

Video Transcript
The Power of Belief: Mindset and Success
(with Eduardo Briceno at TEDxManhattanBeach)

What do you think is the key to achieving our goals, our success? Some people suggest things like hard work, focus, persistence. But research shows these are all by products of something else — something much more powerful that we can all develop. It is this very special something that really is critical to success and is what I'm here to discuss with you today. Someone who has achieved great success is Josh Waitzkin, a chess international master and the subject of the movie Searching for Bobby Fischer. Nobody has won all the national chess championships that Josh has, but even more impressive, when he turned 21 he took on the challenge mastering something completely new and very different from chess — Marshall Arts. He realized that he had learned how to grow and succeed, and he could apply that understanding to other domains. And so, he devoted himself relentlessly to Tai Chi Chuan, and after lots of hard work, many failures and some broken joints, he became a great martial artist and he won two World Championships. Now he's off to jui-jitsu.

So what does Josh say is the greatest thing that ever happened to him? Believe it or not, he says losing my first national chess championship because it helped me avoid many of the psychological traps. The key trap that Josh avoided was believing that he was special, that he was smarter than other people and that he didn't have to work hard. He could have thought of himself as a prodigy, but he doesn't think that he has extraordinary intelligence. He says, the moment we believe that success is determined by an ingrained level of ability, we will be brittle in the face of adversity.

Josh often quotes Stanford professor Carol Dweck, who discovered that some people see intelligence or abilities as fixed — what is called the fixed mindset. While other people see them as Josh does, as qualities that can be developed — a growth mindset. More important, Dr. Dweck discovered that these two different mindsets lead to very different behaviors and results. In a study she did with Dr. Lisa Blackwell, several hundred seventh graders were surveyed to determine which mindset each student had, and then they were tracked for two years. Results showed that the students with a growth mindset — those who thought they could change their own intelligence — increased their grades overtime, while those with the fixed mindset did not. You can see the trend; the gap in performance just widens and widens over time. The difference between these two groups: a different perspective on intelligence.

Other studies have shown similar effects for our mindset about other abilities like problem solving, playing sports, managing people, or anything else you'd like — dancing the Macarena [laughter]. The key to success is not simply effort or focus or resilience, but it is the growth mindset that creates them. The mindset itself is critical. Research shows that when we directly try to build great or persistence it is not nearly as effective as addressing the mindset that underlies them. How many of us think of ourselves as not math people, or creative, or sociable, or athletic. Or conversely, that we are naturals. If we're to fulfil our potential, we have to start thinking differently. We

have to realize that we're not chained to our current capabilities. Neuroscience shows that the brain is very malleable, and we can change our own ability to think and to perform. In fact, many of the most accomplished people of our era were thought of by experts to have no future. People like Charles Darwin, Lucille Ball, Marcel Proust and many others, but they, along with all great achievers from Mozart to Einstein built their abilities.

But the key insight that I would like you to walk away with today is that when we realize that — when we realize that we can change our own abilities, when we have a growth mindset — we bring our game to new levels. So how does a growth mindset do that? It turns out that there are physiological manifestations to mindset. Brain scans show that for people with a fixed mindset, the brain becomes most active when receiving information about how the person performed, such as a grade or a score. But for people with a growth mindset the brain becomes most active when receiving information about what they could do better next time. In other words, people with a fixed mindset worry the most about how they're judged, while those with the growth mindset focus the most on learning.

There are other consequences of mindset. People with a fixed mindset see effort as a bad thing, something that only people with low capabilities need. While those with a growth mindset see effort as what makes us smart, as the way to grow. And when they hit a setback or failure, people with a fixed mindset tend to conclude that they're incapable, so to protect their ego, they lose interest or withdraw. We observe that as lack of motivation, but behind it is a fixed mindset. Whereas people with a growth mindset understand that setbacks are part of growth, so when they hit one they find a way around it, like Josh Waitzkin did when he lost in chess or in martial arts.

Research clearly shows these effects of mindset. In one study that Dr. Dweck did with Dr. Claudia Mueller, they had children do a set of puzzles and then they praised the kids. To some of the kids they said, "Wow, that's a really good score, you must be smart at this." That's fixed mindset praise because it portrays intelligence or abilities as a fixed quality. To other kids, they said, "Wow, that's a really good score. You must have tried really hard." That's growth mindset praise because it focuses on the process. Then they asked the kids, "Okay, what kind of puzzle would like to do next, an easy one or a hard one? The majority of the kids who received the fixed mindset praise chose to do the easy puzzle, while the great majority of those who received the growth mindset praise chose to challenge themselves. Then all the researchers gave a hard puzzle to all of the kids because they were interested in seeing what confronting difficulty would do to their performance.

Look at what happened when the kids later went back to the set of easier problems that what they started with. The kids who received the fixed mindset praise did significantly worse than they had originally, while those who received the growth mindset praise did better. And to top it off, at the very end kids were asked to report their scores, and the kids who received the fixed mindset praise lied about their scores over three times more often than those who received the growth mindset praise. They did not have another

way to cope with their failure. The difference between these two groups one short little sentence: How often do we praise kids for being smart or for being great at something? We've been told that this will raise their self-esteem, but instead it puts them in a fixed mindset. They become afraid of challenges and they lose confidence when things get hard. As Josh Waitzkin says, it is incredibly important for parents to make their feedback process related, as opposed to praising or criticizing talent. If we win because we're a winner, then when we lose it must make us a loser. These studies show not only the mechanisms by which mindset affects performance, but they also show something else that's very important. They show that we can change mindsets, and that's important because most of us have fixed mindsets about something.

Another study that showed that we can change mindsets is one in which Dweck and Blackwell did a workshop with 7th graders to instill a growth mindset in them. As a result of the workshop, the students gained more interest in learning and they work harder — and as a result of that, their grades improved. Other studies have shown that when we teach a growth mindset not only does it improve achievement for students as a whole, but it also narrows the achievement gap because the effects are most pronounced for the students who face negative stereotypes, such as minority students and girls in math.

I've spoken mostly about children but mindset affects all of us. In our workplaces, managers with fixed mindsets don't welcome feedback as much, and they don't mentor employees as much. And employees with growth mindsets about specific skills like negotiations become far better at those skills than people with fixed views. Mindsets can even help both solve big social issues. A recent study showed that when we expose Israelis and Palestinians to the idea that groups can change, they increase their attitude toward one another — they improve them, and they enhance their willingness to compromise and to work for peace. We also see the effects of mindsets on relationships, sports, health.

How is it possible that as a society we're not asking schools to develop a growth mindset in children? Our myopic efforts to teach them facts, concepts, and even critical thinking skills, is likely to fail if we don't also deliberately teach them the essential beliefs that will allow them to succeed — not only in school, but also beyond. There's a lot that we can do to change mindsets. But here are three things that any of us can do to instill a growth mindset in ourselves and those around us. First, recognize that the growth mindset is not only beneficial but is also supported by science. Neuroscience shows that the brain changes and becomes more capable when we work hard to improve ourselves. Second, learn and teach others about how to develop our abilities. Learn about deliberate practice and what makes for effective effort. When we understand how to develop our abilities, we strengthen our conviction that we're in charge of them. And third, listen for your fixed mindset voice, and when you hear it, talk back with a growth mindset voice. If you hear "I can't do it," add "yet." My request you today is that you share this knowledge about the growth mindset with your family, friends, and schools so that all of us can go and fulfill our potential. Thank you.

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