said to his colleagues when they reached consensus, "Gentlemen, I take it we are all in complete agreement on the decision here... Then I propose we postpone further discussion of this matter until our next meeting to give ourselves time to develop disagreement and perhaps gain some understanding of what the decision is all about." What is this leader really saying? What are the benefits of what he is saying? Is there a place for this outlook in your school?

9. In what ways does the fixed mindset *create* groupthink? Does groupthink exist at your school?

10. How do you praise/reward teachers? Can you see the connection between the kind of feedback you give teachers and whether this inspires the growth or fixed mindsets?

11. Look at the examples of growth-mindset leaders in the chapter (such as Alan Wurtzel or Jack Welch). What did they do to bring the growth mindset to their businesses? What mechanisms could you put in place to make sure you listen to others and accept dissent?

12. To begin to root out the fixed mindset in your school, you will have to root it out of yourself as the leader. If you possess a fixed mindset, consider taking action:

- Step 1 – Assess yourself. Look at the questions about whether your school has an environment characterized by the fixed mindset. How much does this stem from your own beliefs? Why do you think you might have a fixed mindset (look at adult influences in your life) and when do you think it started? The first step is to look at your own mindset honestly.
- Step 2 – Make a list of short- and long-term actions you can take to *behave* more like you have a growth mindset. Sometimes changing your actions can lead to changing your beliefs.
- Step 3 – Create an action plan with a timeline to enact these new actions. If you have a trusted colleague, have this colleague hold you to task for following through on this!

## Discussion Questions for Chapter Seven

1. What is wrong with praising a student's ability or intelligence? How exactly might this foster a fixed mindset in the student?
2. What is the impact of praising a student's effort or perseverance?
3. Take a look at the comments in the left-hand column of the table below. What messages might these comments convey? Think of other common fixed-mindset comments intended to praise students and look at these as well.

Comments intended to praise intelligence or ability	How children internalize these comments
"You learned that so quickly! You're so smart!"	
"Look at that drawing. Martha, is he the next Picasso or what?"	
"You're so brilliant, you got an A without even studying!"	

4. Have a colleague observe your class and write down all comments intended to praise. After the observation, discuss these comments and whether they fit into the category of fixed- or growth-mindset comments.
5. Have a colleague observe your class to see what kinds of messages your students have internalized. Have them write down the comments students make to each other. After the class, analyze these comments – were they fixed- or growth-oriented?
6. Pose the question about the nine-year-old Elizabeth (from the book) to your discussion group and discuss what they would say.

**Scenario:** It was nine-year-old Elizabeth's first gymnastics meet. She did well, but not well enough to win and take home any ribbons. What would you say if you were Elizabeth's parents?

1. Tell her *you* thought she was the best?
2. Tell her that she was robbed of a prize that should have been hers.
3. Tell her that gymnastics is just not that important.
4. Tell her that she has the ability and will win next time.
5. Tell her she didn't deserve to win.

First discuss how *you* would respond. Then, after this discussion, look at how Dweck describes the best approach below and discuss it.

Look at the messages the parents would send with the responses above. The first is insincere. The second teaches her to blame. The third teaches her not to value something that is challenging. The fourth is also insincere. While the final option seems cruel, it's the only growth-minded one that is honest and teaches her to learn from her failure. Here's what her father said, "Elizabeth, I know how you feel. It's disappointing not to win. But you know, you haven't earned it yet. There were many girls there who have been in gymnastics longer than you and who've worked a lot harder than you. If this is something you really want, then it's something you'll have to work for." He also let her know if she decided to do gymnastics just for fun, that was fine, too.

7. On p.186 Dweck writes, "Don't judge. Teach. It's a learning process." Discuss what this means.
8. How, as a teacher, might you establish or strengthen a growth-mindset culture in the classroom? What structures and routines would you have to put in place? Would you need to change how you praise students and what you praise them for?

## Discussion Questions for Chapter Eight

1. Describe the connection between cognitive therapy and the mindsets.
2. How do you think that just learning about the mindsets can affect the way people think about themselves?
3. Honestly, how much do you know about the brain and how it functions like a muscle?
4. Imagine you are returning a test or an assignment to students. What types of judgments might they make about themselves? How might these judgments cause them to act?
5. How could you prepare students *before* returning a test/assignment so they will be more oriented toward a growth-mindset? Could you ask students to consider the evidence – how much effort did they put in? How did they study? Perhaps they could list the reasons they might have done poorly on the assignment. You might also ask students who performed well to list the reasons as well. Brainstorm other ideas.
6. What are some ways you might *model* the growth mindset for your students?
7. If you gave your students the type of problem/assignment that would take an entire period (40-60 minutes), how do you think they would respond to a challenge like this? Are students regularly given the opportunity to struggle in your class? Or do you give them tasks that they can usually answer quickly (such as  $3 \times 5 =$  )?
8. When you were a child, did the adults in your life (parents, coaches, teachers) value your performance? Your effort?

\*\*\*\* If you would like to design a workshop around the ideas in *Mindset*, see the PD ideas from The Main Idea. \*\*\*\*