

PARENTS, TEACHERS, AND COACHES: WHERE DO MINDSETS COME FROM?

No parent thinks, “I wonder what I can do today to undermine my children, subvert their effort, turn them off learning, and limit their achievement.” Of course not. They think, “I would do anything, give anything, to make my children successful.” Yet many of the things they do boomerang. Their helpful judgments, their lessons, their motivating techniques often send the wrong message.

In fact, every word and action sends a message. It tells children—or students, or athletes—how to think about themselves. It can be a fixed-mindset message that says: *You have permanent traits and I’m judging them.* Or it can be a growth-mindset message that says: *You are a developing person and I am interested in your development.*

It’s remarkable how sensitive children are to these messages, and how concerned they are about them. Haim Ginott, the childrearing sage of the 1950s through ’70s, tells this story. Bruce, age five, went with his mother to his new kindergarten. When they arrived, Bruce looked up at the paintings on the wall and said, “Who made those ugly pictures?” His mother rushed to correct him: “It’s not nice to call pictures ugly when they are so pretty.” But his teacher knew exactly what he meant. “In here,” she said, “you don’t have to paint pretty pictures. You can paint mean pictures if you feel like it.” Bruce gave her a big smile. She had answered his real question: What happens to a boy who doesn’t paint well?

Next, Bruce spotted a broken fire engine. He picked it up and asked in a self-righteous tone, “Who broke this fire engine?” Again his mother rushed in: “What difference does it make to you who broke it? You don’t know anyone here.” But the teacher understood. “Toys are for playing,” she told him. “Sometimes they get broken. It happens.” Again, his question was answered: What happens to boys who break toys?

Bruce waved to his mother and went off to start his first day of kindergarten. This was not a place where he would be judged and labeled.

You know, we never outgrow our sensitivity to these messages. Several years ago, my husband and I spent two weeks in Provence, in the south of France. Everyone was wonderful to us—very kind and very generous. But on the last day, we drove to Italy for lunch. When we got there and found a little family restaurant, tears started streaming down my face. I felt so nurtured. I said to David, “You know, in France, when they’re nice to you, you feel like you’ve passed a test. But in Italy, there is no test.”

Parents and teachers who send fixed-mindset messages are like France, and parents and teachers who send growth-mindset messages are like Italy.

Let’s start with the messages parents send to their children—but, you know, they are also messages that teachers can send to their students or coaches can send to their athletes.

PARENTS (AND TEACHERS): MESSAGES ABOUT SUCCESS AND FAILURE

Messages About Success

Listen for the messages in the following examples:

“You learned that so quickly! You’re so smart!”

“Look at that drawing. Martha, is he the next Picasso or what?”

“You’re so brilliant, you got an A without even studying!”

If you’re like most parents, you hear these as supportive, esteem-boosting messages. But listen more closely. See if you can hear another message. It’s the one that children hear:

If I don’t learn something quickly, I’m not smart.

I shouldn’t try drawing anything hard or they’ll see I’m no Picasso.

I’d better quit studying or they won’t think I’m brilliant.

How do I know this? Remember chapter 3, how I was thinking about all the praise parents were lavishing on their kids in the hope of encouraging confidence and achievement? You’re so smart. You’re so talented. You’re such a natural athlete. And I thought, wait a minute. Isn’t it the kids with the fixed mindset—the vulnerable kids—who are obsessed with this? Wouldn’t harping on intelligence or talent make kids—all kids—even more obsessed with it?

That’s why we set out to study this. After seven experiments with hundreds of children, we had some of the clearest findings I’ve ever seen: Praising children’s intelligence harms their motivation and it harms their performance.

How can that be? Don’t children love to be praised?

Yes, children love praise. And they especially love to be praised for their intelligence and talent. It really does give them a boost, a special glow—but only for the moment. The minute they hit a snag, their confidence goes out the window and their motivation hits rock bottom. If success means they’re smart, then failure means they’re dumb. That’s the fixed mindset.

Here is the voice of a mother who saw the effects of well-meant praise for intelligence:

I want to share my real-life experience with you. I am the mother of a very intelligent fifth grader. He consistently scores in the 99 percentile on standardized school tests in math, language and

science, but he has had some very real “self-worth” problems. My husband, who is also an intelligent person, felt his parents never valued intellect and he has overcompensated with our son in attempting to praise him for “being smart.” Over the past years, I have suspected this was causing a problem, because my son, while he easily excels in school, is reluctant to take on more difficult work or projects (just as your studies show) because then he would think he’s not smart. He projects an over-inflated view of his abilities and claims he can perform better than others (both intellectually and in physical activities), but will not attempt such activities, because of course, in his failure he would be shattered.

And here is the voice of one of my Columbia students reflecting on his history:

I remember often being praised for my intelligence rather than my efforts, and slowly but surely I developed an aversion to difficult challenges. Most surprisingly, this extended beyond academic and even athletic challenges to emotional challenges. This was my greatest learning disability—this tendency to see performance as a reflection of character and, if I could not accomplish something right away, to avoid that task or treat it with contempt.

I know, it feels almost impossible to resist this kind of praise. We want our loved ones to know that we prize them and appreciate their successes. Even I have fallen into the trap.

One day I came home and my husband, David, had solved a very difficult problem we had been puzzling over for a while. Before I could stop myself, I blurted out: “You’re brilliant!” Needless to say, I was appalled at what I had done, and as the look of horror spread over my face, he rushed to reassure me. “I know you meant it in the most ‘growth-minded’ way. That I searched for strategies, kept at it, tried all kinds of solutions, and finally mastered it.”

