



The power of mindset

What are mindsets? They are the little voices that come into our head, that originate from our core beliefs and assumptions on a particular domain that ultimately orientate our expectations.

Mindsets help us filter and simplify the world's reality

For example, if you walk up to a door of a premises that has a big open sign, you expect the door to open and, if it doesn't, you can spend considerable time trying to figure out why.

Equally, we may feel that people are inherently good, helping us to build relationships easily or we may be more cautious and need more trust, taking us longer to build relationships but protecting us from fraudsters!

Mindsets can be described as the telescope from which we see our world, our objective reality, or personal reality which equals our 'personality'.

As well as being helpful, they can also be limiting and we can often be trapped in the narratives of the stories we constantly tell ourselves. We can build metaphorical walls that trap us in these limiting stories and part of my job as a coach is to help people tear down those walls and create new stories to free them from limiting beliefs and build more abilitating narratives to achieve their goals and aspirations.

Mindsets are largely created from three areas:

- 1 **Inherited** - our upbringing
- 2 **Our environment and influencing others** like parents, friends and teachers etc.
- 3 **Conscious choice** (mindsets that we have created through our life experience) – the area we have most control over.

Mindsets have a significant effect on our motivation, life outcomes and our health.

A good question to ask yourself: "*Is this mindset debilitating on enhancing?*" The answer will change the motivation and the outcome.

For example, in her book *Mindset*, Carol Dweck highlights the power of a 'growth' mindset versus a 'fixed' mindset. A fixed mindset suggests that we are what we are and that's it. In which case, why bother trying to change, resulting in a complete lack of motivation. Conversely, a growth mindset suggests that everything is possible and that we can improve anything if we put our mind to it – literally! As Carol Dweck says, "*If we are not proficient, we are not proficient yet!*"

Mindset can affect everything in our lives, how we view food, exercise and stress.

The Milkshake Study

In a study by Yale University, researchers took a group of students and informed them that they were being given two different types of milkshakes at two different times for different physical and metabolic needs.

One was a high fat, high calorie, indulgent milkshake, the other a low fat, 'diet' milkshake.

The gut peptide response of ghrelin, the hunger hormone, was then measured. The students who drank the high calorie shake saw their hunger response reduced by up to three times more than those who drank the diet one, yet in fact the milkshakes were exactly the same.

This is interesting as it shows that when many of us 'go on a diet' or health kick, our perception is that we are likely to be more hungry – subconsciously we feel that we are depriving and restricting ourselves, creating the reverse of what we would expect.

Having a sense of enoughness and satisfaction is so important. Many of us know that some foods are bad and some are good, but a mindset of restriction has a negative response – it is important to consider healthy choices as indulgent and nutritious, creating a positive response for the body and mind.

The same can be said for exercise, which I have renamed 'intentional movement' for reasons I have suggested in my section on exercise.

In another study, researchers took two sets of hotel cleaners. They asked them to rank the amount of exercise they felt they did on a scale of 1–10. Bearing in mind that these people are up and down stairs all day, changing beds, vacuuming and cleaning bathrooms etc., the average score was only three. However, all suggested that they were tired and aching after each day!

The researchers then took half the group and explained to them how physical and beneficial

“What doesn't kill us makes us stronger.”
Friedrich Nietzsche

their jobs really were. They also took a number of metabolic and physiological markers, like heart rate, blood pressure, weight, body fat etc. After only six weeks, those that now felt their job was not only physically beneficial but environmentally and socially beneficial improved substantially on ALL their markers, reported greater job satisfaction, were less tired and substantially happier.

That's the power of mindset!

You may remember my philosophy around intentional movement: regularly walking with friends outside, taking the stairs rather than the lift, turning up the music while doing some house work, washing the car rather than taking it to a car wash. Adopting a positive mindset while undertaking these activities not only provides reward and satisfaction but can also have a substantial impact on physical and mental wellbeing.

The pharmacology industry has known this for some time. There is much research around the 'placebo effect' as virtually every drug that is trialled in a controlled environment with a placebo (sugar pill). In many trials, the placebo outperforms the drug, why? The power of our mindset.

On the reverse, the 'nocebo' effect is the ugly sister. Research showed that when the brain regions of those with a psychogenic fever were scanned, it found that their body temperatures increased between 2–3°. This was partly physiological and partly when attention was focused around the symptoms.

Wim Hof, AKA 'The IceMan', managed to dispel the e-coli bacteria injected into his body through mindset, cold and meditation.

Reframing the stress mindset

Many public health statements would suggest that we should avoid stress at all costs. However, stress in simple terms is a hurdle in the journey

towards our goals. It is essential and can literally save our lives.

Stress is inevitable – it's a natural bodily function and is mostly activated when we really care about something.

Stress prepares the body – our vision narrows so that we can apply more focus, blood flows to muscles to allow us to move quickly, neurons in our brains are fired so that we can concentrate and we become more sensory aware. How we view stress has a huge impact on our physiology. Do we see stress as harmful, destructive and crushing or do we see it as an inevitable part of our lives which we leverage to our advantage?

I enjoy watching some of the reality programmes on TV like 'SAS Who Dares Wins' or 'I'm a Celebrity, Get Me Out of Here' where contestants are starved, exhausted and challenged to breaking point. Yet, at the end, without fail they all say it was the best experience of their lives... why? Because stress makes us grow stronger – when we are stressed, we release the anabolic hormone DHEA which supports testosterone and oestrogen, supporting growth and strength.

