



How to Foster Talent through a Growth Mindset and Grit

By Jessica Collins

Although individuals may have different starting points in sports, medicine, or most any other pursuit, [talent has a lot more to do with persistence and adaptability](#). Failing to account for that in an organizational setting can be highly problematic.

When organizations focus on inherent talent, employees become pressured to hide their deficiencies and mistakes, leading to worse products and services. Managers become [weaker negotiators](#) and [worse at noticing changes in performance and coaching their teams](#). When stuck in a fixed mindset, organizations cannot self-correct.

At the opposite extreme, [leaders can leverage growth mindset and grit to better develop talent](#) and drive performance. This article outlines what it takes to build a culture of continuous improvement, among other evidence-based practices.

What is a growth mindset?

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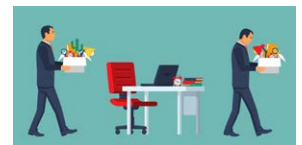
Stanford University psychologist Carol Dweck defines a fixed mindset as the belief you will only ever be as capable as you are now, while a growth mindset sees deficiencies as temporary, i.e. “I can't solve this math problem... *now*” or “I'm not good at leading a team... *yet*.” In a fixed mindset, people withdraw from challenges as threats to their competence, while a growth mindset leads people to engage with challenges as opportunities to improve their competence.

“When people have a fixed mindset, they become more brittle; they’re less likely to work hard when they encounter an obstacle, because they believe that, if they can’t do something, it’s because they don’t have that innate ability.” — Ulrich Boser, Senior Fellow, Center for American Progress

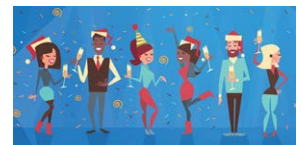
Each person is at a different point on the fixed-growth mindset spectrum. They may believe effort and struggle are normal and necessary for computer skills, for instance, but not for painting



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skills.

This is not just semantics — from a growth mindset, failing genuinely feels like a valuable learning experience. It goes beyond acceptance that effort is required — it's pride in effort and excitement to develop. And this is not false positivity — a person born with natural advantage rarely excels without enduring setbacks and persisting to learn and grow. Meanwhile, a person with disadvantages can still make significant progress and succeed.

“A growth mindset—the belief that intelligence is not fixed, and can be developed—reliably predicts achievement among a national sample of students.”

— [Susana Claro, Professor, Stanford University](#)

Grit

One of the most valuable results of a growth mindset is grit. It is the resilience and perseverance people deliver when they believe that's what it takes to accomplish their goals.

“This quality of being able to sustain your passions, and also work really hard at them, over really disappointingly long periods of time, that's grit.” — [Angela Duckworth, Professor, University of Pennsylvania](#)

[Professor, University of Pennsylvania](#)

Growth mindset and grit are part of personality, which is shaped by both an individual's nature, and how they're nurtured, so there is always potential to nurture them to be stronger — or break them down with overwhelming stressors. Talent is essentially the ability to improve quickly, and even that ability can be improved.

Application in the workplace



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Though largely researched and applied to students, growth mindset and grit are just as important for the experienced employee, who is even more likely to believe their strengths and weaknesses are set at that point in their lives.

“Companies have to help employees take on a growth mindset. This means that employees have to grow their skill sets as their company grows.” — [Ken Hoskin, Head of APAC Talent, Airbnb](#)

Educate and train

Awareness and understanding are the first steps for people to take charge of their mindsets to better achieve their goals. Whether in a workshop or meeting, leaders can apply some of Carol Dweck’s techniques to encourage growth mindset and continuous learning:

- Share stories from respected people within or outside the organization about how growth mindset helped them achieve success.
- Ask them about their values and passions, and discuss how a growth mindset could help them with those achievements and contributions in the future.
- Have them write a letter to a struggling new hire, counseling the new hire in growth-mindset principles.
- Help them notice their [fixed-mindset triggers](#), such as someone performing better than them, so they can identify when it happens and redirect back to a growth mindset more over time

“We really take the time for experiential learning that challenges thinking and looks at ways of treating failure as learning; challenges as opportunity and values effort as a core predictor of success.” — [Scott Nell, Senior Manager of Organisation Development and Talent, Schneider Electric](#)

Nurture passion

[Passion is central is to grit](#) . Without alignment to interests and values, people have a hard time sustaining effort in the long term and overcoming struggles — no matter how big their salary.