“Yes,” I said, smiling sweetly, “that’s *exactly* what I meant.”

SENDING MESSAGES ABOUT PROCESS AND GROWTH

So what’s the alternative to praising talent or intelligence? David’s reassurance gives us a hint. One of my students tells us more:

I went home this weekend to find my 12-year-old sister ecstatic about school. I asked what she was so excited about and she said, “I got 102 on my social studies test!” I heard her repeat this phrase about five more times that weekend. At that point I decided to apply what we learned in class to this real-life situation. Rather than praising her intelligence or her grade, I asked questions that made her reflect on the effort she put into studying and on how she has improved from the year before. Last year, her grades dropped lower and lower as the year progressed so I thought it was important for me to intervene and steer her in the right direction at the beginning of this year.

Does this mean we can’t praise our children enthusiastically when they do something great? Should we try to restrain our admiration for their successes? Not at all. It just means that we should keep away from a certain *kind* of praise—praise that judges their intelligence or talent. Or praise that implies that

we’re proud of them for their intelligence or talent rather than for the work they put in.

We can praise them as much as we want for the growth-oriented process—what they accomplished through practice, study, persistence, and good strategies. And we can ask them about their work in a way that admires and appreciates their efforts and choices.

“That homework was so long and involved. I really admire the way you concentrated and finished it.”

“That picture has so many beautiful colors. Tell me about them.”

“You put so much thought into this essay. It really makes me understand Shakespeare in a new way.”

“The passion you put into that piano piece gives me a real feeling of joy. How do you feel when you play it?”

I was excited to learn recently that Haim Ginott, through his lifelong work with children, came to the same conclusion. “Praise should deal, not with the child’s personality attributes, but with his efforts and achievements.”

Sometimes people are careful to use growth-oriented praise with their children but then ruin it by the way they talk about others. I have heard parents say in front of their children, “He’s just a born loser,” “She’s a natural genius,” or “She’s a pea-brain.” When children hear their parents level fixed judgments at others, it communicates a fixed mindset. And they have to wonder, *Am I next?*

This caveat applies to teachers, too! In one study, we taught students a math lesson spiced up with some math history, namely, stories about great mathematicians. For half of the students, we talked about the mathematicians as geniuses who easily came up with their math discoveries. This alone propelled students into a fixed mindset. It sent the message: *There are some people who are born smart in math and everything is easy for them. Then there are the rest of you.* For the other half of the students, we talked about the mathematicians as people who became passionate about math and ended up making great discoveries. This brought students into a growth mindset. The message was: *Skills and achievement come through commitment and effort.* It’s amazing how kids sniff out these messages from our innocent remarks.

One more thing about praise. When we say to children, “Wow, you did that so quickly!” or “Look, you didn’t make any mistakes!” what message are we sending? We are telling them that what we prize are speed and perfection. Speed and perfection are the enemy of difficult learning: “If you think I’m smart when I’m fast and perfect, I’d better not take on anything challenging.” So what *should* we say when children complete a task—say, math problems—quickly and perfectly? Should we deny them the praise they have earned? Yes. When this happens, I say, “Whoops. I guess that was too easy. I apologize for wasting your time. Let’s do something you can really learn from!”

How do you make a child feel secure before a test or performance? The same principle applies. Reassuring children about their intelligence or talent backfires. They'll only be more afraid to show a deficiency.

Kristina was a really bright high school student who, much to her shame, did terribly on tests. She always studied, she always knew the material, but every time it came to the test, she got so wound up that her mind went blank. Her grades suffered. She disappointed her teachers. She let her parents down. And it was only going to get worse as she faced the College Board tests that the schools she longed to attend prized so highly.

The night before each test, her parents, seeing how distraught she was, tried to build her confidence. "Look, *you* know how smart you are and *we* know how smart you are. You've got this nailed. Now, stop worrying."

They were as supportive as they knew how to be, but they were raising the stakes even higher. What could they have said instead?

"It must be a terrible thing to feel that everyone is evaluating you and you can't show what you know. We want you to know that we are not evaluating you. We care about your learning, and we know that you've learned your stuff. We're proud that you've stuck to it and kept learning."

Messages About Failure

Praising success should be the least of our problems, right? Failure seems like a much more delicate matter. Children may already feel discouraged and vulnerable. Let's tune in again, this time to the messages parents can send in times of failure.

Nine-year-old Elizabeth was on her way to her first gymnastics meet. Lanky, flexible, and energetic, she was just right for gymnastics, and she loved it. Of course, she was a little nervous about competing, but she was good at gymnastics and felt confident of doing well. She had even thought about the perfect place in her room to hang the ribbon she would win.

In the first event, the floor exercises, Elizabeth went first. Although she did a nice job, the scoring changed after the first few girls and she lost. Elizabeth also did well in the other events, but not well enough to win. By the end of the evening, she had received no ribbons and was devastated.

What would you do if you were Elizabeth's parents?

1. Tell Elizabeth *you* thought she was the best.
2. Tell her she was robbed of a ribbon that was rightfully hers.
3. Reassure her that gymnastics is not that important.
4. Tell her she has the ability and will surely win next time.
5. Tell her she didn't deserve to win.

There is a strong message in our society about how to boost children's self-esteem, and a main part of that message is: *Protect them from failure!* While this may help with the immediate problem of a child's disappointment, it can be harmful in the long run. Why?

Let's look at the five possible reactions from a mindset point of view—and listen to the messages:

The first (*you* thought she was the best) is basically insincere. She was not the best—you know it, and she does, too. This offers her no recipe for how to recover or how to improve.

