

It's all about the mindset

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As students, we are all conscious of what it means to reach our full potential. We set high goals for ourselves and are constantly focused on achieving those goals.

Striving to do well in the most challenging classes, landing the most leadership positions, or competing for state championships: these are the most common expectations laid upon us by parents, teachers, coaches, and ourselves. We constantly try to overachieve and over-perform, aiming high to place ourselves in the best possible positions in the future. Placing the value of our lives on a series of goals that we scramble to achieve is what defines our high school careers. But what about the process? The lessons to be learned from mistakes and failure? Is there any value in that? We focus too much on concrete goals instead of the process of achieving these goals. The process is what matters, and we fail to realize that focusing on our development as people will generate the greatest improvement. While striving for perfection, we fail to realize that the “mindset” we have in the process of achieving our goals happens to be one of the most crucial determinants of our success in any field.

As students, we tend to share the common preconception that our intelligence, personality, and talents are fixed, and that these are birth-given traits carved in stone. We gravitate towards the preconceived notion that the amount of innate talent we have determines our success. Such remarks as “I’m not a natural athlete” or “I’m not good with numbers” foster this presumption and can stand in the way of success. This is where “Mindset”, as it is called by Stanford Psychologist Carol Dweck, comes in. In “decades

of research on achievement and success”, she discovered a simple idea that makes all the difference. According to Dr.

Dweck, whether individuals have a “ fixed” or “ growth” mindset greatly impacts skill development and growth, and influences one’s future success. Those who believe that they are born with a certain amount of brains and talent have a “ fixed mindset”. In this mindset, individuals believe that they have “ a certain amount [of talent or brains] and that’s that, and then their goal becomes to look smart all the time and never look dumb”, says Dweck. Worrying about how their traits and abilities are perceived by others creates an urgency for these individuals to repeatedly prove themselves in every facet of their life. On the other hand, people with a “ growth mindset” believe that their own abilities can expand over time.

Dr. Dweck says that in a growth mindset, “ students understand that their talents and abilities can be developed through effort, good teaching and persistence.” They are happy if they are brainy or talented, but they realize that these talents cannot be developed or lead to success without passionate practice and learning. Though the benefits of having a growth mindset may seem obvious, most of us are guilty of having fixed mindsets in certain situations. For example, saying “ I’m not a math person” can act as an easy excuse to avoid practicing math. The fixed mindset hinders one’s ability to grow, develop, and achieve his full potential in the long-run.

Meanwhile, someone with a growth mindset would be willing to work through problems that they had trouble with in the past. They see failure and setbacks as an indication that they should continue developing their skills

instead of accepting that they are simply “ not good at” something.

Consequently, people with a growth mindset are more likely to maximize their potential because of their belief in the idea that any skill can be developed, regardless of innate ability. Rather than ignoring criticism, they tend to learn from it, and look for solutions to their problems instead of avoiding them. “ Society is obsessed with the idea of talent and genius and people who are ‘ naturals’ with innate ability,” says Dr. Dweck.

As students, we need to deconstruct the common assumption that “ naturally talented” or “ naturally smart” people are more likely to be successful because of their seemingly inborn abilities. In reality, people have different talents and traits because of their varying backgrounds, experiences, training, or ways of learning. Though goals are helpful (and arguably necessary) to achieve success, we should also focus on the process of achieving our goals. By being willing to work through our mistakes, we are setting ourselves up for improvement and development, which can lead us to surpass even our own self-expectations.