

COLLEGE SUCCESS HABITS



7

Powerful Principles
to Help You Excel in
College and Beyond

JESSE MOGLE

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www.jessemogle.com

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CHAPTER 1

DEVELOP A GROWTH MINDSET

In a growth mindset, people believe that their most basic abilities can be developed through dedication and hard work—brains and talent are just the starting point. This view creates a love of learning and a resilience that is essential for great accomplishment.

CAROL S. DWECK

Developing a growth mindset is essential if you want to experience all that life has to offer. It is the first principle because it is the foundation upon which all the other principles are grounded.

A willingness to explore new ideas, new opinions, new information—and being open to all the people who will bring those things to you—will change your life for the better in innumerable ways.

Carol Dweck, professor of psychology at Stanford and author of the book *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success*, categorized mindsets as either growth or fixed.

Having a growth mindset means that you are ready to learn new things whenever presented with them. You believe you can learn new things, and you know your current skills and talents are not the ceiling you must live under for the rest of your life. You see hurdles as opportunities for growth into a new you, not as barriers meant to dissuade you from moving forward.

Having a fixed mindset means you believe that your skills, talents—basically, your lot in life—is fixed, and there is little you can do about it. If you believe you can't do something because you can't do it today, then you are following a fixed mindset.

If you examine yourself, you will notice there are areas in your life you have a growth mindset and areas where you are more fixed. If you have experience doing something, you will tend more on the growth mindset side. If you lack experience in an area, you will tend toward a fixed mindset.

You can have a growth mindset all the way, then hit a wall, and slide into a fixed mindset. What's important is to know that about yourself and then concentrate on fine-tuning your beliefs so you know, deep down inside, that if you put forth the effort, you will learn something, and you will get better at it.

A growth mindset is a critical asset for you to possess your whole life through.

A growth mindset also means that you're ready to hear somebody else's opinion, even if it's different from your own because you know you'll learn something new about them or the subject.

You've seen those people that live in a fixed mindset bubble. They get on social media, the internet, or TV/radio and spew closed-minded rhetoric for the world to hear.

You don't want to be that person. You want to be growth-oriented.

Yes, you want to have your own beliefs, morals, values, and the like, but you don't want to be so fixed in your ways that you can't even listen to someone else's opinion.

I live in Los Angeles, and there are a lot of extreme people here. The vegans, for instance, are a sector that can be very fixed in their mindset. They will argue, interrupt, and otherwise yell "no, no, no" anytime the conversation turns to carnivores versus herbivores—and trust me, they can turn any conversation toward that topic.

I say eat what you want to eat, believe what you want to believe, value what you want to value, but don't expect me to change my opinion because you raise your voice over mine.

I generally love my way of life, and I work on improving it daily because I know I can improve every day. I know I can grow into the person I desire to become. I have a growth mindset that allows me to change my opinion on things, to change my perspective, to change my perception, to change anything and everything I want to.

You have this too. You just have to exercise the mind-muscle so you can be in permanent growth mindset mode.

Open-minded: *adjective; willing to consider new ideas; unprejudiced*

What Is a Growth Mindset?

A growth mindset is the capability to see everything as an opportunity to learn, grow, and experience life to its fullest. You can develop any talent, skill, or ability, no matter your background or current level of expertise.

A fixed mindset, on the other hand, believes that skills, talents, knowledge, and so on are relatively stationary and cannot be grown and cultivated.

A growth mindset realizes every single opportunity in life is a chance for growth. And then, if your mind is open to it, you will learn something, you will experience something you had not previously even considered. Even if you watch the same movie ten times in ten days, if you're wearing growth mindset goggles, I guarantee you'll see something new. You will understand something new about that movie each time.

A growth mindset in college (and in life) is imperative because you'll be introduced to countless situations that are unlike anything you've ever experienced before. Unless you went to a high school that had ten, twenty, thirty, or forty-thousand or more students, the likelihood that you've ever walked into a classroom where there are three hundred students is doubtful.

Whether you were raised in a metropolis or not, I doubt you had the level of diversity at your high school that you'll experience in college.

College is awesome! The social activities, organizations, clubs, groups, Greek life—everything so readily available to you and with little to no adult supervision. But if you go into it with a fixed mindset, cultivated through your parents, teachers, friends, preacher, town, city—literally everything you ever saw, heard, felt, or experienced—you will miss out on the wonderment that is college and the world.

Do you say or think things like the following statements?

“That’s not what the cool kids did in high school.”

“That’s not what my parents would have wanted me to do back then.”

“That’s not what my parents would approve of me doing.”

“That’s not how I’ve always done it.”

If so, you’re going to miss out on fantastic opportunities to grow, to learn, to experience your life. This isn’t somebody else’s journey. You make the decisions now.

Even if your parents are paying your way and they’ve chosen your major, they’re probably not deciding on your extracurricular activities. If they are that up your ass, you might need to have them talk to someone on campus so they ease up on you.

