

# MIND LIFE PROJECT

*with Dr Elise Bialylew*

**Carol S. Dweck, Ph.D.**, is one of the world's leading researchers in the field of motivation and is a Professor of Psychology at Stanford University. Her research has focused on why people succeed and how to foster success. She has lectured all over the world, and has been elected to the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. Her work has been featured in such publications as The New Yorker, Time Magazine, The New York Times, and The Washington Post

**Dr Elise Bialylew:** Welcome Carol. I'm so thrilled to have you on the program

**Carol Dweck:** Thank you Elise. It's a pleasure to be here.

**Dr Elise Bialylew:** So we will get straight into the questions. What I wanted to ask you to begin with is how did actually you become involved yourself in research around mindset?

**Carol Dweck:** It's been something I've been researching for a long time. It grew out of the work I did in graduate school many years ago where I was interested in how people coped with difficulties, setbacks, stresses. As overtime as I dug more and more deeply I understood that a lot of difficulties people experience flow from their mindset.

**Dr Elise Bialylew:** So can you please describe for me what these mindsets are?

**Carol Dweck:** We find that some people favor a fixed mindset and this means they believe that they're basic qualities like their intelligence, their skills, their talents are just these fixed traits. You have a certain amount and that's that. That's the person you are and that's the person you'll always be. But, other people favor a growth mindset. They believe that even basic qualities can be developed through hard work, good strategies, input from others. So they don't worry, "what am I like right now?" they're striving to develop their qualities and these are the people that don't beat themselves up, don't worry about failure all the time, and don't get stressed out about everything. They have a perspective over time of what they are reaching for.

We all have a little at least a little of both. We'll talk as though, you know, when you're in a fixed mindset it's this when you're in a growth mindset it's this, but we all have thoughts and feelings that comes from both mindsets.

**Dr Elise Bialylew:** Could you please describe how you came to discover these two different mindsets? Like perhaps giving some descriptions of some of the studies you did or, 1 or 2 things to just highlight how this came to be a paradigm for you.

**Carol Dweck:** Yes. So in my research my students and I were asking why do some people worry all the time about failure, about difficulty? Why are they always concerned how they're going to look, and how they're going to feel, if this happens, or that happens. Whereas other people are just diving in and seeking to learn and get information from the setback and mistakes. And we realized over time that

these qualities flowed from the mindsets. **When you have a fixed mindset everything that happens defines you in your eyes. If you have a failure, you are a failure. If you have to work too hard at something you must not be good at it. But, in a growth mindset it's all revolving around learning. And so, what's a heartbreak and the end of the world for someone with a fixed mindset, is an exciting challenge from a growth mindset perspective.** We see this in many studies where for example we follow students over school transitions. That's when everyone experiences difficulty and those in the fixed mindset say "Oh, I'm not good at this. I don't feel smart, I worry about..." even if they're doing well they worry if they're not doing well. But those in a growth mindset they have, you know, a healthy degree of apprehension because they don't know what's going on yet, but they are viewing it as more of a challenge and an opportunity for growth. Actually then in the end those with a growth mindset do better in terms of their grades. When we teach students the growth mindset, the idea that every time they stretch outside of their comfort zone and do new and hard things, the neurons in their brains form stronger connections and they get smarter. And when we teach them this and how to apply it to their school work, they do better. They earn higher grades, they earn higher achievement test scores.

**Dr Elise Bialylew:** So in fact even just teaching young people about the idea and concept of a growth mindset can actually perpetuate them into developing into a growth mindset or improving.

**Carol Dweck:** Yes, yes. We find this even among college aged students. And one of my former students Jason Plass showed that when you teach the elderly a growth mindset their memory improves.

**Dr Elise Bialylew:** That's fascinating. And how does this play out in the world of business?

**Carol Dweck:** Oh, it has a profound effect on the world of business where businesses and people in them need to be creative and innovative, experimenting and then rolling with the punches. So research has found that business people with more of a growth mindset are willing to take those risks more and willing to take on those challenges and see the setbacks as meaningful not about themselves it's about where to go next. People in a fixed mindset in companies say "I want to be the genius. I want to be the star. Even if I'm in a group I have to be the best". So either they opt out of the risk or they're competing with other people rather than seeing themselves as part of a team that's working together to do something exciting. Also the company itself can have predominantly a fixed mindset. A fixed mindset company we call that the "culture of genius." Everyone striving to look smart and not look dumb, hide mistakes. They talk about keeping secrets and cutting corners to get ahead. That's the name of the game. But, a growth mindset company supports people's development. They feel the company will be on their side if they take a risk and it doesn't work out. They feel the company gives them points for working with others, playing nicely with others. The bosses in growth mindset companies say that their employees are more innovative because they're given this freedom to innovate safely.