The second (she was robbed) places blame on others, when in fact the problem was mostly with her performance, not the judges. Do you want her to grow up blaming others for her deficiencies?

The third (reassure her that gymnastics doesn't really matter) teaches her to devalue something if she doesn't do well in it right away. Is this really the message you want to send?

The fourth (she has the ability) may be the most dangerous message of all. Does ability automatically take you where you want to go? If Elizabeth didn't win this meet, why should she win the next one?

The last option (tell her she didn't deserve to win) seems hardhearted under the circumstances. And of course you wouldn't say it quite that way. But that's pretty much what her growth-minded father told her.

Here's what he actually said: "Elizabeth, I know how you feel. It's so disappointing to have your hopes up and to perform your best but not to win. But you know, you haven't really earned it yet. There were many girls there who've been in gymnastics longer than you and who've worked a lot harder than you. If this is something you really want, then it's something you'll really have to work for."

He also let Elizabeth know that if she wanted to do gymnastics purely for fun, that was just fine. But if she wanted to excel in the competitions, more was required.

Elizabeth took this to heart, spending much more time repeating and perfecting her routines, especially the ones she was weakest in. At the next meet, there were eighty girls from all over the region. Elizabeth won five ribbons for the individual events and was the overall champion of the competition, hauling home a giant trophy. By now, her room is so covered with awards, you can hardly see the walls.

In essence, her father not only told her the truth, but also taught her how to learn from her failures and do what it takes to succeed in the future. He sympathized deeply with her disappointment, but he did not give her a phony boost that would only lead to further disappointment.

We always hear the term *constructive criticism*. But doesn't everyone think the criticism they give their children is constructive? Why would they give it if they didn't think it was helpful? Yet a lot if it is not helpful at all. It's full of judgment about the child. *Constructive* means helping the child to fix something, build a better product, or do a better job.

Billy rushed through his homework, skipping several questions and answering the others in a short, sloppy way. His father hit the roof. "*This* is your homework? Can't you ever get it right? You are either dense or irresponsible. Which is it?" The feedback managed to question his son's intelligence and character at the same time and to imply that the defects were permanent.

How could the dad have expressed his frustration and disappointment without assassinating his son's attributes? Here are some ways.

"Son, it really makes me upset when you don't do a full job. When do you think you can complete this?"

"Son, is there something you didn't understand in the assignment? Would you like me to go over it with you?"

"Son, I feel sad when I see you missing a chance to learn. Can you think of a way to do this that would help you learn more?"

"Son, this looks like a really boring assignment. You have my sympathy. Can you think of a way to make it more interesting?" or "Let's try to think of a way to lessen the pain and still do a good job. Do you have any ideas?"

"Son, remember I told you how tedious things help us learn to concentrate? This one is a real challenge. This will really take all your concentration skills. Let's see if you can concentrate through this whole assignment!"

Sometimes children will judge and label themselves. Ginott tells of Philip, age fourteen, who was working on a project with his father and accidentally spilled nails all over the floor. He guiltily looked at his dad and said:

PHILIP: Gee, I'm so clumsy.

FATHER: That's not what we say when nails spill.

PHILIP: What do you say?

FATHER: You say, the nails spilled—I'll pick them up!

PHILIP: Just like that?

FATHER: Just like that.

PHILIP: Thanks, Dad.

Kids with the fixed mindset tell us they get constant messages of judgment from their parents. They say they feel as though their traits are being measured all the time.

We asked them: "Suppose your parents offer to help you with your schoolwork. Why would they do this?"

They said: "The real reason is that they wanted to see how smart I was at the schoolwork I was working on."

We asked: "Suppose your parents are happy that you got a good grade. Why would that be?"

They said: "They were happy to see I was a smart kid."

We asked: "Suppose your parents discussed your performance with you when you did poorly on something in school. Why would they do this?"

They said: "They might have been worried I wasn't one of the bright kids," and "They think bad grades might mean I'm not smart."

So every time something happens, these children hear a message of judgment.

Maybe all kids think their parents are judging them. Isn't that what parents do—nag and judge? That's not what students with the growth mindset think. They think their parents are just trying to encourage learning and good study habits. Here's what they say about their parents' motives:

Q: Suppose your parents offer to help you with your school-work. Why would they do this?

A: They wanted to make sure I learned as much as I could from my schoolwork.

Q: Suppose your parents are happy that you got a good grade.

A: They're happy because a good grade means that I really stuck to my work.

Q: Suppose your parents discussed your performance with you when you did poorly on something in school.

A: They wanted to teach me ways to study better in the future.

Even when it was about their conduct or their relationships, the kids with the fixed mindset felt judged, but the kids with the growth mindset felt helped.

Q: Imagine that your parents became upset when you didn't do what they asked you to do. Why would they be this way?

FIXED-MINDSET CHILD: They were worried I might be a bad kid.

GROWTH-MINDSET CHILD: They wanted to help me learn ways of doing it better next time.

All kids misbehave. Research shows that normal young children misbehave every three minutes. Does it become an occasion for judgment of their character or an occasion for teaching?

Q: Imagine that your parents were unhappy when you didn't share with other kids. Why would they be this way?

FIXED-MINDSET CHILD: They thought it showed them what kind of person I was.

GROWTH-MINDSET CHILD: They wanted to help me learn better skills for getting along with other kids.

Children learn these lessons early. Children as young as toddlers pick up these messages from their parents, learning that their mistakes are worthy of judgment and punishment. Or learning that their mistakes are an occasion for suggestions and teaching.

