

GRAPHIC BY NIGEL HOLMES

# Fixed Mindset vs. Growth Mindset: Which One Are You?

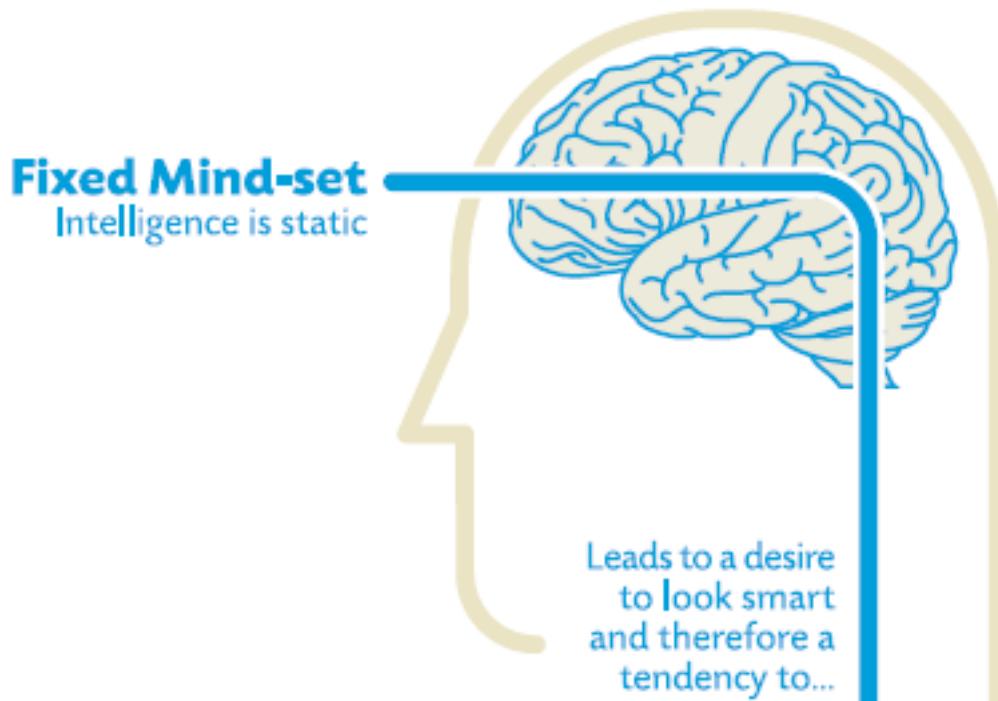
Here is an excerpt from [an article](#) about [Carol Dweck](#), a professor of psychology at Stanford University:

Through more than three decades of systematic research, [Carol Dweck] has been figuring out answers to why some people achieve their potential while equally talented others don't—why some become Muhammad Ali and others Mike Tyson. **The key, she found, isn't ability; it's whether you look at ability as something inherent that needs to be demonstrated or as something that can be developed.**

To anyone who is into personal growth and self-improvement, this seems obvious. But clearly, it is not obvious to everybody: look at [this diagram](#) by Nigel Holmes representing the two types of mindsets and I'll sure you'll recognize the attitudes of many people you know.

## Fixed Mindset

Let's have a look, starting with the **Fixed Mindset** side:



People who hold these beliefs think that “they are the way they are”, but that doesn't mean that they have less of a desire for a positive self-image than anyone else. So of course they want to perform well and look smart. But to achieve these goals...

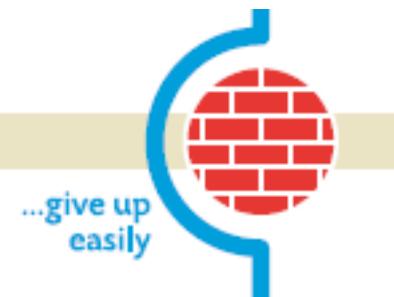
## CHALLENGES



...avoid challenges

By definition, a challenge is hard and success is not assured, so rather than risk failing and negatively impacting their self-image, they will often avoid challenges and stick to what they know they can do well.

