

Coaching Tip: Helping Your Clients Achieve Their Goals

Welcome to my coaching tip of the week on helping your clients achieve their goals and overcome obstacles. Today I want to share a concept that made a drastic difference in how I approached my training as a coach as well as my own personal challenges. It's called the "growth" and "fixed" mindset. According to Carol Dweck, author of *Mindset*, a "growth" mindset, means that you believe, with effort, perseverance and drive, that you can develop your natural abilities, talents and even your intelligence through experiences, training and effort.

A "fixed" mindset is the belief that your intelligence, talents and other abilities are set in stone. You believe that you're born with a particular set of skills and that you can't change them.

If you have a "fixed" mindset, you will likely fear that you may not be smart or talented enough to achieve your goals. You may hold yourself back by engaging only in activities that you know you can do well. When you face a challenge, your lizard might respond with "are you sure you can do it?", or "what if you fail?", "you know how foolish you'll look if you screw up" and the consequence of that is "if I don't try, I can protect myself and keep my dignity". When you hit a setback, that voice might say, "I knew this would happen, now everyone knows how limited or dumb I am" – "I'll never do that again" or "I can still back out before it's too late and I lose all my dignity".

In short, someone with a “fixed” mindset has the desire to look smart which leads to a tendency to avoid challenges (because they don’t want to risk ruining their self-image) so they will stick to what they know and when faced with outside obstacles, they will give up easily.

Conversely, an individual with a “growth” mindset embraces challenges because they know they will be stronger as a result. When faced with a setback, they will be persistent because their self-image is not tethered to success and they understand that effort is inherent in the path of mastery rather than something to be avoided.

Is it becoming clear why this concept is relevant to coaching? Whether your client has goals (learning a new language, losing weight, starting a new business) or is faced with life challenges (taking care of aging parents or losing their job) having a growth mindset is crucial to their success.

Let’s look at the “fixed” mindset in the context of coaching.

Example:

Let’s say your client want to get into medical school. If he has a “fixed” mindset, he believes that the outcome will be based on his innate intelligence or talent. Heidi Halverson, author of *Succeed*, would characterize this as a performance goal – their energy is directed toward achieving a particular outcome in order to validate their intelligence, talent or desirability. They use it as measure or their self-worth. If that person gets into medical school, he wins, he feels good, he can tell himself he’s smart. If he doesn’t get in, he loses. He makes it mean that he’s not smart enough which will likely trigger a host of negative emotions (anxiety, depression, shame, hopelessness, etc.) and behaviors (giving up, self-recrimination, rumination). He will likely tell himself “if I’m not smart enough why should I even try again. There’s no point, I’ll just go back to the job I hated”. Now there’s nothing wrong with having a performance goal, in fact, it can create the motivation for your client to work exceptionally hard at getting into medical school but if he doesn’t get in, he will have a hard time adapting to this reality and will likely not try again. Chances are good that he will retreat to something safe and familiar – a job he hates.

If this client, however, adopted a “growth” mindset, (which means you believe you can cultivate your natural abilities, gifts and talents, even your intelligence with effort and practice) not getting into medical school wouldn't cause those intense or extreme negative emotions or reactions like giving up. Although there might be temporary disappointment, a client with a growth mindset is less likely to judge himself and/or make it a measure of his self-worth. In fact, studies have shown that people with growth mindsets who face setbacks are more likely to take action and ask questions like what are they doing wrong and then take steps to fix it. They are about self-improvement vs. self-validation. In short, they are not about proving themselves and how smart they are but rather becoming the best and most capable candidate they can be.

In summary, those with “growth” mindsets accept feedback or criticism not as a reflection of their competence or value as a human being but rather as an opportunity to foster their growth and/or skill set.

So, how can you help your client create a “growth” mindset when it comes to them achieving their goals or even facing setbacks? I'm so glad you asked.

Here are some of my favorite questions:

1. We all face setbacks and/or difficult circumstances, how you choose to respond to those is up to you. It's a choice. How do you feel about your choice in this situation?
2. How would it feel if you focused on getting better rather than proving that you're good enough? Or, is your intention to get better or prove you're good enough?
3. What 3 top feelings do you want to experience on your journey toward achieving your goal (of losing weight, learning Spanish, transitioning to your new job)? Or, what do you want to stand for as you go through this divorce, send your last kid off to college or leave your job?
4. What would you need to think in order to experience those feelings?

5. Remember your why. Why did you want to go to medical school in the first place? Why do you want a new career?
6. You had a setback? So what. What did you learn? Why is this perfect for you?
7. Oh, you made a mistake – who cares! What are you making that mean? What else is true?
8. This wasn't your best work –who can help you?
9. Who would you be if you didn't make this mistake or failure a reflection of your value/worth as a human being?
10. What's one teeny tiny turtle step you can take toward achieving your goal?
11. Name 3 things you did well that had nothing to do with the outcome (did you show up? Did you have courage? Did you do your best?)
12. You got some feedback, that's terrific. Is there some truth in there for you?

By the way, I invite you to share the “growth/fixed” mindset concept with your clients. The reasons why we strive for a growth mindset is to feel better, stay motivated, get unstuck, build resilience and enjoy the journey in pursuit of the goal or in the face of obstacles. You are much more likely to succeed when you give yourself the gift of making progress vs. achieving perfection.

Per usual Coaches, I'd love to know if these tips are valuable and if you have ideas for future tips, I'd appreciate hearing those too.

Cheers,

Jackie