

Embrace failure

Isn't saying '*Don't be afraid to fail*' just a cliché, I hear you ask? It may be, but more importantly there is excellent research evidence to show if you actually embrace failure, you are more likely to be more successful than those who succumb to being afraid to fail.

In an interview with Harvard Business Review titled '[The Right Mindset for Success](#)' Carol Dweck, a leading organisational psychologist, explains why no executive should be afraid to fail or make mistakes.

The key message in Carol's research is understanding why some people reach their potential while others who are just as talented don't. Her work shows us that talented people who find success have a growth mindset, in contrast with a fixed mindset.

Let's start by digging into the essential difference between these two ways of thinking. A person with a fixed mindset believes their basic make-up, intelligence and ability are fixed and determine their success in life. They have an image of themselves to protect and uphold that are reluctant to risk.

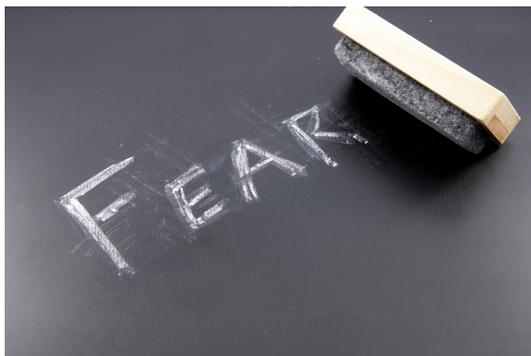
In comparison, those with a growth mindset believe their talents can be developed over time through learning from experience and deliberate self-improvement initiatives, e.g. mentoring and coaching.

Executives with a growth mindset are not afraid to fail. They challenge themselves in all aspects of their lives, emotionally, physically, and intellectually. They venture beyond their comfort zones and take risks. They are not afraid to experiment, fail, and expose their vulnerability.

A continuum

Now clearly there's a continuum in all of us. Nobody is *all* fixed or *all* growth in their mindset; that is, it's not black or white.

Take yourself and think about your reactions in each of these situations (fixed mindset response is described first in each):



- When challenged by your boss in a meeting, do you see it as put-down, or as an opportunity to demonstrate your mental agility and smarts?
- When you fail to reach a target, do you see the shortcoming as set-back, or as learning to improve next time?
- When you are offered an opportunity to take a high profile role in a major company meeting, do you are you immediately fearful of being shown up, or do you see the offer as a showcase for your potential?
- When you make a mistake that is visible to people at work, do you feel embarrassed and want to hide, or do you acknowledge the error, seek feedback, learn and move on?

To which end of the continuum do you lean?

Why you should strengthen your growth mindset

In a growth mindset, you focus on the processes of being successful. In this [video interview](#) based on her book, [Mindset: The New Psychology of Success](#), Carol delves into the science of persistence and praise and suggest four ways to strengthen your growth mindset – and that of others you supervise and mentor.

1. Understand that your passion and dedication will take you further than your intelligence.
2. Learning is an everyday opportunity, not something you take time off to do in isolation.
3. Stretching beyond your comfort zone is essential, which means you will fail on occasions. If you don't,

you are not pushing hard enough.

4. Reward yourself (and others) for trying, for taking on new challenges, for being dogged.

And then there's praise. Praise yourself for grit, effort, success, and for trying even when you have failed. Praise the process, not just the outcome.

Remember "If"

*If you can keep your head when all about you
Are losing theirs and blaming it on you,
If you can trust yourself when all men doubt you,
But make allowance for their doubting too;
If you can wait and not be tired by waiting,
Or being lied about, don't deal in lies,
Or being hated, don't give way to hating,
And yet don't look too good, nor talk too wise:*

*If you can dream—and not make dreams your master;
If you can think—and not make thoughts your aim;
If you can meet with Triumph and Disaster
And treat those two impostors just the same;
If you can bear to hear the truth you've spoken
Twisted by knaves to make a trap for fools,
Or watch the things you gave your life to, broken,
And stoop and build 'em up with worn-out tools:*

*If you can make one heap of all your winnings
And risk it on one turn of pitch-and-toss,
And lose, and start again at your beginnings
And never breathe a word about your loss;
If you can force your heart and nerve and sinew
To serve your turn long after they are gone,
And so hold on when there is nothing in you
Except the Will which says to them: 'Hold on!'*

*If you can talk with crowds and keep your virtue,
Or walk with Kings—nor lose the common touch,
If neither foes nor loving friends can hurt you,
If all men count with you, but none too much;
If you can fill the unforgiving minute
With sixty seconds' worth of distance run,
Yours is the Earth and everything that's in it,
And—which is more—you'll be a Man, my son!*

Rudyard Kipling wrote *If* in 1895

In conclusion, trust yourself. Being willing to embrace failure. There's no surer path to success.

More on related topics

If you want to delve into other aspects of this topic I recommend read this earlier post:

+ [When one door closes you can open the next one](#)