




# The Agile Mindset

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**Disclaimer: This provocative presentation is ideally the beginning of a conversation. It won't take long for me to tell you everything I know about cognitive psychology, although I have been reading in the area for several years now. I'm an amateur who has sufficient interest in weird topics and a strange way of connecting ideas that might or might not be of interest to you. Thank you for your tolerance and understanding of my meanderings and I hope you learn a little that might help you in your life.**

**This is not an “academic” presentation, but those interested in more information are invited to ask me for references for any part of this talk and I will be happy to make them available.**



# **Do you mostly agree or mostly disagree with the following**

**Intelligence is something very basic that you really can't change much. You're born with it or not. Yes, you can learn new things, but you can't really change how intelligent you are.**

**No matter how intelligent you are, you can always get better, sometimes you can improve a lot.**

**You can substitute any ability or talent for "intelligence."**



# **Interesting experiments**

**Phase I:**

**Students given very easy set of questions**

**Then categorized into “effort” or “fixed”  
groups (about 50-50)**



## **Phase II**

**All students allowed to choose between:**

**(1) a more difficult test (where they would learn a lot) or**

**(2) another easy test (similar to Phase I)**

**Most (~90%) “effort” students chose (1)**

**Most (~80%) “fixed” students chose (2)**



## **Phase III**

**Very difficult exam given to both groups**

**“Effort” students worked hard, enjoyed the challenge**

**“Fixed” students easily discouraged**



# **Phase IV**

**All students allowed to choose between:**

**(1) seeing exams of those who did better  
or**

**(2) exams of those who did worse**

**“Effort” students chose (1)**

**“Fixed” students chose (2)**



# Phase V

All students given easy test (similar to Phase I)

“Effort” students improved (by ~30%)

“Fixed” students’ were worse (by ~20%)



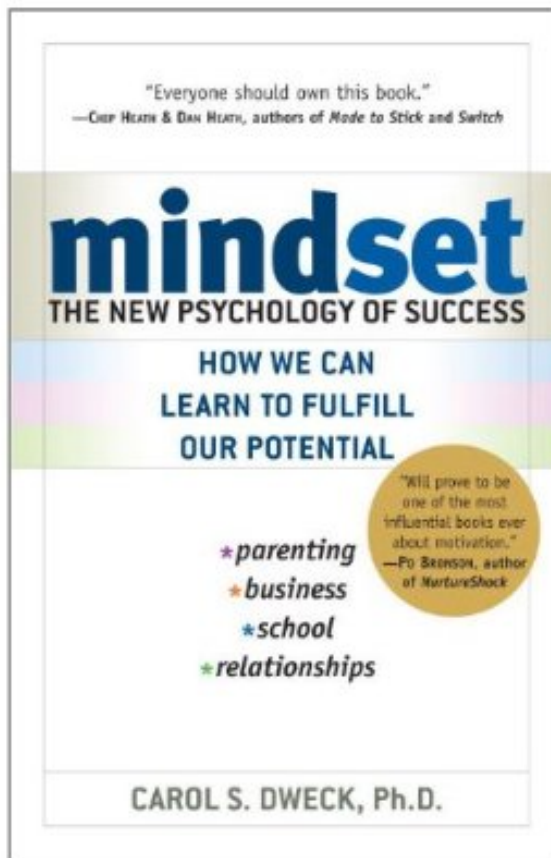
## **Phase VI**

**All students asked to give advice to other students and include their scores**

**“Effort” students: Lots of advice and encouragement.**

**“Fixed” students: Very little or no advice  
and ~40% lied about their scores**

# Mindset – Carol Dweck





# More info

*New Yorker* – “The Talent Myth,” [gladwell.com](http://gladwell.com)

*New York Magazine* – “How not to talk to your kids,”

Po Bronson

TIME magazine – “How to help them succeed”

[mindsetonline.com/](http://mindsetonline.com/)