Researchers were able to predict successfully which Naval seals would pass the BUDS selection training, one of the most demanding of all the military selection processes, where an average of only 15% pass. They were able to predict this through the participants' view of stress. Those who felt they were able to use stress to enhance their performance passed.

A good question to ask yourself; *"is this mindset debilitating or enhancing, limiting or empowering? If it's debilitating, what change can you make to alter your state?"*.

Tips to help and support you:

- 1 **Have a goal** – a plan in life forms purpose and meaning which in turn has value and this results in positive emotions.
- 2 **Acknowledge** – awareness is a powerful asset and gives us perspective. Be present in the moment. How is your current mindset making you feel? Awareness can support us in reprogramming our subconscious and changing our state to a CAN DO attitude.
- 3 **Welcome the feeling** – it's telling you something – to care, connect and embrace.
- 4 **Utilise** – use it to your advantage – stress can be an asset providing you with potential. It can be the wind in the sails, creating focus, strength and growth.
- 5 **Visualise** – see the result you would like. The brain can't always differentiate between an emotion associated to an event or one visualised.
- 6 **Box breathe '3,3,3'** – breathe in through your nose for three seconds, hold your breath for three seconds, breath out slowly for three seconds, then repeat. This technique was taught to the military as a way of staying calm whilst remaining alert.
- 7 **Be grateful** – stress can also be a way of identifying that for which we are truly grateful and aid change to our mindset.
- 8 **Surround yourself with those who inspire, both physically and through media.** Podcasts are a great way to connect and make a conscious decision to look at life with a telescope of growth, development and gratitude.

believe in yourself

Can you fake it till you make it?

I'm not sure I like the expression, but you can definitely 'practice till you become'.

A research on birds showed that those with darker feathers tended to be more dominant than those without. The researchers took birds with lighter feathers and stained them darker, but they still got picked on. Then they injected them with a little growth hormone which transformed them into more fearless birds.

Amy Cuddy has shown in her research that by simply taking a 'power pose', standing up straight, head held high for two minutes, the body growth and strength hormone increases substantially and that those who participate get more confident. You only have to experience the New Zealand All Blacks HAKA (war dance) to see how powerful this can be psychologically. To support this, there is far more evidence in the animal kingdom where the dominant animal will make themselves bigger.

I'm not suggesting anyone take growth hormones, however, leaning forward into adversity with your head held high and a mindset of 'I CAN DO', will biologically stimulate growth hormones which can give you strength and courage to support you through your journey of this exciting, interesting, complex, often frightening event we call life.

RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

Listen:

**Andrew Huberman
podcast with
Alina Crum**

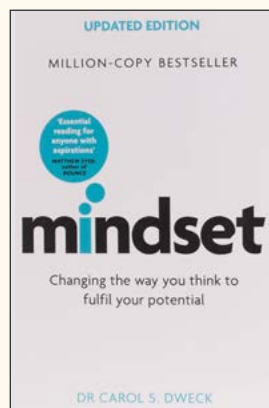


Watch on
YouTube:

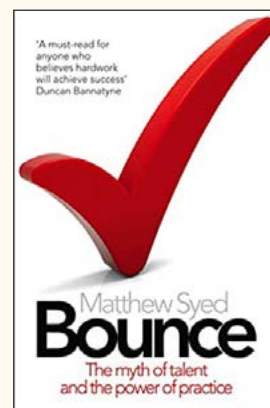
**Amy Cuddy –
your body lan-
guage shapes who
you are**



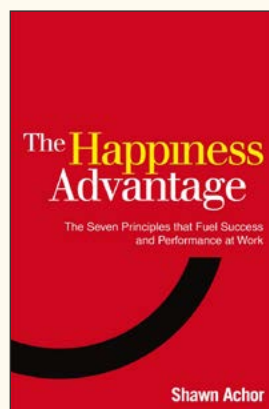
RECOMMENDED READING



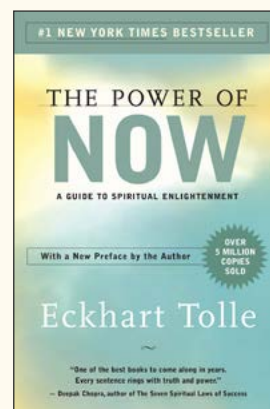
Mindset
Dr Carol S. Dweck



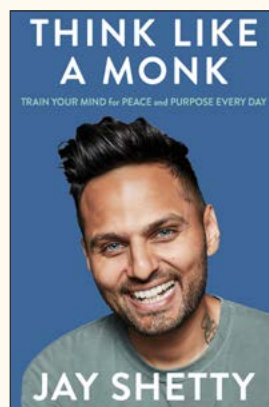
Bounce
Matthew Syed



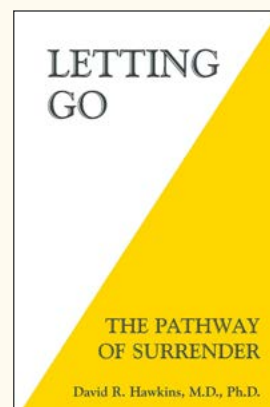
**The Happiness
Advantage**
Shawn Achor



The Power of Now
Eckhart Tolle



Think Like a Monk
Jay Shetty



Letting Go
David R. Hawkins