

# Cultivating a Growth Mindset in the Workplace

It's important to be proud of who we are and surround ourselves with people who love us unconditionally, however, that doesn't mean we should close off to the idea of learning new things!

If we become too set in our ways, and develop a fixed mindset, over time our mental health and overall happiness can actually suffer as a result. Moreover, if too many employees within an organisation have fixed mindsets, then it can negatively impact improvement and progress.

## WHAT IS A GROWTH MINDSET?

The term "growth mindset" was originally coined by Carol Dweck, a psychologist, professor, and researcher at Stanford University, in her 2006 book *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success*. In this book, she describes two types of mindsets: Fixed and growth mindsets.

**A fixed mindset** = If we only pay attention to our teachers, parents, bosses, colleagues and friends when they say we're only good at certain things, it can become entrenched in our narrative. We may decide we're only talented enough to succeed at certain things and close ourselves off to other options because we're terrified of failure. On the flip side, we may become too overly confident in specific disciplines and shut off from other things we could be more successful at - and happier doing!

**A growth mindset** = Someone with a growth mindset believes that their basic qualities are things you can cultivate through their efforts and that although people may differ - in their initial talents and aptitudes, interests, or temperaments - everyone can change and grow through application and experience. They don't necessarily believe that anyone can do absolutely anything, but that a person's true potential is unknown and that it's impossible to foresee what can be accomplished with years of passion and commitment.



## BENEFITS OF A GROWTH MINDSET IN THE WORKPLACE

Dweck's research has shown that employees in a "growth mindset" company are:

- 47% likelier to say that their **colleagues are trustworthy**
- 34% likelier to feel a **strong sense of ownership and commitment** to the company
- 65% likelier to say that the **company supports risk taking**
- 49% likelier to say that the **company fosters innovation**

Let's examine why this happens:

**Increased trust.** If employees have fixed mindsets, they tend to believe their abilities and those of their colleagues are essentially set, and are more likely to view their colleagues as competitors in a race for success rather than as collaborators. This means they're less likely to trust their peers and the organisation as a whole.

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## CULTIVATING A GROWTH MINDSET IN THE WORKPLACE

**Better morale.** In an organisation that champions a growth mindset, employees understand that leaders will judge their performance based on their effort and creativity rather than their willingness to support short-term thinking. A growth mindset also empowers employees to ask questions and offer up their own ideas.

**Increased risk taking.** The first two points leads to employees being more willing to take risks in the workplace. When individuals and organisations believe their capacities are fixed, they're more likely to focus on specific, short-term goals (such as sales or quarterly returns) rather than longer-term possibilities. As a result, employees and leaders may avoid following through on ideas that could impact success in the long-run.

### HOW TO CULTIVATE A GROWTH MINDSET IN AN ORGANISATION

Even though mindsets are personal, the way an organisation's leaders manage their teams can have a major impact on company culture. Here are some key pointers to promote a growth mindset at work:

- Value hard work, determination and perseverance over talent.
- Help employees learn new skills.
- Encourage experimentation to try new ideas.
- Use failures as valuable learning opportunities.
- Empower employees to take responsibility and own up to mistakes.
- Coach employees to develop critical thinking skills to navigate challenging problems.
- Encourage people to speak up and, in turn, respect diverse viewpoints.
- Give feedback that promotes learning and desire to get better.

### HOW INDIVIDUALS CAN DEVELOP THEIR OWN GROWTH MINDSETS

You don't have to wait for cues from your management. Try the following suggestions if you want to develop a growth mindset yourself:

**Hang out with people who do have a growth mindset.** If you surround yourself with other people

who have a fixed mindset, you're likely to fall into that trap yourself. People who demonstrate a commitment to learning and a passion for experimentation should be sought out.

**Don't be afraid of failure.** This is perhaps the most important point of them all. Thomas Edison, when describing how he eventually invented the lightbulb, once famously said "I have not failed, I have found over 9,000 ways that won't work." This, he pointed out, put him closer to success. Without risk-taking, creativity and innovation are completely stifled, making it harder to propel ideas forward. Remember that failure is an inevitable part of life. When you fail, there is always something to learn — even if that means going back to the drawing board and changing your approach.

**Tap into what motivates you.** You need to search for something in your work that inspires you, not just external rewards. These are called your intrinsic motivators (or self-motivation), and they're far more powerful than external motivators. This motivation is based on three key factors:

- **Autonomy** — the urge to direct our own lives, to feel a sense of ownership for our work and control over our own destiny.
- **Mastery** — the desire to get better at something that matters.
- **Purpose** — the drive to be part of something larger than ourselves and to feel that what we do is important and valued.

By focusing on these three things, you can encourage yourself and others to pursue these ideas of autonomy, mastery, and purpose. Doing so can increase your engagement and drive, and — most importantly — improve your sense of fulfilment at work.

**Be emotionally agile.** Be aware of your reactions when you fail. How do you feel? What do you tell yourself? Where possible, try to change the storyline you tell yourself internally, from "I'm not good at this" to "I might need to keep working on this to get better".

The world is your oyster, so take the plunge and take an educated risk at work. If you get it wrong, that's okay! Learn from it, don't dwell on the set back, but rather build upon the mistake to achieve something better.

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