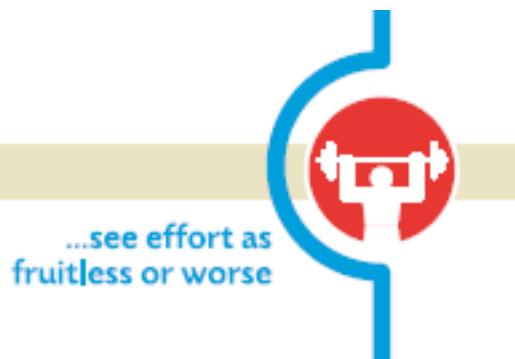
## OBSTACLES



...give up easily

Same with obstacles. The difference here, as I see it, is that challenges are things that you can decide to do while obstacles are external forces that get in your way.

## EFFORT



...see effort as fruitless or worse

What's the point of working hard and making efforts if afterwards you are still on square one? If your worldview tells you that effort is an unpleasant thing that doesn't really pay dividends, then the smart thing to do is to avoid it as much as possible.

## CRITICISM

...ignore useful  
negative feedback



Useful negative feedback is ignored in the best of cases, and taken as an insult the rest of the time. The **Fixed Mindset** logically leads you to believe that any criticism of your capabilities is criticism of you. This usually discourages the people around and after a while they stop giving any negative feedback, further isolating the person from external influences that could generate some change.

## SUCCESS OF OTHERS

...feel threatened  
by the success  
of others



The success of others is seen as a benchmark against which the person looks bad. Usually when others succeed, people with a **Fixed Mindset** will try to convince themselves and the people around them that the success was due to either luck (after all, almost everything is due to luck in the **Fixed Mindset** world) or objectionable actions. In some cases, they will even try to tarnish the success of others by bringing up things that are completely unrelated ("Yes, but did you know about his...").



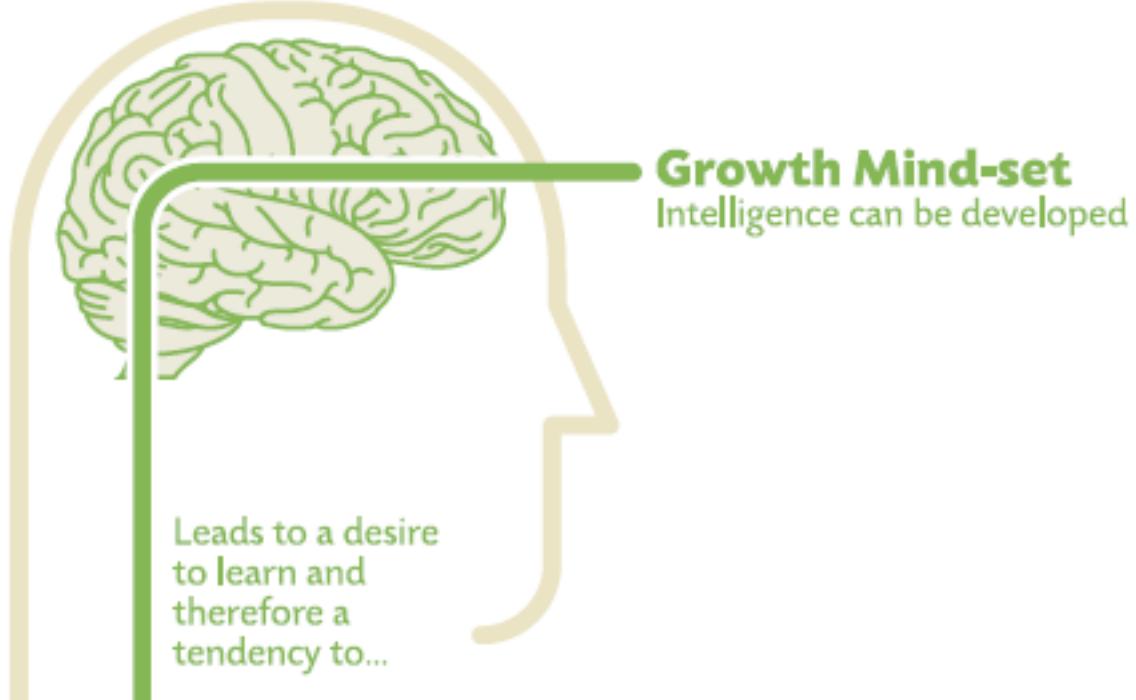
As a result, they may plateau early  
and achieve less than their full potential.