Help employees identify and pursue their passions within their roles, or in special projects. Many organizations support employees in developing skills unrelated to their current positions so they can move to roles within the organization that better align with their passions.

Even if employees can't identify a passion yet, that too can be developed over time. A workplace culture that encourages learning and growth will provide those employees the opportunities to discover where they derive the most intrinsic motivation.

Set learning goals

Employees with fixed mindsets tend toward a performance goal orientation, which means they set goals they believe they will achieve in order to prove their abilities, not to develop their abilities. Leaders can foster a learning goal orientation by discussing goals as challenges to stretch their current abilities and grow in their career.

Specific and difficult learning goals encourage greater effort in strategizing and executing, and ultimately greater task mastery.

[Simultaneously setting a difficult learning goal with a moderately difficult performance goal leads to the highest performance as long](#)

as the employee is not feeling distressed.

Bonusly previously outlined [easy ways to support such learning goals](#).

Stretch sometimes

[Facebook encourages growth with stretch goals](#) they call 50-50 goals because there's an equal chance they will or will not be achieved. The motivation comes from acknowledging great effort is required and believing great achievement is possible.

[Microsoft recognizes people who can learn quickly through trial and error, whether they succeed or not](#). They attribute more innovative ideas and more employees developing leadership skills as a result of Microsoft's efforts to adopt a growth mindset. Encourage employees to intentionally spend some time outside their comfort zones.

You might set aside time periods every week or month to experiment with new and different skills and ideas. You can also encourage employees to join committees or projects beyond their normal scope.

Build a feedback culture

[Success often requires reflection and redirection](#). Seeing obstacles as opportunities to learn does not always mean learning how to go through them — it could also mean learning from them how to go a different way.

Keep your team committed to values and purpose, but help them receive feedback with openness to different strategies and techniques. Encourage them to check in with one another and other people they trust to give them honest feedback.

Role model growth mindset by asking your direct reports how you can be a better manager to them. Showing gratitude for feedback,

enthusiasm for improvement, and commitment to action will help establish trust, strengthen leadership, and propel learning.

Focus praise

The biggest shift toward a growth mindset is to praise the process, not just the outcome. Critical here is avoiding false praise for trying hard regardless of progress, without expectation of real improvement.

“Students know that if they didn’t make progress and you’re praising them, it’s a consolation prize. They also know you think they can’t do any better.” — [Carol Dweck, Psychologist, Stanford University](#)

Recognize effort, strategy, and resilience and show them how they contributed to their learning, progress, and success. Acknowledge how difficult it was for them as evidence of their strength and improvement.

Be a lifelong learner

When people see learning as a lifelong process, they can be more patient. Reading feels natural now, but remember the time and space it took to get there? Your team members won’t be perfect with any new skill, so remain realistic and celebrate their progress.

Continuous learning is also exciting. Fostering curiosity drives mastery and innovation, especially when people with growth mindsets are curious about their own capabilities.

"We don't have a fixed amount of resilience. It's a muscle — we don't only build it in ourselves, we build it in each other." — [Sheryl Sandberg, Chief Operating Officer, Facebook](#)

One continuous improvement technique is [marginal gains](#) , which

comes from winning bike races by improving each component part by one percent. Another, the [black box method](#), comes from aviation's best lessons coming from accidents recorded by a plane's black box.

Encourage and model sharing mistakes as a key part of the process just as important as sharing successes. Teach your team to ask for help. And facilitate the resources and strategies they need to redirect effort that isn't leading to progress.

In summary

Organizations that value the power of growth mindset and grit can build a culture of curious and patient people capable of reflection, redirection, and resilience.

By nurturing passion, setting learning goals, assigning stretch projects, and praising process, leaders can foster the attitudes and behaviors they need from a high performing team.

If you're ready to take the next step toward building an organizational culture that fosters continuous growth and improvement, check out our latest guide:



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