They’re not deciding the topic for your term papers and assignments. They’re not there to decide what you’ll focus on within your major. They’re not there to decide how you’re going to feel, hear, see, or experience anything because you are deciding how you see everything through your eyes, how you experience them in your mind.

You choose how you’re going to experience college and your life. Even if your parents are pushing you toward a particular major, there are still plenty of opportunities for you to make it your own. Walk into it with a growth mindset, and that major can be anything you want it to be.

A growth mindset is the ability to learn continuously and see the potential to arrive at an outcome from hundreds if not thousands of directions.

It’s the ability to hear somebody else’s side of the story and at least empathize with why they think that way. Humility is the art of overlooking dissimilarities in favor of the similarities and finding a connection.

A growth mindset is being able to meet somebody from a different nationality, with a foreign accent, a diverse background, a nontraditional upbringing, with divergent beliefs and values than you—and still get along with them. Better yet, you’ll go beyond getting

along with them—you'll like them, you'll want to get to know them better, and you'll make friends with them.

But if you only hung out with a certain kind of person in high school, then go to college and still only hang out with that same kind of person, you're not displaying much of a growth mindset. Instead of only dating a certain kind of person or only eating a particular type of food, develop a growth mindset: try something new, because in that uncomfortableness is the true essence of life.

A fixed mindset believes that you are only as smart as you were born to be.

You're only as talented as the skills you already possess.

You're only able to make friends with a certain kind of person.

Only this kind of person will like you because that's who's always liked you.

You're not pretty enough for that career.

You're not pretty enough for that person.

You're not smart enough for that job.

You're not this, that, or the other.

Any sentence that starts with I'm not, I can't, I don't, or I won't has its stem firmly planted in fixed dirt.

I am not, I repeat, I am not saying that if your friends aren't diverse, you aren't growth-oriented.

I'm not saying that if your partners are generally alike, you have a fixed mindset. And I'm not saying that if you don't want to do something, you are entrenched in a fixed mindset and are destined to live there forever.

First off, that's totally a fixed mindset way to see things, and it is also not for me to decide.

You know when you're giving it the "old college try" and when you are not. This is your life and your experiences. You choose how to live it. You decide how to see it.

You choose everything—that's the moniker of a growth mindset.

Do you want to be right or do you want to connect?

STEPHAN STAVRAKIS

A Growth Mindset Takes Practice

First, realize that your intelligence, abilities, skills, talents—everything about you—can grow and develop in whatever way you decide. Time and time again, I have read about how a scientist, inventor, computer science hobbyist, musician, or athlete pushed themselves through a perceived barrier and came out the other side with a new invention, a new record, a new personal best, a new or better something.

Nothing worth having in life has ever come easy, and nothing that ever changed the world was the first incarnation of the idea that presented itself. Even the original wheel was probably a rock—which was certainly not as streamlined as a wagon wheel or a wheelbarrow wheel. Everything can grow and evolve into a better version than the previous if seen through growth-minded eyes.

In writing this book, I fluidly moved through this experience with a growth mindset. I don't think my writing skills are the best in the world. I know my limitations, and I work on them. I'm not the fastest typist, for instance. I put effort into keeping my fingers in the correct position, practicing so I will get better.

I wrote the first draft to get the basics and the outline out of my head. After the first draft reached completion, I went back and chopped it all up. Now that you have my book in your hands, it looks and sounds very different from the first draft, and that's the point—that's where the awesome is!

The mental flexibility of the wise man permits him to keep an open mind and enables him to readjust himself whenever it becomes necessary for a change.

MALCOLM X

Action Steps Toward Having a Growth Mindset

1. *Tell yourself you can figure this out.* Literally, tell yourself you can do it, whether it's getting a good grade or making a new friend.

Be decisive in the choices you make. Be action-oriented in the completion of doing it.

As you begin to complete things, learn things, and grow into this new you, you will increase your discipline and your abilities. It's a positive feedback loop. As you do things, you learn new things, and then you realize you can learn and do new things all the time. Creating that loop will become a self-fulfilling prophecy. You will know you can grow BECAUSE you are growing—which will fuel further growth.

2. Make a plan. A fixed mindset will either creep in or come in like an avalanche when you don't have a strategy. Reverse-engineer the project from completion to the blank piece of paper or computer document in front of you.

How do you envision it upon completion?

Now go backward and note each step along the way. That is your strategy . . . for now. It's going to change—that's the point of having a growth mindset. Build your strategy now knowing it will morph and evolve along the way.

3. Do not allow anyone else, let alone you, to tell you it's not possible. From the light bulb, to penicillin, to the internet, to online shopping, to social media, to the iPhone—all of them, and thousands of other inventions that changed our world, were once just visions by an inventor. Those visions only came to fruition because the inventors overcame the hurdles that inevitably arrived along their creative journey.

4. Replace the thought of "I'm failing" with the strength of "I'm learning." There is no failure, only feedback. You are not failing—you are learning better ways to do something.

5. Work your ideas to completion. The best way I have learned to show myself I can do anything is to do the things I say I'm going to do.

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