Here's a kindergarten boy we will never forget. You will hear him role-playing different messages from his two parents. This is the situation: He wrote some numbers in school, they contained an error, and now he tells us how his parents would react.

MOTHER: Hello. What are you sad about?

BOY: I gave my teacher some numbers and I skipped the number 8 and now I'm feeling sad.

MOTHER: Well, there's one thing that can cheer you up.

BOY: What?

MOTHER: If you really tell your teacher that you tried your best, she wouldn't be mad at you. [Turning to father] We're not mad, are we?

FATHER: Oh, yes we are! Son, you better go right to your room.

I wish I could tell you he listened to his mother's growth-oriented message. But in our study, he seemed to heed the judgmental message of his dad, downgrading himself for his errors and having no good plan for fixing them. Yet at least he had his mother's effort message that he could, hopefully, put to use in the future.

Parents start interpreting and reacting to their child's behavior at minute one. A new mother tries to nurse her baby. The baby cries and won't nurse. Or takes a few sucks, gives up, and starts screaming. Is the baby stubborn? Is the baby deficient? After all, isn't nursing an inborn reflex? Aren't babies supposed to be "naturals" at nursing? What's wrong with my baby?

A new mother in this situation told me: "At first I got really frustrated. Then I kept your work in mind. I kept saying to my baby, 'We're both learning how to do this. I know you're hungry. I know it's frustrating, but we're learning.' This way of thinking helped me stay cool and guide her through till it worked. It also helped me understand my baby better so I knew how to teach her other things, too."

Don't judge. Teach. It's a learning process.

CHILDREN PASS ON THE MESSAGES

Another way we know that children learn these messages is that we can see how they pass them on. Even young children are ready to pass on the wisdom they've learned. We asked second-grade children: "What advice would you give to a child in your class who was having trouble in math?"

Here's the advice from a child with the growth mindset:

Do you quit a lot? Do you think for a minute and then stop? If you do, you should think for a long time—two minutes maybe and if you can't get it you should read the problem again. If you can't get it then, you should raise your hand and ask the teacher.

Isn't that the greatest? The advice from children with the fixed mindset was not nearly as useful. Since there's no recipe for success in the fixed mindset, their advice tended to be short and sweet. "I'm sorry" was the advice of one child as he offered his condolences.

Even *babies* can pass along the messages they've received. Mary Main and Carol George studied abused children, who had been judged and punished by their parents for crying or making a fuss. Abusive parents often don't understand that children's crying is a signal of their needs, or that babies can't stop crying on command. Instead, they judge the child as disobedient, willful, or bad for crying.

Main and George watched the abused children (who were one to three years old) in their day care setting, observing how they reacted when other children were in distress and crying. The abused children often became angry at the distressed children, and some even tried to assault them. They had gotten the message that children who cry are to be judged and punished.

We often think that the legacy of abuse gets passed on to others only when the victims of abuse become parents. But this amazing study shows that children learn lessons early and they act on them.

How did *nonabused* children react to their distressed classmate, by the way? They showed sympathy. Many went over to the crying child to see what was wrong and to see if they could help out.

ISN'T DISCIPLINE TEACHING?

Many parents think that when they judge and punish, they *are* teaching, as in "I'll teach you a lesson you'll never forget." What are they teaching? They are teaching their children that if they go against the parents' rules or values, they'll be judged and punished. They're not teaching their children how to think through the issues and come to ethical, mature decisions on their own.

And chances are, they're not teaching their children that the channels of communication are open.

Sixteen-year-old Alyssa came to her mother and said that she and her friends wanted to try alcohol. Could she invite them over for a "cocktail party"? On the face of it, this might seem outrageous. But here's what Alyssa meant. She and her friends had been going to parties where alcohol was available, but they didn't want to try it in a setting where they didn't feel safe and in control. They also didn't want to drive home after drinking. They wanted to try it in a supervised setting, with their parents' permission, where their parents could come and pick them up afterward.

It doesn't matter whether Alyssa's parents said yes or no. They had a full discussion of the issues involved. They had a far more instructive discussion than what would have followed from an outraged, angry, and judgmental dismissal.

It's not that growth-minded parents indulge and coddle their children. Not at all. They set high standards, but they teach the children how to reach them. They say no, but it's a fair, thoughtful, and respectful no. Next time you're in a position to discipline, ask yourself, What is the message I'm sending here: *I will judge and punish you?* Or *I will help you think and learn?*

MINDSETS CAN BE A LIFE-AND-DEATH MATTER

Of course parents want the best for their children, but sometimes parents put their children in danger. As the director of undergraduate studies for my department at Columbia, I saw a lot of students in trouble. Here is the story of a great kid who almost didn't make it.

Sandy showed up in my office at Columbia one week before graduation. She wanted to change her major to psychology. This is basically a wacky request, but I sensed her desperation and listened carefully to her story. When I looked over her record, it was filled with A+'s and F's. What was going on?

Sandy had been groomed by her parents to go to Harvard. Because of their fixed mindset, the only goal of Sandy's education was to prove her worth and competence (and perhaps theirs) by gaining admission to Harvard. Going there would mean that she was truly intelligent. For them, it was not about learning. It was not about pursuing her love of science. It was not even about making a great contribution. It was about the label. But she didn't get in. And she fell into a depression that had plagued her ever since. Sometimes she managed to work effectively (the A+'s), but sometimes she did not (the F's).

I knew that if I didn't help her she wouldn't graduate, and if she didn't graduate she wouldn't be able to face her parents. And if she couldn't face her parents, I didn't know what would happen.

