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## CAREER STRATEGIES AND INSIGHTS

### A Formula for Success: Growth Mindset

*I recently had the privilege to serve as the keynote speaker for the Annual Summit of a Xerox Caucus Group, The Black Women's Leadership Council. I was asked to provide perspective on a book that the group is reading, dissecting, and applying to their personal and professional lives, "Mindset, The New Psychology of Success" by Dr. Carol S. Dweck. This post is an adapted version of that keynote.*

I'm here today to talk to you about a concept called Growth Mindset - what it means, its implications, and how you can shift your behavior and attitude to demonstrate "a different kind of smart." Let's begin to create a picture of what it means to have a Growth Mindset by looking at its antithesis, the Fixed Mindset.

#### ***The Fixed Mindset***

People with a Fixed Mindset believe that their qualities, their intellect, the extent to which they are smart is carved in stone – it's FIXED. It is what it is.

This mindset limits achievement the tapes, "I'm not ready for that job is too big for me." "I'm not don't want to appear dumb." "I'm assignment, but I don't want to or seeking clarity."

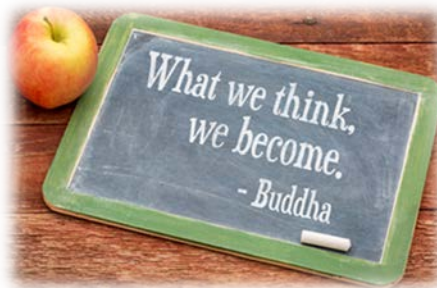
If you *suffer* from a Fixed well to feedback or initiate a are concerned about being

of failure; your resilience is practically nonexistent; and you walk away from the "hard stuff" because you prefer not to exert the effort and take the chance of failing anyway. In other words, people who suffer from Fixed Mindset reject the opportunity to learn.

#### ***The Growth Mindset***

On the other hand, when you have a Growth Mindset you believe that your basic qualities, your intellect, the extent to which you are smart can be cultivated and expanded. You view stretch assignments, challenging situations, new projects, the task for which you were not hired to do and that you didn't sign up for as an opportunity to exert effort, to learn, and to grow.

If you've adopted a Growth Mindset, you view every situation with the potential to yank you out of your comfort zone as an opportunity to move away from who you are today toward something more in the future. Your focus is improvement and growth, not the desire to prove yourself to anyone. In a sense though, the only thing you should want to prove is your ability to learn. You don't always have to "already be." You do have to demonstrate perseverance when learning becomes difficult or more challenging than you expected. You must show resilience when you fail. You must bounce



with interfering thoughts. You know promotion or new opportunity" "That going to ask a question because I really struggling with this work appear incompetent by asking for help

Mindset, you are less likely to respond feedback conversation because you judged. You won't take a risk for fear



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back to move forward with reflection and knowledge.

When you adopt a Growth Mindset:

1. Find pleasure in your work and new experiences even when they become difficult and challenging.
2. Surround yourself with people that will challenge you. These are often the people that you'll resent and resist. But these are the individuals who see your potential and are invested in your growth.
3. Understand that effort is a good thing. It ignites your ability and turns that ability into accomplishment.
4. Get that when you exert the effort to learn, your brain actually grows stronger and forms new connections.
5. Finally, you realize that while opening up to growth can be risky, it allows you to be more of yourself. The mask can come off and the voice that echoes "imposter" is silenced because you become free to explore, ask questions, try new things, and to be curious - unapologetically.

You are probably thinking, "Yeah but, what about the expectation to hit the ground running and to be good at what I do." Well, that doesn't go away. Absolutely, there are expectations of strong performance. You bring certain skills, knowledge and abilities to the organization – demonstrate them – leverage your strengths. But don't limit yourself to the skillset that you entered the organization with.

Yes, there are unforgiving cultures. Yes, there are people who will judge and label. But how will you show up in the presence of all that? Growth Mindset sounds like "Yes, we didn't get the outcome we expected, but here is what I learned," "As a result of this situation, this is how I will proceed moving forward to leverage my learning." "Let's debrief the situation, not to blame but to learn."

I believe that you can set the tone by demonstrating a Growth Mindset. It is your only tool for demonstrating your potential, your ability to deal with complexities, and to recover from failure - your "ready, set, go"



## ***Growth Mindset and Emotional Intelligence***

I want to take a moment to touch on the relationship between Emotional Intelligence and Growth Mindset. For the purposes of this conversation I'll highlight the six components of Emotional Intelligence that I believe are strongly related to Growth Mindset - Self-Regard, Self-Actualization, Problem solving, Flexibility, Stress Tolerance, and Empathy.

1. **Self-Regard** examines the extent to which you are aware of your strengths *and* limitations and still demonstrate confidence in your abilities. Moving forward even when you don't know is the signature of Growth Mindset. The Growth Mindset theory also suggests that confidence is not a requirement to learn – you must simply be curious. Imagine though, the strength of your confidence as you grow through learning.
2. **Self-Actualization** is about achievement and the extent to which one pursues continuous improvement –which takes effort - in his/her personal and professional lives. The parallel I see here is that Growth Mindset emphasizes effort to ignite ability and achievement.
3. Learning in many ways is about **Problem Solving**, but in the case of Emotional Intelligence, the emphasis is on problem solving in the mist of emotion. Learning and growth can be uncomfortable, frustrating and embarrassing, all of

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which are strong emotions. The greater one's Emotional Intelligence the more effective a person will be in pressing toward a solution in the presence of emotion.

4. **Flexibility** aligns nicely with the requirement to be open to change in the Growth Mindset – even when it's hard.

5. **Stress Tolerance** speaks to risk and resilience. Failure creates stress in even the most confident people. Individuals strong in Emotional Intelligence are highly resilient and able to effectively manage the stress that comes from “outside of your comfort zone” experiences.

6. **Empathy** is a key component of Emotional Intelligence. Empathy is the ability to understand the perspective of others and a willingness to learn from someone's point of view, even when you don't agree with their thinking.

Individuals high in Emotional Intelligence are probably more likely to adopt a Growth Mindset. Conversely a Growth Mindset may actually help cultivate certain aspects of Emotional Intelligence.

## *Strategies for transitioning toward a Growth Mindset*

1. Cultivate authentic relationships, build a support system, and use it as a source of feedback, collaboration, and thought partnership.
2. Be open to feedback and initiate feedback conversations. It is in feedback that opportunities for growth are found.
3. Look for and create opportunities to collaborate. Collaboration is a great way to learn from others.
4. Ask others for thought partnership when you need help working through a problem or a situation. You don't have to have all the answers.
5. Take on the challenge and exert the effort. So what if you haven't done it before or it is not in your job description.
6. Do not let fear paralyze you, drag it along, it will eventually fall away.
7. Ask questions when you need clarity or do not understand something – you are usually not alone.
8. Nurture yourself for optimal growth. Cultivate your best self so that you can show up strong. Get the requisite amount of rest, eat foods that give you energy, be active, exercise, unplug and decompress, take your vacations, and make time for reflection in order to maximize your “Ah ha” moments. All of this stimulates energy and mental clarity, which enhances learning.



Be intentional about cultivating your ability to learn. Participate in activities that will promote a Growth Mindset and ignite your growth. Never turn down the opportunity to demonstrate your “ready, set, go.”

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*Dr. Harris is a dynamic keynote speaker who shares her personal and professional life lessons through colorful, humorous, and moving stories that entertain and impart powerful lessons about work and life. She is available to deliver conference keynotes, facilitate conference breakout sessions and workplace workshops and webinars.*

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