All this confirms a **deterministic view of the world**.

As a result, they don't reach their full potential and their beliefs feed on themselves: They don't change or improve much with time, if at all, and so to them this confirms that "they are as they are".

## Growth Mindset

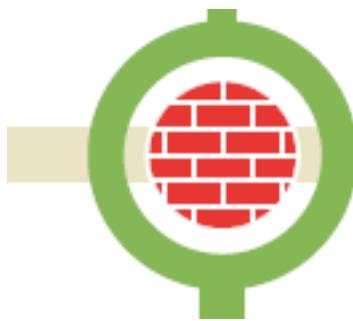
Let's now look at the **Growth Mindset**:



People who hold the **Growth Mindset** believe that intelligence can be developed, that the brain is like a muscle that can be trained. This leads to the desire to improve.

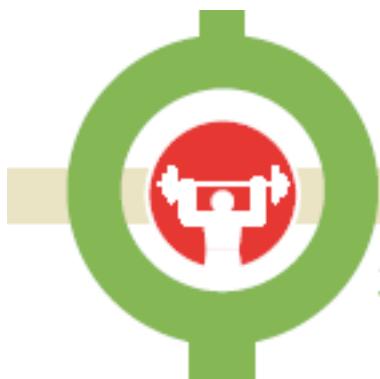


And how do you improve? First, you embrace challenges, because you know that you'll come out stronger on the other side.



...persist in the face of setbacks

Similarly, obstacles – external setbacks – do not discourage you. Your self-image is not tied to your success and how you will look to others; failure is an opportunity to learn, and so whatever happens you win.



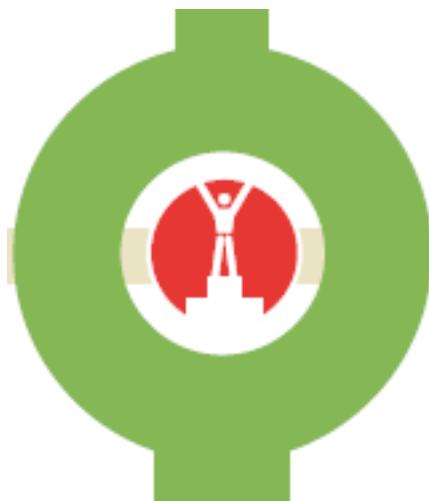
...see effort as the path to mastery

Effort is seen not as something useless to be avoided but as necessary to grow and master useful skills.



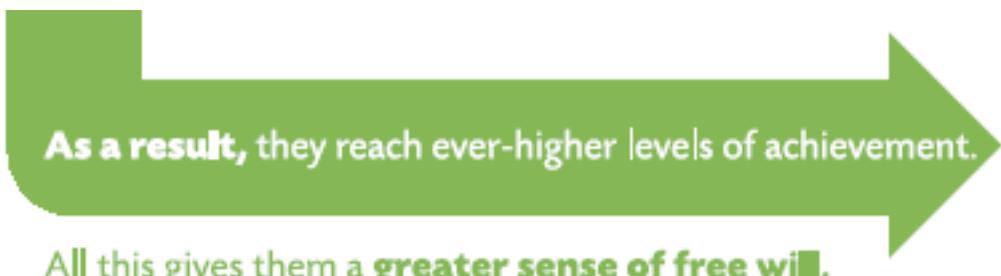
...learn from criticism

Criticism and negative feedback are sources of information. That doesn't mean that all criticism is worth integrating or that nothing is never taken personally, but at least the **Growth Mindset** individual knows that he or she can change and improve, so the negative feedback is not perceived as being directly about them as a person, but rather about their current abilities.



...find lessons and  
inspiration in the  
success of others

The success of others is seen as a source of inspiration and information. To **Growth Mindset** individuals, success is not seen as a [zero-sum game](#).



And so, **Growth Mindset** individuals will improve and this will create a positive feedback loops that encourages them to keep learning and improving.