I was legitimately able to help Sandy graduate, but that isn't really the point. It's a real tragedy to take a brilliant and

wonderful kid like Sandy and crush her with the weight of these labels.

I hope these stories will teach parents to "want the best" for their children in the right way—by fostering their interests, growth, and learning.

WANTING THE BEST IN THE WORST WAY

Let's look more closely at the message from Sandy's parents: *We don't care about who you are, what you're interested in, and what you can become. We don't care about learning. We will love and respect you only if you go to Harvard.*

Mark's parents felt the same way. Mark was an exceptional math student, and as he finished junior high he was excited about going to Stuyvesant High School, a special high school in New York with a strong math-and-science curriculum. There, he would study math with the best teachers and talk math with the most advanced students in the city. Stuyvesant also had a program that would let him take college math courses at Columbia as soon as he was ready.

But at the last moment, his parents would not let him go. They had heard that it was hard to get into Harvard from Stuyvesant. So they made him go to a different high school.

It didn't matter that he wouldn't be able to pursue his interests or develop his talents as well. Only one thing mattered, and it starts with an *H*.

"WE LOVE YOU—ON OUR TERMS"

It's not just *I'm judging you*. It's *I'm judging you and I'll only love you if you succeed—on my terms*.

We've studied kids ranging from six years old to college age. Those with the fixed mindset feel their parents won't love and respect them unless they fulfill their parents' aspirations for them. The college students say:

"I often feel like my parents won't value me if I'm not as successful as they would like."

Or: "My parents say I can be anything I like, but deep down I feel they won't approve of me unless I pursue a profession they admire."

John McEnroe's father was like that. He was judgmental—everything was black-and-white—and he put on the pressure. "My parents pushed me. . . . My dad was the one mainly. He seemed to live for my growing little junior career. . . . I remember telling my dad that I wasn't enjoying it. I'd say, 'Do you have to come to every match? Do you have to come to this practice? Can't you take one off?'"

McEnroe brought his father the success he craved, but McEnroe didn't enjoy a moment of it. He says he enjoyed

the *consequences* of his success—being at the top, the adulation, and the money. However, he says, “Many athletes seem truly to love to play their sport. I don’t think I ever felt that way about tennis.”

I think he did love it at the very beginning, because he talks about how at first he was fascinated by all the different ways you could hit a ball and create new shots. But we never hear about that kind of fascination again. Mr. McEnroe saw his boy was good at tennis and on went the pressure, the judgment, and the love that depended on his son’s success.

Tiger Woods’s father presents a contrast. There’s no doubt that this guy is ambitious. He also sees his son as a chosen person with a God-given destiny, but he fostered Tiger’s love of golf and raised Tiger to focus on growth and learning. “If Tiger had wanted to be a plumber, I wouldn’t have minded, as long as he was a hell of a plumber. The goal was for him to be a good person. He’s a great person.” Tiger says in return, “My parents have been the biggest influence in my life. They taught me to give of myself, my time, talent, and, most of all, my love.” This shows that you can have superinvolved parents who still foster *the child’s own growth*, rather than replacing it with their own pressure and judgments.

Dorothy DeLay, the famous violin teacher, encountered pressure-cooker parents all the time. Parents who cared more about talent, image, and labels than about the child’s long-term learning.

One set of parents brought their eight-year-old boy to play for DeLay. Despite her warnings, they had made him memorize the Beethoven violin concerto. He was note-perfect, but he played like a frightened robot. They had, in fact, ruined his playing to suit their idea of talent, as in, “My eight-year-old can play the Beethoven violin concerto. What can yours do?”

DeLay spent countless hours with a mother who insisted it was time for her son to be signed by a fancy talent agency. But had she followed DeLay’s advice? No. For quite a while, DeLay had been warning her that her son didn’t have a large enough repertoire. Rather than heeding the expert advice and fostering her son’s development, however, the mother refused to believe that anyone could turn down a talent like his for such a slight reason.

In sharp contrast was Yura Lee’s mother. Mrs. Lee always sat serenely during Yura’s lesson, without the tension and frantic note taking of some of the other parents. She smiled, she swayed to the music, she enjoyed herself. As a result, Yura did not develop the anxieties and insecurities that children with overinvested, judgmental parents do. Says Yura, “I’m always happy when I play.”

IDEALS

Isn’t it natural for parents to set goals and have ideals for their children? Yes, but some ideals are helpful and others are not. We asked college students to describe their ideal of a successful

student. And we asked them to tell us how they thought they measured up to that ideal.

Students with the fixed mindset described ideals that could not be worked toward. You had it or you didn’t.

“The ideal successful student is one who comes in with innate talent.”

“Genius, physically fit and good at sports. . . . They got there based on natural ability.”

Did they think they measured up to their ideal? Mostly not. Instead, they said these ideals disrupted their thinking, made them procrastinate, made them give up, and made them stressed-out. They were demoralized by the ideal they could never hope to be.

Students with the growth mindset described ideals like these:

“A successful student is one whose primary goal is to expand their knowledge and their ways of thinking and investigating the world. They do not see grades as an end in themselves but as means to continue to grow.”

Or: “The ideal student values knowledge for its own sake, as well as for its instrumental uses. He or she hopes to make a contribution to society at large.”

Were they similar to their ideal? They were working toward it. “As similar as I can be—hey, it takes effort.” Or: “I believed for many years that grades/tests were the most important thing but I am trying to move beyond that.” Their ideals were inspiring to them.