[www.stanford.edu/dept/psychology/cgi-bin/drupalm/cdweck](http://www.stanford.edu/dept/psychology/cgi-bin/drupalm/cdweck)



# **Fixed vs. Agile**

**Ability – static, like height**

**Goal - look good**

**Challenge - avoid**

**Failure - defines your identity**

**Effort - for those with no  
talent**

**Reaction to challenge -  
helplessness**

**Ability – can grow, like muscle**

**Goal - to learn**

**Challenge - embrace**

**Failure – provides information**

**Effort - path to mastery**

**Reaction to challenge –  
resilience**



# **Belief about yourself affects belief about others**

**Those with a fixed mindset are quick to  
judge others based on little information  
and quick to stereotype**

**Those with an agile mindset don't ignore  
information about others but are less  
negative/positive**

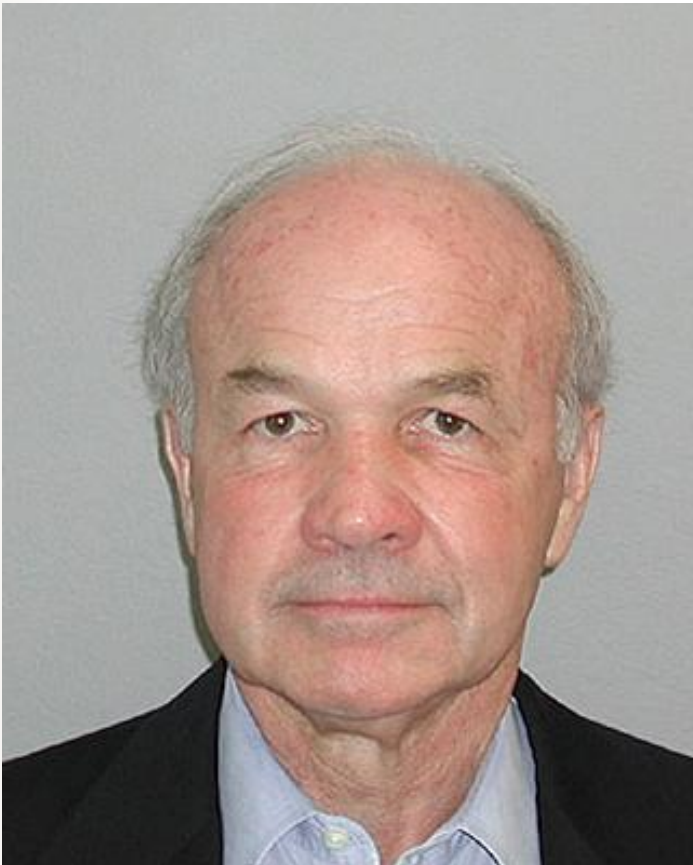
# Bright little girls



# Bright little boys



# Smartest guys in the room





# **Enron's fixed mindset**

**Identify and hire “the best talent”**

**Then continuously and ruthlessly grade,  
sort, fire, and promote – a process called  
“rank and yank”**

**We are a company of people, not planes. That is what distinguishes us from other airlines.**



Great Value.  
Excellent Service.  
Our Mission.

**Fly Southwest Airlines because you want to be treated like a person.**



# **The Southwest Culture**

**Hire for attitude**

**Establish a culture of community, trust, and  
the “Southwest spirit”**

**Then provide learning opportunities and  
continually grow people**

**Southwest seems to have an “agile” mindset**



# Managers have a mindset

“Keen to Help? Managers’ implicit person theories and their subsequent employee coaching,” Peter Heslin, Don Vandewalle, Gary Latham, *Personnel Psych.*, 2006.

“Pygmalion in Management,” J. Sterling Livingston, Sept/Oct 1988 *Harvard Business Review*.



