

Change Your Mindset: Change Your Life

Mindset Matters. It's in the news—whether you're battling a cold, bouncing back after a big blunder, beating the blues, or braving a new and challenging task—mindset matters more than you may think. God has created these marvelous brains of ours with a capacity to improve in function, ability, and attitude with proper treatment, use, and exercise. The brain constantly re-shapes itself according to what it learns, thinks, feels, and expects. Neuroscientist John Ratey explains: "Experiences, thoughts, actions, and emotions actually change the structure of our brains."¹ "But," he cautions, "one necessary precursor to change, though, is often a change of attitude."²

Attitude can be more important than facts when it comes to conquering life's mountains. When we pack a bad attitude, we may expend a lot of energy mountain-climbing over molehills but find ourselves unprepared when we need the mental mettle to scale a genuine peak of difficulty.

Fixed Mindset: Fixed Results. Social psychologist Carol Dweck has studied what she terms the "fixed" versus the "growth" mindset in children and adults.³ Fixed mindsets believe that traits such as intelligence, ability, personality, and competence are inborn and basically unchangeable. They believe that the need to "work" at improving means there is a basic lack of intelligence or ability. They tend to view themselves as smart or dumb; strong or weak; winners or losers.

Children with this mindset will choose easy puzzles instead of hard ones in order to reassure themselves that they are competent. Because of the strong need to "be smart" instead of "get smart", the fixed mindset individual tends to avoid challenges. They give up easily when confronted with an obstacle and view "effort" as fruitless. They ignore criticism and find other people's success threatening. A fixed mindset student who gets a poor grade on a test sees himself as "dumb" instead of needing to study harder or plan better. This attitude makes him more likely to give up on his goals.

In marriage, the fixed mindset believes that "love conquers all." A good marriage should not require work; it should be smooth sailing and self-adjust over time. Marriage partners should be able to read each other's minds, and flaws indicate deep problems. The fixed mindset individual tends to be negative; they suffer from more anxiety and depression, and find it difficult to forgive others because they are so tough on themselves.

Sociologist Benjamin Barber concluded: "I don't divide the world into the weak and the strong, or the successes and failures, those who make it or those who don't. I divide the world into learners or non-learners." It is possible to have a fixed mindset in certain areas but not others. The good news is that the fixed mindset is "fixable"!

Growth Mindset: Growth Results. Growth mindsets believe that although people may differ in basic aptitudes, interests, and temperament, everyone can change, grow, and improve. They have a passion for stretching and growing, even when they are making mistakes and facing challenges. Children with a growth mindset will choose hard puzzles over easy ones because they enjoy the challenge.

The growth mindset person may not "feel" smart but they are interested in "getting smart." They tend to embrace challenges and they persist in the face of obstacles. They see effort as the path to mastery and learn from criticism. They find others' success inspiring. The growth mindset individual tends to be positive. They are able to trust others and "bounce back" when difficulties get them down. They tend to be more forgiving of others. A growth mindset student who gets a poor grade on a test will re-assess his study habits, join a study group, or re-take the class if necessary. He is determined to "learn" and therefore is less likely to give up his goals.

In marriage, the growth mindset believes that love needs a lot of practical help; problems are a part of life, and good relationships require effort and maintenance. Couples rarely agree on everything and certainly cannot read each other's minds! They believe the relationship will deepen and grow and challenges are met and conquered—and they are right!

Change Your Mindset. Victor Frankl was a Jewish psychiatrist who was imprisoned in Auschwitz during World War II. He lost his family, career, freedom, and health. When he was finally released, he wrote: "Everything can be taken from a man but one thing: the last of the human freedoms—to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances."⁴ Choosing a new way of thinking is like changing any other habit—it takes practice, perseverance, and patience. "What we learn to do, we learn by doing. Excellence, then, is not an act—but a habit."⁵

Do you come from a long line of naysayers? No worries. Neuroscientist John Ratey encourages: “We are not prisoners of our genes or our environment. Poverty, alienation, drugs, hormonal imbalances, and depression don’t dictate failure. Wealth, acceptance, vegetables, and exercise don’t guarantee success. Genes set boundaries for human behavior, but within these boundaries there is immense room for variation determined by experience, personal choice, and even chance. We always have the ability to remodel our brains.”

Jesus promises to implant a new mind set, motives, and attitude in the heart of those who surrender to Him as Lord and Savior. “Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation.” 2 Corinthians 5:17. We receive this new beginning as spiritual seed. God helps us identify and overcome faulty habits of thinking and grow in stability and strength over time as we learn more from His Word and through prayer.

First, learn to spot fixed thinking. **Second**, determine to replace faulty internal monologues. **Third**, read the Bible for direction and power. Jesus said: “Learn of Me.”⁶ Learning new and better ways of living and thinking is possible. So practice a new *attitude*—it will help you achieve greater *altitude* when meeting life’s challenges!

Visit us at LifestyleMatters.com or call 1-866-624-5433 for your resources to build a better brain, body, and lifestyle.

¹ Ratey J. User’s Guide to the Brain, Vintage Books, New York; 2001. p. 17.

² Ibid, p. 356.

³ Dweck C. Mindset. Random House, New York; 2006.

⁴ Frankl V. http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/authors/v/viktor_e_frankl.html

⁵ Aristotle. <http://www.goodreads.com/author/quotes/2192.Aristotle>

⁶ Matthew 11:29.