When parents give their children a fixed-mindset ideal, they are asking them to fit the mold of the brilliant, talented child, or be deemed unworthy. There is no room for error. And there is no room for the children’s individuality—their interests, their quirks, their desires and values. I can hardly count the times fixed-mindset parents have wrung their hands and told me how their children were rebelling or dropping out.

Haim Ginott describes Nicholas, age seventeen:

In my father’s mind there is a picture of an ideal son. When he compares him to me, he is deeply disappointed. I don’t live up to my father’s dream. Since early childhood, I sensed his disappointment. He tried to hide it, but it came out in a hundred little ways—in his tone, in his words, in his silence. He tried hard to make me a carbon copy of his dreams. When he failed he gave up on me. But he left a deep scar, a permanent feeling of failure.

When parents help their children construct growth-minded ideals, they are giving them something they can strive for. They are also giving their children growing room, room to grow into full human beings who will make their contribution to society in a way that excites them. I have rarely heard a growth-minded parent say, “I am disappointed in my child.” Instead, with a beaming smile, they say, “I am amazed at the incredible person my child has become.”

Everything I've said about parents applies to teachers, too. But teachers have additional concerns. They face large classes of students with differing skills, whose past learning they've had no part in. What's the best way to educate these students?

TEACHERS (AND PARENTS): WHAT MAKES A GREAT TEACHER (OR PARENT)?

Many educators think that lowering their standards will give students success experiences, boost their self-esteem, and raise their achievement. It comes from the same philosophy as the overpraising of students' intelligence. Well, it doesn't work. Lowering standards just leads to poorly educated students who feel entitled to easy work and lavish praise.

For thirty-five years, Sheila Schwartz taught aspiring English teachers. She tried to set high standards, especially since they were going to pass on their knowledge to generations of children. But they became indignant. "One student, whose writing was full of grammatical mistakes and misspellings," she says, "marched into my office with her husband from West Point—in a dress uniform, his chest covered with ribbons—because her feelings had been hurt by my insistence on correct spelling."

Another student was asked to summarize the theme of *To Kill a Mockingbird*, Harper Lee's novel about a southern lawyer fighting prejudice and (unsuccessfully) defending a black man accused of murder. The student insisted the theme was that "all people are basically nice." When Schwartz questioned that conclusion, the student left the class and reported her to the dean. Schwartz was reprimanded for having standards that were too high. Why, Schwartz asks, should the low standards of these future teachers be honored above the needs of the children they will one day teach?

On the other hand, simply raising standards in our schools, without giving students the means of reaching them, is a recipe for disaster. It just pushes the poorly prepared or poorly motivated students into failure and out of school.

Is there a way to set standards high *and* have students reach them?

In chapter 3, we saw in the work of Falko Rheinberg that teachers with the growth mindset brought many low achievers up into the high-achieving range. We saw in the growth-minded teaching of Jaime Escalante that inner-city high school students could learn college calculus, and in the growth-minded teaching of Marva Collins that inner-city grade school children could read Shakespeare. In this chapter, we'll see more. We'll see *how* growth-oriented teaching unleashes children's minds.

I'll focus on three great teachers, two who worked with students who are considered "disadvantaged" and one who worked with students considered supertalented. What do these great teachers have in common?

Great Teachers

The great teachers believe in the growth of the intellect and talent, and they are fascinated with the process of learning.

Marva Collins taught Chicago children who had been judged and discarded. For many, her classroom was their last stop. One boy had been in and out of thirteen schools in four years. One stabbed children with pencils and had been thrown out of a mental health center. One eight-year-old would remove the blade from the pencil sharpener and cut up his classmates' coats, hats, gloves, and scarves. One child referred to killing himself in almost every sentence. One hit another student with a hammer on his first day. These children hadn't learned much in school, but everyone knew it was their own fault. Everyone but Collins.

When *60 Minutes* did a segment on Collins's classroom, Morley Safer tried his best to get a child to say he didn't like the school. "It's so hard here. There's no recess. There's no gym. They work you all day. You have only forty minutes for lunch. Why do you like it? It's just too hard." But the student replied, "That's why I like it, because it makes your brains bigger."

Chicago Sun-Times writer Zay Smith interviewed one of the children: "We do hard things here. They fill your brain."

As Collins looks back on how she got started, she says, "I have always been fascinated with learning, with the *process* of discovering something new, and it was exciting to share in the discoveries made by my . . . students." On the first day of school, she always promised her students—all students—that they would learn. She forged a contract with them.

"I know most of you can't spell your name. You don't know the alphabet, you don't know how to read, you don't know homonyms or how to syllabicate. I promise you that you will. None of you has ever failed. School may have failed you. Well, goodbye to failure, children. Welcome to success. You will read hard books in here and understand what you read. You will write every day. . . . But you must help me to help you. If you don't give anything, don't expect anything. Success is not coming to you, you must come to it."

Her joy in her students' learning was enormous. As they changed from children who arrived with "toughened faces and glassed-over eyes" to children who were beginning to brim with enthusiasm, she told them, "I don't know what St. Peter has planned for me, but you children are giving me my heaven on earth."

Rafe Esquith teaches Los Angeles second graders from poor areas plagued with crime. Many live with people who have drug, alcohol, and emotional problems. Every day he tells his students that he is no smarter than they are—just more experienced. He constantly makes them see how much they have grown intellectually—how assignments that were once hard have become easier because of their practice and discipline.

Unlike Collins's school or Esquith's school, the Juilliard School of music accepts only the most talented students in the world. You would think the idea would be, *You're all talented, now let's get down to learning.* But if anything, the idea of talent

and genius looms even larger there. In fact, many teachers mentally weeded out the students they weren't going to bother with. Except for Dorothy DeLay, the wondrous violin teacher of Itzhak Perlman, Midori, and Sarah Chang.

