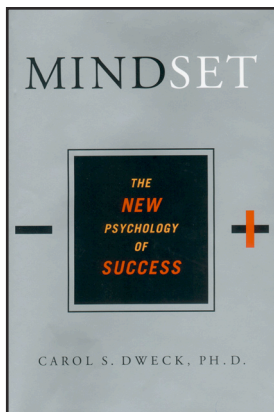


# Book Reviews for Managers

## Mindset

### *The New Psychology of Success*

by Carol S. Dweck



Random House, 2006  
ISBN #1-4000-6275-6

*"In organizations headed by fixed mindset leaders... You keep your head down and don't question 'divine' decisions"*

#### REVIEWED BY IAN COOK

John McEnroe reached great heights in the world of professional tennis but, by his own admission, he did not fulfill his potential. Whenever he lost, it was not his fault. Even his defeat at the 1984 French Open he blamed on sound coming from the headset of a network cameraman. As a world class athlete, he felt he had the right to abuse others. In fact, the image of him screaming at umpires is burnished in the minds of a generation.

"Chainsaw" Al Dunlap, the notorious turnaround artist of Scott Paper and Sunbeam fame, slashed jobs and closed plants with a vengeance, then, bored with the idea of helping a company grow, he would move on. At Sunbeam, four days after he stormed out of a board meeting yelling that a major shareholder was trying to get the stock price to drop further so the company could be sold, the board sacked him.

Dunlap had been engaging in highly questionable accounting to sustain financial targets that he had promised but were not going to be achieved. Meanwhile, he had a book coming out about his being a "poster boy" for creating shareholder wealth. Current and former employees and fellow executives cheered his demise. Even his son said, "I laughed like hell" and his daughter commented, "He got what he deserved."

These are two high profile examples of what Carol Dweck calls the "Fixed Mindset." She contrasts this with the "Growth Mindset," an approach to work and life that successful leaders follow. Here are some aspects of each:

#### Fixed mindset people...

- Believe that their qualities—intelligence, personality, talent, etc.—are fixed and that they have little potential to learn and grow

- Have a deep-seated need to prove themselves, over and over again.
- Feel smart when they don't make any mistakes or when something comes easy to them
- Are not open to feedback or new ideas from others
- When they hit a setback,
  - they blame others, instead of wondering what they could have done themselves to avoid it.
  - they run an internal monologue, such as, "This means...I'm a failure, bad husband, not smart enough, etc."

#### Growth mindset people...

- Believe that their true potential is unknowable.
- Want to learn, grow and get better
- Feel smart when they try hard and achieve something they couldn't do before.
- In the face of a setback,
  - they resolve to solicit feedback, make adjustments and try again
  - they run an internal monologue, such as, "What can I learn from this? How can I improve? Where can I get help?"

**People with a fixed mindset experience an urgency to excel. They see their performance as reflecting their final level of talent and worth.** This, not surprisingly, means that in work and life they absolutely must succeed and win. The stakes are always huge because, at least unconsciously, they believe there will be no second chance...not if their competency level is cast in concrete.

A fixed mindset is a serious impediment to people's willingness to grow as well as to their effectiveness as a leader. People with a fixed mindset refrain from effort because it removes their fallback explanation for failing: "I would have done better if I had tried harder." Also,

*"Growth mindset leaders... are not saddled with the fixed mindset added fear of damaging your self-esteem if you fail"*



**Ian Cook**, trainer, consultant, keynote speaker and Principal of Fulcrum Associates Inc., helps managers and supervisors get more from their people and teams through modern leadership approaches. Contact Ian to discuss the ideas in this article or to find out about related training programs, facilitation and coaching services, and keynote presentations for your organization.

they tend to avoid learning, because, in an insidious way, it implies that they are less than the natural talent they think they are. It follows, then, that these people do not respond well to performance feedback or to coaching.

Fixed mindset leaders tend to work solo, not liking to rely on or acknowledge the efforts of their managers and staff. They prefer not to share recognition for good work, even sometimes going to the other extreme of showing contempt toward people lower than them on the corporate ladder. Steve Case and Jerry Levin at AOL intimidated others with their brilliance and grabbed more personal credit than was due them.

Some corporate cultures, particularly sports teams, reflect a fixed mindset when management relies too much on hiring star athletes or executives with "natural" talent, rather than developing the talent already within the team/company. They glorify the superstar, the genius, who can do (and decide) no wrong. In organizations headed by fixed mindset leaders, you cannot *safely* admit your deficiencies or that you were wrong. You keep your head down and don't question "divine" decisions.

**Growth mindset leaders are much less afraid to commit themselves to a calculated level of risk** because they are not saddled with the fixed mindset added fear of damaging your self-esteem if you fail. A growth mindset encourages openness, candor, and the respectful challenging of management's positions and opinions. If someone comes up with a better argument or idea, the growth mindset leader doesn't resent the other person for being smarter or better.

Where do the mindsets originate? Many children in school acquire the belief that they are dumb in math or they will never learn to play the piano. In addition, psychologists Carl Rogers and Karen Horney believed that young children figure out what version of their "self" will win the approval and love of their parents. They adapt their self-image to that particular self and it works, for a while.

In order to mature, however, they need to let go of that single, fixed image of

who they are and allow their personality to experience exploration, change and growth. If parents and teachers foster in them a self-image that they are able to try new things, fail, learn and grow, they will successfully trade in their fixed mindset for a strong vibrant one of growth and attainable possibilities.

Today's leaders and those responsible for their development will benefit from Carol Dweck's perspective. In her book she chronicles as well the tales of several noted growth mindset leaders: Jack Welch (GE), Lou Gerstner (IBM) and Ann Mulcahy (Xerox). As readers, you will become more aware of when you are dealing with a fixed mindset or a growth mindset individual at work (or beyond, as Dweck includes chapters also on mindsets in relationships and in the education arena).

When you invest resources to develop someone operating from a relatively fixed mindset, you will need to pay special attention to:

1. Work with them to alter, consciously, their current internal monologues
2. Challenge their fixed assumptions with contrary facts and logic
3. Support them as they step up and risk, fall short and grow.

The author quotes sociologist Benjamin Barber, "I don't divide the world into the weak and the strong, or the successes and the failures...I divide the world into the learners and the non learners."

Which one of these are your top team leaders? Which one are you?

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