# Fixed educational system?

**“... what we do throughout our whole education system is give students solvable problems. In fact they’ re guaranteed to be solvable.... In the real world, most problems are not solvable...and there are many competing demands....you have to often change course in the middle in order to meet sociological issues as opposed to technological ones.....it’ s very difficult for us to implement that in our teaching. But I think we do a much better job and a much better service to our students if we try and teach our students to fail more effectively.”**

**Lawrence Krauss, theoretical physicist**

**We' re born agile!**





# **The good news is...**

**Mindset is not “fixed”**

**We encourage one or the other in each other**

**We develop one or the other in our children**

**Research has shown that small  
experimental manipulations, e.g.  
feedback or reading an article can  
produce one or the other**

# **First Lady at Savoy Elementary**



**No one is born smart. No one is born knowing how to read. No one is born knowing how to do math. No one is born knowing how to play the flute. All of that comes with a lot of hard work. Even the president works hard!**

**You mean I don't have to  
be stupid?**





# **Effort is good!**

**Praise effort, strategies, process**

**Ask about the work**

**Instead of ignoring failure, teach others  
that it's a way to learn and improve**

**Simply ask, "Which mindset do you want  
to hold?"**



# For Kids

**Instead of** “You’re so smart” or “You picked that up so quickly,” **say** “That was a clever approach” or “I’m proud of your persistence.”

**Instead of** “You’re a natural” **say** “Practice is really making you better.”

**Instead of** “Did you win?” **say** “Did you give your best effort?”

**Instead of** “How was your day?” **say** “What did you learn today?” or “What mistakes did you make that taught you something?”

**Instead of** “What do you want to do when you grow up?” **say** “What are your plans for reaching your goals?”

**Never** let failure progress from an action to an identity.

**Never** label kids, e.g. “Jimmy is the artist” or “Susie is the computer geek.”

When a child doubts her ability, **ask** her to think of areas where she once had low ability and now excels, or to recall a time when she saw someone learn something or improve in ways no one thought possible.



# For other adults

**Instead of** arguing with someone who continually puts him/herself down by telling the other person, “You are smart. You are talented. You are <whatever>. Realize that this simply enforces the fixed mindset.

**Remind** the other person of times in the past when determination and hard work have led to success. Offer your support to help them invest energy in the new situation.

**Instead of** lecturing the other person, at some point BEFORE they are down, **provide information** about the different mindsets. Experiments have shown that simply describing the two approaches can help.

Depressed people tend to believe that it’s just the way they are. **Help** the other person see themselves as a temporarily derailed work in progress.



# For Yourself

**Instead of** letting salary, benefits, and status define job satisfaction, ask yourself if you're still learning. If yes, then you're fortunate to have a job that encourages a growth mind-set. View its challenges as opportunities rather than stress. If you've stopped learning, then consider looking either for new avenues of growth or for another job.

**Instead of** blaming others in your relationships, remember "the whole point of a relationship is to encourage each other's development."

Depressed people tend to believe that it's just the way they are. **Instead of** viewing yourself as a failed end product, think of yourself as a temporarily derailed work in progress. "We usually think of personality as something very stable, but we're finding that even core parts of it can be changed by shifting mind-sets."



# **Agile software development**

**Fail early, fail often.**

**Fail fast, learn constantly.**

**Failure \*IS\* an option.**

**Without failure how can learning happen?**

**“Make mistakes faster.”**

**Rich Sheridan, CEO, Menlo Innovations**

**“Perfect is a verb.”     Kent Beck**

**“Those that fail fastest grow strongest.”**

**Roy Singham, Founder and Chair, Thoughtworks**



# **Agile is agile**

**The agile mindset believes that we are \*ALL\* a work in progress.**

**The agile software development process isn't fixed. It continues to change and grow as we learn more about it. If we are lucky, this will never end because it will never be perfect.**

**We will continue to improve as we age—just like me 😊!**

**Ever tried. Ever failed. No matter. Try Again. Fail again. Fail better. Samuel Beckett, Irish poet (1906-1989)**

**Thanks for listening!**