DeLay's husband always teased her about her "midwestern" belief that anything is possible. "Here is the empty prairie—let's build a city." That's exactly why she loved teaching. For her, teaching was about watching something grow before her very eyes. And the challenge was to figure out how to make it happen. If students didn't play in tune, it was because they hadn't learned how.

Her mentor and fellow teacher at Juilliard, Ivan Galamian, would say, "Oh, he has no ear. Don't waste your time." But she would insist on experimenting with different ways of changing that. (*How* can I do it?) And she usually found a way. As more and more students wanted a part of this mindset and as she "wasted" more and more of her time on these efforts, Galamian tried to get the president of Juilliard to fire her.

It's interesting. Both DeLay and Galamian valued talent, but Galamian believed that talent was inborn and DeLay believed that it was a quality that could be acquired. "I think it's too easy for a teacher to say, 'Oh this child wasn't born with it, so I won't waste my time.' Too many teachers hide their own lack of ability behind that statement."

DeLay gave her all to every one of her students. Itzhak Perlman was her student and so was his wife, Toby, who says that very few teachers get even a fraction of an Itzhak Perlman in a lifetime. "She got the whole thing, but I don't believe she gave him more than she gave me . . . and I believe I am just one of many, many such people." Once DeLay was asked, about another student, why she gave so much time to a pupil who showed so little promise. "I think she has something special. . . . It's in her person. There is some kind of dignity." If DeLay could get her to put it into her playing, that student would be a special violinist.

High Standards and a Nurturing Atmosphere

Great teachers set high standards for all their students, not just the ones who are already achieving. Marva Collins set extremely high standards, right from the start. She introduced words and concepts that were, at first, way above what her students could grasp. Yet she established on Day One an atmosphere of genuine affection and concern as she promised students they would produce: "I'm gonna love you . . . I love you already, and I'm going to love you even when you don't love yourself," she said to the boy who wouldn't try.

Do teachers have to love all of their students? No, but they have to care about every single student.

Teachers with the fixed mindset create an atmosphere of judging. These teachers look at students' beginning performance and decide who's smart and who's dumb. Then they give up on the "dumb" ones. "They're not *my* responsibility."

These teachers don't believe in improvement, so they don't try to create it. Remember the fixed-mindset teachers in chapter 3 who said:

"According to my experience students' achievement mostly remains constant in the course of a year."

"As a teacher I have no influence on students' intellectual ability."

This is how stereotypes work. Stereotypes tell teachers which groups are bright and which groups are not. So teachers with the fixed mindset know which students to give up on before they've even met them.

More on High Standards and a Nurturing Atmosphere

When Benjamin Bloom studied his 120 world-class concert pianists, sculptors, swimmers, tennis players, mathematicians, and research neurologists, he found something fascinating. For most of them, their first teachers were incredibly warm and accepting. Not that they set low standards. Not at all, but they created an atmosphere of trust, not judgment. It was, "I'm going to teach you," not "I'm going to judge your talent."

As you look at what Collins and Esquith demanded of their students—all their students—it's almost shocking. When Collins expanded her school to include young children, she required that every four-year-old who started in September be reading by Christmas. And they all were. The three- and four-year-olds used a vocabulary book titled *Vocabulary for the High School Student*. The seven-year-olds were reading *The Wall Street Journal*. For older children, a discussion of Plato's *Republic* led to discussions of de Tocqueville's *Democracy in America*, Orwell's *Animal Farm*, Machiavelli, and the Chicago city council. Her reading list for the late-grade-school children included *The Complete Plays of Anton Chekhov*, *Physics Through Experiment*, and *The Canterbury Tales*. Oh, and always Shakespeare. Even the boys who picked their teeth with switchblades, she says, loved Shakespeare and always begged for more.

Yet Collins maintained an extremely nurturing atmosphere. A very strict and disciplined one, but a loving one. Realizing that her students were coming from teachers who made a career of telling them what was wrong with them, she quickly made known her complete commitment to them as her students and as people.

Esquith bemoans the lowering of standards. Recently, he tells us, his school celebrated reading scores that were twenty points below the national average. Why? Because they were a point or two higher than the year before. "Maybe it's important to look for the good and be optimistic," he says, "but delusion is not the answer. Those who celebrate failure will not be around to help today's students celebrate their jobs flipping burgers. . . . Someone has to tell children if they are behind, and lay out a plan of attack to help them catch up."

All of his fifth graders master a reading list that includes *Of Mice and Men*, *Native Son*, *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee*,

The Joy Luck Club, *The Diary of Anne Frank*, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, and *A Separate Peace*. Every one of his sixth graders passes an algebra final that would reduce most eighth and ninth graders to tears. But again, all is achieved in an atmosphere of affection and deep personal commitment to every student.

“Challenge and nurture” describes DeLay’s approach, too. One of her former students expresses it this way: “That is part of Miss DeLay’s genius—to put people in the frame of mind where they can do their best. . . . Very few teachers can actually get you to your ultimate potential. Miss DeLay has that gift. She challenges you at the same time that you feel you are being nurtured.”

Hard Work and More Hard Work

But are challenge and love enough? Not quite. All great teachers teach students *how* to reach the high standards. Collins and Esquith didn’t hand their students a reading list and wish them *bon voyage*. Collins’s students read and discussed every line of *Macbeth* in class. Esquith spent hours planning what chapters they would read in class. “I know which child will handle the challenge of the most difficult paragraphs, and carefully plan a passage for the shy youngster . . . who will begin his journey as a good reader. Nothing is left to chance. . . . It takes enormous energy, but to be in a room with young minds who hang on every word of a classic book and beg for more if I stop makes all the planning worthwhile.”

