

15 Ways to Build a Growth Mindset

Want to increase your chances of success? Then develop your growth mindset.

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“The hand you are dealt is just the starting point for development.” —Carol Dweck

Why Growth Mindset Matters

Only 10 years ago, I stood behind an old brown cash register at a local retail store, sliding customers' purchases across a crisscross red scanner for \$7.25 an hour (minimum wage at the time). If you had told me then that 10 years later I'd have a Ph.D. from Berkeley, write a [blog for Psychology Today](#), or be the author of a [book on how to generate happiness in the technology age](#), I would have thought you were absolutely bonkers! I had no connections, no money, no information on how to get me from where I was then to where I am now. But I did have one thing ... I had a [growth mindset](#).

What Is Growth Mindset?

A growth mindset is simply the belief that our basic abilities can be developed and improved through dedication and hard work. It's not so much that this belief is some kind of magic. It's just that without a growth mindset, we don't exert the required effort and so we remain perpetually stuck.

But with a growth mindset, we can break through the stuck-ness and achieve the results we desire, whether that be at work, in our relationships, or in other aspects of our lives (take this [well-being quiz](#) to get a sense for the areas of your life that might need work).

Do You Have A Growth Mindset?

Do you believe that you were born and raised with a fixed set of skills and abilities—such as your IQ—that you had from birth and will stay with you your entire life? Or do you believe that your ideas and beliefs are ever-evolving, that you can learn new skills if you work at it, and that your [wisdom](#) and [intelligence](#) grows with each new experience? If you said “yes” to the first question, you have what is referred to as a “fixed mindset.” If you said “yes” to the second question, you probably have what Stanford professor Carol Dweck calls a “growth mindset.”

Don't worry if you currently have more of a fixed mindset—you can [develop a growth mindset](#)! I talk a bit about how to build a growth mindset (and important complementary skills like [resilience](#), positivity, and self-compassion) in my book, [Outsmart Your Smartphone: Conscious Tech Habits for Finding Happiness, Balance, and Connection IRL](#). But I go into a lot more detail about growth mindset and how to build it in the sections below.

Why Does Growth Mindset Matter?

If we have a “fixed mindset,” we may [shy](#) away from challenges because we do not want to feel embarrassed or humiliated in front of others—who does, right?! But this can be problematic because our [fear of making mistakes](#) can lead us to avoid challenges and new experiences—experiences which would help us grow, [improve ourselves in important ways](#), and create the life we desire.

If we have a “growth mindset,” we enjoy challenges, despite the risk, usually because we value learning and growth more than others thinking we know what we’re doing. And because we’re always trying new things, we often don’t know what we’re doing. Still, those of us with a growth mindset often build new skills more easily because we *believe* we can and so we really work at it.

Developing a growth mindset could contribute to [a fuller, more meaningful life](#) because the range of experiences that such a life encompasses will be considerably broader.

Key Differences Between “Fixed” and “Growth” Mindset

1. Effort

When faced with hard work, the “fixed mindset” person may recruit others to do the hardest parts, spending as little effort as possible, while the “growth mindset” person believes that good outcomes often require exertion—“effort” is just a part of the process. In order to master a new task, one usually needs to apply energy, whether mental, physical or simply by using repetition over time.

2. Challenge

A “fixed mindset” person shies away from challenges, possibly from [fear of failure](#) and may go into hiding as a way to avoid responsibilities. In contrast, the “growth mindset” person finds challenges to be exciting and engaging, knowing that they will learn something valuable from their

experiences. They “stick to it,” mastering the challenge, and then are able to move on to ever greater accomplishments.

3. Mistakes and Feedback

The “fixed mindset” person hates making mistakes because it’s embarrassing. They may blame others (check out the [Inner Bonding](#) workbook if you need help with blaming) or be defensive when criticized. Meanwhile, a “growth mindset” person will see the mistake as a lesson to learn from and will be less likely to take criticism personally. Being open to criticism can help improve one’s ability to do better the next time, which is another reason why a growth mindset can lead to success.

15 Ways to Develop a Growth Mindset

Changing one’s mindset from a “fixed” perspective to a “growth mindset” may seem daunting, but by taking baby steps, anyone who wants to can build a “growth mindset.” Here’s how:

1. Acknowledge and embrace imperfection in self and others, as it is the spice that makes us individuals. We all have our flaws, peculiarities, and weirdness—our imperfections. Like the small black mole on Marilyn Monroe’s face, our imperfections make us unique.

