

The Mindset of High-Performers

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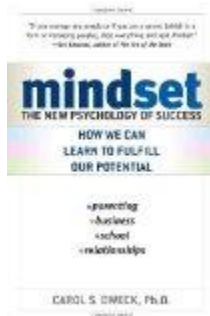
“I lost my starting spot on the soccer team. I’m just not good at soccer.”

“I failed my math test. I’m just not good at math.”

Ever heard such a statement from one of your kids? From one of your players?

If so, it is very likely that the single greatest factor limiting their performance is not coaching, or teammates, or fitness.

It is a bad state of mind. It is a lousy mindset!



Famed Stanford researcher Dr. Carol Dweck has found that when it comes to performance, **there are two types of ‘mindsets’ as she calls them: a fixed mindset and a growth mindset.** In [her internationally known book *Mindset*](#), Dweck discusses the difference between these two mindsets, and provides parents and coaches with a path to instilling the proper mindset in their athletes, students, and for that matter, performers in any type of achievement activity. Understanding the importance of mindset is crucial to helping your child perform his or her best in sports.

A person with a fixed mindset usually judges situations in terms of how they reflect upon her ability, which in her mind is permanent. In other words, if she does poorly on a test, she is not smart. If she plays poorly in a game, she is not a good player. As a result, **fixed mindset individuals rarely seek out opportunities to learn or challenge themselves, for failure to them is vindication of their lack of self belief.** In their mind, risk and effort are likely to expose their weaknesses and lack of ability. They instead choose to seek easy achievement activities, fear failure, shun effort, and are constantly finding excuses to not perform their best.

A growth mindset individual, on the other hand, sees her abilities as capable of being cultivated. She recognizes that challenging herself is an exciting part of learning, and that failure is a necessary component of success. Her attitude towards a poor result on a test is “Next time I just need to study harder.” When confronted with a difficult task, she embraces the challenge. She is not afraid to fail, pick herself up, and try again.

In Dweck’s words, “a belief that your qualities are carved in stone (fixed mindset) leads to a host of thoughts and actions, and a belief that your qualities can be cultivated (growth mindset) leads to a host of different thoughts and actions, taking you down an entirely different road.” **A fixed mindset individual will not put forth effort, for he believes that if he were smart (or talented) he would not need to try hard. Effort is a bad thing. For a growth mindset individual, effort is the secret sauce that makes you talented! Effort is everything!**

Dweck has found that adults often instill a fixed mindset in their children by praising them in the wrong way. We live in a culture of effusive praise, where some people believe that the more praise we heap upon children, the better. Yet Dweck found that praising children for their ability – you are so smart, you are so talented – actually has the opposite effect. In a test of four hundred fifth graders, Dweck found that praising children for their intelligence (“You must be smart at this”) as opposed to their effort (“You must have worked really hard”) had a massive detrimental effect upon performance. Over a series of tests, **children praised for effort as a whole tried harder, worked at a task longer, and enjoyed challenges more** than those praised for intelligence. **But beyond that, those praised for effort improved their test scores by 30%, while those praised for intelligence saw their scores decline by 20%!**

[\(If you have not gotten my video on **how to praise your kids the right way**, as well as my entire book chapter on “Confidence” where I discuss Dweck’s work in more detail, you can get it for FREE by clicking this link \)](#)

How does this apply to coaching and parenting athletes?

As a coach, until I read Dweck’s work I had different words for fixed and growth mindset players: Uncoachable and Coachable!

What I did not realize was that a **fixed mindset athlete was not uncoachable; he or she just heard me completely differently than a growth mindset player.** When I offered critique or criticism, what a fixed mindset player heard from her inner voice was “Coach does not think I am good, because if I was good, I wouldn’t need to try, and he wouldn’t need to coach me.” On the other hand, the growth-oriented player’s inner voice said “coach is trying to make me better by teaching me new things.”

If your athletes have stopped putting effort into their sports, you may need to figure out whether they have adopted a fixed mindset. Do they view failure as evidence that they are not good? Do they fear failure, and thus have given up trying, lest they give their best and fail? If so, your athletes need a mindset adjustment!

For your athletes to reach their true athletic potential, they must have a growth mindset. They must come to realize that nothing relating to ability is fixed, and with effort and application, **what you can be a month from now or a year from now is determined not by who you are, but by what you do!**

You can help, simply by learning to praise your athletes for their effort, and not their ability!
In the meantime, [grab a copy of Dweck's Mindset](#), it is **the #1 book I recommend all parents and coaches read** ([you can see all my recommended resources here](#)). You will be glad you did.
Please share this with any fellow parents or coaches with athletes that may be struggling with confidence and performance. And as always, please leave your thoughts and questions/comments below.

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