

## Grit and the Growth Mindset

By Lori A. Hoffner

In an ecosystem [research](#) study, scientists found that although trees grew faster in a biosphere indoor environment than they did outdoors, they would collapse under their own weight before they'd reach maturity. This happened, they concluded, because there was no wind in the biosphere to produce "stress wood" or resiliency in the trees. This type of wood makes the tree more resilient and allows the trees to be strong enough to live to maturity.

In today's world, doesn't it feel like there has been more than enough "wind" to create resiliency in each of us? Like the storms we have all faced have generated a sort of grit that we never knew we had within us? Your grit defines your determination to meet your goals; it is the amount of effort you are willing to put forth to accomplish something and your willingness to keep moving—no matter how difficult things get—even when the reward is far away. In order to have a growth mindset, you have to cultivate grit. . And, it's important to surround yourself with others who have grit. Identify people who stick to their goals without allowing themselves to get distracted. Who do you know that continues to show up, even when things get really challenging? Bouncing back from setback is at the heart of growth mindset. Therefore, developing grit can be dependent on learning from mistakes and knowing within yourself that you can create a positive future experience.



Fostering our own understanding of a growth mindset is important and exhibiting those type of traits continuously can be difficult. We are all a mixture of both a growth and a fixed mindset. Understanding the difference is helpful in advancing us as individuals who are willing to learn and improve.

- Fixed Mindset: Intelligence and traits are fixed and unwilling to yield
  - Never wants to appear "dumb"
  - Doesn't work any harder or seek help
  - Doesn't ask for help
- Growth Mindset: Intelligence can be developed through strategies and experiences
  - Wants to learn
  - Wants to work hard, use strategies and seek help to learn
  - Learns from mistakes

Because we all have a mixture of growth and fixed mindsets, it's important to recognize when we're "digging in" and using a fixed mindset, preventing us from moving forward. Here are some possible triggers for a fixed mindset:

- When we're **challenged** by others, we start to feel anxious, therefore, we resort to what we know and will not seek out the help, support, advice or guidance from others.
- If we have a **setback** or **struggle** with our desired outcome, we might become discouraged or defensive.
- When we perceive criticism, we become angry, defensive, or ashamed.
- When we see someone who appears to be more skilled than us, especially at something that we feel like we're especially competent at, we become jealous or demotivated.

It's important that we get to know our "fixed mindset persona." Once we learn more about our own fixed mindset, we learn to work with it rather than let it get in the way.

- When does it show up?
- How does it make us feel?
- How does it affect our behavior, relationships and goals?

Do you look at your staff through a fixed or growth lens? Do you create an environment where people want to learn, and they aren't afraid to make mistakes? This type of supportive culture relies on help, support, advice and guidance from others. Fostering a growth mindset creates opportunities for continuous learning and improvement. When you engage in process-praise, encouraging a growth mindset, you also encourage your staff to seek other ideas, strategies and, ultimately, a positive experience for your staff and your organization as a whole.

Opportunities to advise others or provide mentor-type relationships is another way to intentionally create the type of work environment that fosters a growth mindset. How a person perceives their ability plays a key role in their motivation and achievement, and encouraging a mentorship role helps to validate the ability your staff sees in themselves.

A final element to cultivating grit is knowing your purpose and finding the meaning in what you do. When you are aware of the greater meaning of your work, you can see how it's important to other people—not just to yourself. Knowing that your work matters to others is what creates your sense of passion and makes your perseverance for it sustainable. While this doesn't make your work easy, it does make it satisfying because you've chosen to continuously be challenged—and with a growth mindset, you will be confident in your ability to overcome those challenges.

Who knows what direction the wind will be blowing in the next few months, or even how hard? Your resiliency will depend on cultivating grit while facing those challenges with an open, growth mindset approach. It will give you the opportunity to look back, years from now, and say, "I did a great job in the midst of those challenges."

Cheers to you!

Stay safe and healthy,



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