

Mindset and Success

(Extract of Principal's Address – School Assembly 12th November, 2014)

We all know that to be good in anything we need to

- **focus** on our tasks
- **work hard**
- **be tough** and not to give up in the face of difficulties

We all know them but not every one of us can practice them! Why? What are the factors behind that drives effort, focus and resilience/toughness?

A psychologist Dr Blackwell did an experiment some years ago with 700 students and showed that **the mere belief that a person's intelligence is not fixed and can develop** will lead one to be more focused, hardworking and tough!

This renders support to a theory put forward by Dr Carol Dweck of Stanford University. Her theory is that **one's mindset matters a lot to one's performance.**

With a “**fixed mindset**”, people believe their basic qualities, like their intelligence or talent, are simply fixed traits. They spend their time trying to confirm and re-confirm their intelligence or talent instead of developing them. They also believe that talent alone creates success—without effort. In fact, if you work hard, that proves you are not smart!

With a “**growth mindset**”, people believe that their most basic abilities can be developed through dedication and hard work—brains and talent are just the starting point. This view creates a love of learning and a toughness that is essential for great accomplishment. Virtually all great people have a predominantly a growth mindset.

For most of us, **we entertain BOTH mindsets.** The question is just which is stronger. To make continuous improvements, we would want to **strengthen our growth-mindset** and **suppress our fixed-mindset.** This needs practice. One way suggested by Dr Dweck is our **self-talk**:

She gave an example on how to “talk back” to our fixed mindset voice with our growth mindset voice:

As you approach a **challenge**:

THE FIXED-MINDSET: *“Are you sure you can do it? Maybe you don’t have the talent.”*

THE GROWTH-MINDSET: *“I’m not sure I can do it now, but I think I can learn to with time and effort.”*

FIXED MINDSET: *“What if you fail—you’ll be a failure”*

GROWTH MINDSET: *“Most successful people had failures along the way.”*

FIXED MINDSET: *“If you don’t try, you can protect yourself and keep your dignity.”*

GROWTH MINDSET: *“If I don’t try, I automatically fail. Where’s the dignity in that?”*

As you hit a **setback**:

FIXED MINDSET: *“This would have been so simple if you really had talent.”*

GROWTH MINDSET: *“That is so wrong. Basketball wasn’t easy for Michael Jordan and science wasn’t easy for Thomas Edison. They had a passion and put in tons of effort.”*

As you face **criticism**:

FIXED MINDSET: *“It’s not my fault. It was something or someone else’s fault.”*

GROWTH MINDSET: *“If I don’t take responsibility, I can’t fix it. Let me listen—however painful it is— and learn whatever I can.”*

With self-talk (and accompanying action), Dr Dweck believes that we will be on the path to lifelong **improvements** in **academic results**, in **performance in extracurricular activities** and in **relationship with others**.

So to summarize, if we change mindset, we'll change effort, focus, toughness and even our brains. Through these, we change our performance.

During the Annual Athletics Meet last week, I saw a sports team uniform with the following words:

心態決定境界 ("Our Mindset determines our Level.")

It is very encouraging, but is it true? And is it the same as Dr Dweck's theory that mindset determines performance? I think whether the slogan is the same as Dr Dweck's theory depends on which situation the slogan is referring to. If it just refers to the mindset during the competition or the exam, then this is too limiting and does not correspond completely to Dr Dweck's theory. However, if it is **about the mindset during the long periods of learning, practicing and training**, then they are very similar.

So be more conscious of your **mindset**, your **self-talk** and try to steer it in the direction that is favourable to your long term **learning, growth** and **wellbeing**.

YL So