**Dr Elise Bialylew:** So, in the realm of business it's about relationships with people. I'm wondering now if we move that to the realm of relationships for example in family or intimate relationship settings and how this idea of the growth mindset versus the fixed mindset might come into play say in intimate relationships.

**Carol Dweck:** Yes it's been researched in intimate relationships as well. So that people who have more of a fixed mindset feel like they always have to be right, because if there's a problem in the relationship it means I'm at fault and therefore not a good person or you're at fault and not a good person. There's a lot of the blame game or there's a lot of deciding "Oh, is this relationship bad or good"? **But, people in**

**a growth mindset understand that relationships grow over time and that sometimes disagreement and argument can be the basis of greater understanding and greater growth through talking it out. They're not as threatened when a problem arises.** They're not as eager to say "Well, it's not my fault". And in fact as a legacy of my fixed mindset I still have a little bit of that blame game. So my husband and I had to invent a third person whom we named 'Maurice'. And then when we disagree about something or something goes wrong we blame Maurice.

**Dr Elise Bialylew:** That's fantastic. I like that. So how do you suggest we could support one another to develop our growth mindsets?

**Carol Dweck:** Well we have a lot of research on how, for example, parents can develop growth mindset in their kids. First as I mentioned it can be taught directly. Kids can learn that when they do hard things they're growing their brains and getting smarter. But also we have found that the way parents praise their kids has a really important impact on their mindset and ironically telling kids that they're clever or brilliant backfires. It can harm them. It teaches them the fixed mindset and it makes them vulnerable to thinking "Oh, if you think I'm smart then I better not make mistakes. I better not do anything too hard". So it makes them want to do easy things and it makes them less able to cope with difficulty. So what's the alternative? We have found that when you praise the process, the child engages in their strategy, their hard work, their improvement over time, their focus, these are the things that teach them a growth mindset and help them to be hearty in the face of difficulty. We just published a study of mother's praise to their babies 1-3 years of age. And we showed that the parent's praise predicted the child's mindset and their desire for challenge 5 years later. The more process praise they gave, the more the child had a growth mindset and a desire for challenge 5 years later. So you can always change it but, it's powerful. **We're also doing research on the word "yet".** The child says "I'm not a math person", you would say "math's person". "I'm not good at this... The adult says "Yet".

**Dr Elise Bialylew:** Oh I love that!

**Carol Dweck:** I also advise parents to talk a lot about struggle around the dinner table. **"Who had a fantastic struggle today?"** Too many kids think "Oh, if it's easy it means I'm smart and if I have to struggle that means oh I'm not". Let's make struggle a valiant thing. A terrific word.

**Dr Elise Bialylew:** That's fantastic. This idea of 'fantastic struggle' I think that's just wonderful for all of us not just our kids but actually amongst each other as well.

**Carol Dweck:** Amongst each other and in the work place. I worked with one of the biggest companies in Silicon Valley that traditionally had a culture of genius and I worked with one particular department where they started talking about struggle all the time and they felt so released to be more innovative and creative. And what I say is that you're conveying a different value system. It's not about easy, and smart and better than the other person. It's about how struggling and doing hard things as a team creates talent, intelligence and success.

**Dr Elise Bialylew:** Fantastic. And I think that, I'm not sure if this is in your area or not, but all the research around neuroplasticity and the connection between learning and actually changing our brains would be very interesting as well.

**Carol Dweck:** Yes. I don't do research on that specifically but it's what we teach in our growth mindset workshops which is doing hard things, learning, is what changes your brain. Your brain can even re-organize over time based on learning.

**Dr Elise Bialylew:** I think you might have touched on this before but the relationship between the mindset and creative flourishing.

**Carol Dweck:** Yes.

**Dr Elise Bialylew:** Could you say something about that?

**Carol Dweck:** Yes. Some people at Berkley have recently done very exciting research showing a link between a growth mindset and creativity. I always hoped it would be there because when you're not worried about making mistakes, when you find mistakes to be interesting, when you expect to do things over a long period of time to get better and better at them, how could that not foster innovation and creativity? They have now. **Researchers at Berkley, have done a very impressive series of studies showing that the growth mindset is predictive of creativity and also that when you teach a growth mindset people become more creative on the tasks that you give them.**

**Dr Elise Bialylew:** As we finish the interview I wanted to offer you an opportunity if there's anything that comes to mind that we haven't covered that feels very important that you would like to share with the listeners.

**Carol Dweck:** I would just say just keep your minds on the ways in which you would like to grow. The goals you have for your life. What contributions you want to make. Ways in which you want to grow and then go for it.

**Dr Elise Bialylew:** Thank you so much. Fantastic, it's been absolutely fascinating.

**Carol Dweck:** My pleasure.