2. Face your challenges bravely. If you find yourself terrified in the face of a serious challenge, stop and reframe the situation in your mind. Consider your challenge as an “opportunity,” thus slightly [shifting your perspective](#) to make it easier for you to engage. Each challenge or opportunity invites us into a new experience that is a sort of adventure.

Try different tactics to coach yourself about how to explore a new path, or how to develop a new skill, or how to interact with a new group of people, or to navigate through new circumstances. As an adventure, [fear](#) is an acceptable feeling. You press forward anyway because it’s exciting and new. If you take this same attitude with a crisis at work or whatever the challenge, you can discover abilities you didn’t know you even possessed.

3. Pay [attention](#) to your words and thoughts. Start to [pay attention to the words you speak](#), even the words in your mind. If your words are low or dark, the results may be also. So watch yourself. Listen to what you are saying and thinking. Censor yourself and become your own guide.

[Replace negative thoughts with more positive ones](#) to build a growth mindset. [Replace judgment with acceptance](#), hate with compassion. If you

are disrespecting yourself or lowering your ethical standards, the outcome of your decisions and their consequences will reflect that. Intend to think higher thoughts and hold yourself to it.

4. Stop seeking approval from others. Approval from others can often prevent a growth mindset. [Cultivate self-acceptance](#) and self-approval. [Learn to trust yourself](#). You are the only person who will always be there for you in your life so you are the only one you need to impress.

5. Take a step deeper into [authenticity](#). Pretending to be someone who you are not disrespects who you really are. It makes you a fake. It diminishes what you have to offer. [Becoming truly authentic](#) is a process that takes time and a lot of inner work. Once you do, you'll likely be more driven to pursue your true [goals](#), which puts you in a growth mindset.

6. Cultivate a sense of purpose. Does your life feel like it is purpose-driven? If yes, [define for yourself what that purpose encompasses](#). If you are drawing a blank, ask that your life's purpose become clear to you. [Meditate or contemplate](#) on "purpose" and see what tidbits come through until you feel like you know the essence of your purpose, or perhaps part of it. Then pursue it—that's what'll help you build a growth mindset.

7. Redefine "genius." We all have strengths and weaknesses. [Explore and appreciate your strengths, and work to improve your weaknesses](#). This effort can help you build a growth mindset.

8. Turn criticism around until you find its gift. The purpose of criticism is to make things better. Someone else can see what you are doing from a slightly different perspective than you, and may have some valuable suggestions for you. If you open up to hearing suggestions, you can more easily develop your growth mindset.

9. Value the process over the end result. Remember, it's the journey that matters, not the destination.

10. Learn from the mistakes of others. If you can learn from the mistakes of others, then you may be able to make fewer mistakes. This can sometimes [calm the fear of trying new things](#), a key aspect of building a growth mindset.

11. "Not yet" is OK. When struggling with a task, remind yourself that you just haven't mastered it "yet." If you stick with it, time and practice will lead to improvement.

12. Take risks in the company of others. Try not to take yourself too seriously. Be willing to make mistakes in front of others, because if you're growing, this is bound to happen. And making mistakes in front of others will usually get easier with practice.

13. Be realistic. It takes time, sometimes lots of time, to learn a new skill, like learning a new language or learning to play an instrument or learning how to become a good lawyer. Keeping this in mind can help with a growth mindset.

14. Speed is not important. When you have a growth mindset, the end results are less of a focus. Instead, you fully engage and put effort into the process, no matter how long it takes. Incidentally, focusing on the process often also improves results, because you *did* put a lot of effort in along the way.

15. Own your attitude. If you value having a growth mindset, then take the time and make the effort to develop it. Persist and opportunities will come. [Cultivate resilience](#) along the way. You are remolding your mind and that's a pretty cool thing.

In sum

Growth mindset means one embraces challenges, persists in the face of setbacks, takes responsibility for their words and actions, and acknowledges that effort is the path toward mastery. It is basically the reason why "practice makes perfect."

By choosing to make the extra effort to build a growth mindset, you can make your mental processes to work for you, resulting in a greater likelihood that you get the results you're looking for and live the life you want to live