

The Right Mindset is Vital in Leadership

Once upon a time ...

There were two men who wanted to travel through a forest to reach their destination beyond it. One, in fixed mindset, decides to journey from south to north in the energy of expectation. He maps and plans out the way he has to go to get to his desired destination. He thinks he cannot veer from his chosen path, because he knows this is the only way that will get him to where he wants to go. This is what his path looks like, this is the way he wants to do it, and this is the only option that he believes will get him there. As he moves through the forest, unexpected things lay in wait. There are fallen trees along his path that he must take precious time to remove, because going around them would take him from his path, and this is not an option. It takes effort and he moves along with frustration every time he encounters something he didn't expect in his way. He curses even taking this journey to begin with. He should not have come, and he wonders if he will ever get to where he wants to go. When he finally does arrive, he is exhausted and so focused on the many pitfalls that he had to overcome that he cannot even experience the joy of arriving.

The second man, in growth mindset, enters the forest journey in the energy of acceptance. He, too, knows he wants to travel from south to north, and has a desired destination in mind. This person is open to working with whatever comes his way, knowing that the glory in the journey, itself, is in the learning and the growth. To him, it's not about the destination, it is about the journey, so he is challenged and stimulated by the obstacles in a completely different way. He knows he has the power to look at what he encounters as an opportunity to learn something about himself and gain a better knowledge and perspective of his gifts so that he can better use them along the way as well as when he arrives at his destination. He sees the journey as a way to learn more about who he is and what value he brings. Without the challenges that he meets in the forest, he knows he can never, truly, feel the pure joy of reaching his destination. When he does arrive, he feels a greater sense of accomplishment and gratitude for the increased clarity and ability to see why he came to this place at all.

In her book, ***Mindset***, Dr. Carol Dweck presents decades worth of her research at Stanford University that shows the type of mindset a leader has will determine how his/her company will perform during uncertain times. Thriving, surviving and failing are not due to circumstances, alone. They all start with a particular mindset that then becomes the “decision-maker” when it comes to thoughts, ideas, choices, actions and eventually outcomes.

I think this is a very pertinent consideration based on the times we're in, don't you?

Larry Robertson, in his article ***A 'Growth Mindset' is Powerful, But Only if You Know How to Use It*** discusses the key principles of Dweck's book. He writes:

“Dweck's mindset theory is simple and, when applied consistently, can be very powerful. It boils down to one simple observation proven by countless studies by Dweck and others -- each of us is equipped with the ability to tap into two mindsets: fixed and growth. Each mindset produces vastly different paths, a good thing to know for those who hope to build thriving organizations.”

So, let's talk about these different mindsets and their characteristics.

In our earlier story, the first journeyer chose to be in fixed mindset. This is where we have that business plan, goals and “way” we think we need to do things, and we stick to that, like glue. Really, when we look around, we can see that, traditionally, we have lived in a world that promotes fixed mindset. We are told to stay the course & keep our eye on the prize (which could be a goal, the bottom line, or a particular outcome). We do this so much that we don’t notice when we might need to pivot and stay flexible to allow a better approach or new focus to meet us where we are. We miss the opportunity to remain relevant and tapped into the signs of the times and calls for change and innovation.

A growth mindset is different and has us focusing on different things. Not that we lose sight of the goals, plans or bottom line, no instead the *WAY IN WHICH WE APPROACH* seeing to these things is changed. Fixed mindset sees variations as problems to block and tackle. The growth mindset sees them as an integral ingredient to actual growth. In order to grow, we need two things, support and challenge. Deviations and variations to what was expected are challenges that push us to pivot and grow. Much like the times we are currently in. Growth mindset sees this time as necessary to make the changes we need to be more sustainable, more viable and, simply put, better.

One of my favorite quotes is by John C. Maxwell, a well known leadership expert. He says, *“I don’t focus on goals. I have goals, but what I focus on is growth. With this this, I find, I always surpass my goals.”*

Having a consistent growth mindset when we approach business and life matters and can have us surpassing our greatest goals, each and every time.

So what can we do to ensure that we have a growth rather than a fixed mindset?

Here are some suggestions: The 3 “C’s” and the 3 “D’s”

1. **Collaboration** – letting ideas collide
2. **Conducive Environments** – creating learning spaces that are **diverse, distinct** and **dynamic**.

Diverse – race, gender, age, years of experience in the field and even having people with good ideas that have never been in the field to offer a fresh perspective.

Distinct – Clarity is kindness, and seeking what is clear, at all times, will help us to remain relevant and aware of changes and needs as they happen. An example is asking your client how they see something instead of always relying on your perspective of it.

Dynamic – Open to change and seeing the movement of things being a necessary motivator and driver. Example is how we see Chaos. The energy is one of creation – think of the typical condition of an artist’s studio.

3. **Curiosity** – staying open to possibilities and being willing to experiment and try new ways of approaching and doing things. I always think of this as having the Child Mind. Children aren’t, inherently, afraid to try new things and experiment. When learning to walk, a baby falls down and keeps getting back up until they finally can take steps without tumbling. Curiosity also fuels excitement far more than any other way of approaching a situation. It

keeps us more capable of seeing the WHOLE field of possibility, because we don't have blinders on.

Learning how to develop a growth mindset, which involves ways to invite and inspire collaborative, innovative and diverse approaches and solutions to any of the needs that your business or organization has is a key skill that a great leader must develop. Discovering the areas where this type of strategy gets blocked is crucial and establishing ways to tap into your own creative thinking and problem-solving to sharpen this skill and make accessing it easier is critical.

Becoming a more curious and courageous thinker helps you to be a more open, innovative, flexible and agile leader, especially during times of high and constant change. After all, who wouldn't benefit from this?