

# Will You Keep a Fixed Mindset or ADOPT A GROWTH MINDSET IN 2021?

YOUR SUCCESS NEXT YEAR HINGES ON THAT CHOICE.

WRITTEN BY MARTHA M. NEWMAN

**IF THERE IS A GAP BETWEEN WHERE YOU ARE** and where you want to be, the beliefs you hold about your own possibilities can close that gap or widen it. The choice you make between a fixed mindset and a growth mindset will determine whether your practice grows or stalls in the next 12 months.

## What Is the Difference?

Let's say your goal is to become a rainmaker, make partner, or earn a board certification and you have not succeeded so far.

The fixed mindset claims, "I can't do it." The growth mindset declares, "I can't do it *yet*."

## How Can You Recognize a Fixed Mindset?

If you believe that talents are innate and unchangeable and that abilities are deep-seated traits that cannot be altered, you have a fixed mindset. That mindset does not leave room for *becoming* talented or capable. You are stuck with the way you were born.

As Carol Dweck writes in her groundbreaking book, *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success*, people who are convinced of their own inherent limitations live with the urge to prove themselves, fear being judged, and crave validation from others. Failure reminds them of their own intractable inadequacies. Clinging to those limiting beliefs stymies their personal development and prevents them from achieving their full potential.

The self-talk of lawyers with fixed mindsets sounds like this:

"My law practice will never take off. I'm no good at business development."  
"I lost that case. I'm a failure."  
"All the other associates are moving up. I just don't have what it takes to make partner."  
"There is so much I don't know. I don't see how I'll ever be a good lawyer."

## How Can You Recognize a Growth Mindset?

If you believe that talents can be developed with effort and persistence, you are willing to fail in order to learn, and you have the courage to stretch yourself in order to get better, you have a growth mindset. Lawyers who believe success is there for the taking dedicate themselves to lifelong learning and improvement. As the author says in *Mindset*, people should spend more time working toward their goals and less time worrying about what is wrong with them.

When we are less focused on looking smart and regard defeats as learning opportunities, our talents grow. Setbacks become motivators. We know we can develop skills and attributes we do not currently possess.

Lawyers with growth mindsets think optimistically about the likelihood of positive change:

"My originations are down. I know I can bring in more clients if I build my business development skills."  
"I intend to figure out why I lost that trial and win the next one."  
"I didn't make partner this year. I'll find out what I need to improve and get promoted."

## How Do You Shift to a Growth Mindset?

Mindsets are long-held beliefs that influence your decision-making and determine your success. They are habits and patterns of thinking that either advance your career or hold you back. If those beliefs are fixed and self-limiting, you can change them with unrelenting determination, continuous practice, and willingness to be uncomfortable until your new growth mindset becomes habitual. What choice will you make? **TBJ**



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