 

Although you may not be conscious of them, you have powerful beliefs that affect what you want and whether you get it. In *Mindset*, psychologist and researcher Carol S. Dweck argues that **your attitudes about how fixed your abilities and intelligence are can determine the course of much of your life, starting as early as your preschool years.**

You learn one of two mindsets from your parents, teachers, and coaches: **that** **personal qualities such as intelligence are innate and unchangeable (a “fixed” mindset) or that you and others can change and grow (a “growth” mindset)**. This view shapes your personality and helps or hinders you from reaching your potential.

Your mindset shapes how you learn, cope with setbacks, advance in your career, and relate to others. Here’s how the two mindsets compare.

**Fixed mindset**: When you have a fixed mindset, you believe your abilities are unchangeable. You were born with certain traits and a certain amount of intelligence and that’s that. Many people are trained in this mindset from an early age — for instance, by a teacher who believes your IQ determines everything: You’re either smart or you’re dumb; you can learn or you can’t. **When you view your abilities as unchangeable, you feel you must constantly prove yourself**. If people get a set amount of intelligence, you want to prove you have a lot, although you secretly worry you were shortchanged.

**Growth mindset**: When you have a growth mindset, you believe the abilities you’re born with are a starting point. You can get smarter and grow with hard work, persistence, and the right learning strategies. You have a passion for learning, welcome mistakes as opportunities to learn, and seek challenges so you can stretch.

The two different mindsets lead to different sets of thoughts and actions, and two different paths. They dictate people’s aspirations; how they see success, failure, and effort; and what that means in school, sports, work, and relationships. Here are some ways the mindsets shape your life.

**Success and Failure**

**In the fixed mindset world, success is about proving to yourself and others that you’re smart and talented**. If you fail, it means you’re not smart or talented, therefore failure is intolerable. Failure is any type of setback: a bad grade, losing a competition, not getting the job or promotion you want, being rejected. Effort is a negative — if you need it, that means you’re not smart.

**In the growth mindset world where you can change, success is about stretching yourself**, learning, and improving. Failure is not seizing an opportunity to learn, not striving for what’s important to you, not reaching for your potential. Effort is a positive — it helps you get smarter and increase your abilities.

Perfection Versus Learning

**For people with fixed mindsets, perfection is essential.** To feel smart, they not only have to “get it” right away, they have to be perfect at it.

When researchers asked students from grade school to college age when they felt smart, fixed-mindset students said it was when they could do something quickly without making any mistakes. For growth-minded people, it wasn’t about perfection. They said they felt smart when they tried hard and made progress or were able to do something they couldn’t do before. **Feeling smart was about learning.**



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