What are they teaching the students en route? To love learning. To eventually learn and think for themselves. And to work hard on the fundamentals. Esquith’s class often met before school, after school, and on school vacations to master the fundamentals of English and math, especially as the work got harder. His motto: “There are no shortcuts.” Collins echoes that idea as she tells her class, “There is no magic here. Mrs. Collins is no miracle worker. I do not walk on water, I do not part the sea. I just love children and work harder than a lot of people, and so will you.”

DeLay expected a lot from her students, but she, too, guided them there. Most students are intimidated by the idea of talent, and it keeps them in a fixed mindset. But DeLay demystified talent. One student was sure he couldn’t play a piece as fast as Itzhak Perlman. So she didn’t let him see the metronome until he had achieved it. “I know so surely that if he had been handling that metronome, as he approached that number he would have said to himself, I can never do this as fast as Itzhak Perlman, and he would have stopped himself.”

Another student was intimidated by the beautiful sound made by talented violinists. “We were working on my sound, and there was this one note I played, and Miss DeLay stopped me and said, ‘Now *that* is a beautiful sound.’” She then explained how every note has to have a beautiful beginning, middle, and end, leading into the next note. And he thought, “Wow! If I can do it there, I can do it everywhere.” Suddenly the beautiful sound of Perlman made sense and was not just an overwhelming concept.

When students don’t know how to do something and others do, the gap seems unbridgeable. Some educators try to reassure

their students that they’re just fine as they are. Growth-minded teachers tell students the truth and then give them the tools to close the gap. As Marva Collins said to a boy who was clowning around in class, “You are in sixth grade and your reading score is 1.1. I don’t hide your scores in a folder. I tell them to you so you know what you have to do. Now your clowning days are over.” Then they got down to work.

Students Who Don’t Care

What about students who won’t work, who don’t care to learn? Here is a shortened version of an interaction between Collins and Gary, a student who refused to work, ripped up his homework assignments, and would not participate in class. Collins is trying to get him to go to the blackboard to do some problems:

COLLINS: Sweetheart, what are you going to do? Use your life or throw it away?

GARY: I’m not gonna do any damn work.

COLLINS: I am not going to give up on you. I am not going to let you give up on yourself. If you sit there leaning against this wall all day, you are going to end up leaning on something or someone all your life. And all that brilliance bottled up inside you will go to waste.

At that, Gary agreed to go to the board, but then refused to address the work there. After a while Collins said:

“If you do not want to participate, go to the telephone and tell your mother, ‘Mother, in this school we have to learn, and Mrs. Collins says I can’t fool around, so will you please pick me up.’”

Gary started writing. Eventually, Gary became an eager participant and an avid writer. Later that year, the class was discussing *Macbeth* and how his misguided thinking led him to commit murder. “It’s sort of like Socrates says, isn’t it, Miss Collins?” Gary piped up. “*Macbeth* should have known that ‘Straight thinking leads to straight living.’” For a class assignment, he wrote, “*Somnus*, god of sleep, please awaken us. While we sleep, ignorance takes over the world. . . . Take your spell off us. We don’t have long before ignorance makes a coup d’état of the world.”

When teachers are judging them, students will sabotage the teacher by not trying. But when students understand that school is for them—a way for them to grow their minds—they do not insist on sabotaging themselves.

In my work, I have seen tough guys shed tears when they realize they can become smarter. It’s common for students to turn off to school and adopt an air of indifference, but we make a mistake if we think any student stops caring.

Growth-Minded Teachers: Who Are These People?

How can growth-minded teachers be so selfless, devoting untold hours to the worst students? Are they just saints? Is it reasonable to expect that everyone can become a saint? The answer is that they’re not entirely selfless. They love to learn. And teaching is a

wonderful way to learn. About people and how they tick. About what you teach. About yourself. And about life.

Fixed-minded teachers often think of themselves as finished products. Their role is simply to impart their knowledge. But doesn't that get boring year after year? Standing before yet another crowd of faces and imparting. Now, that's hard.

Seymour Sarason was a professor of mine when I was in graduate school. He was a wonderful educator, and he always told us to question assumptions. "There's an assumption," he said, "that schools are for students' learning. Well, why aren't they just as much for teachers' learning?" I never forgot that. In all of my teaching, I think about what *I* find fascinating and what *I* would love to learn more about. I use my teaching to grow, and that makes me, even after all these years, a fresh and eager teacher.

One of Marva Collins's first mentors taught her the same thing—that, above all, a good teacher is one who continues to learn along with the students. And she let her students know that right up front: "Sometimes I don't like other grown-ups very much because they think they know everything. I don't know everything. I can learn all the time."

It's been said that Dorothy DeLay was an extraordinary teacher because she was not interested in teaching. She was interested in learning.

So, are great teachers born or made? Can anyone be a Collins, Esquith, or DeLay? It starts with the growth mindset—about yourself and about children. Not just lip service to the idea that all children can learn, but a deep desire to reach in and ignite the mind of every child. Michael Lewis, in *The New York Times*, tells of a coach who did this for him. "I had a new taste for . . . extra work . . . and it didn't take long to figure out how much better my life could be if I applied this new zeal acquired on a baseball field to the rest of it. It was as if this baseball coach had reached inside me, found a rusty switch marked Turn On Before Attempting to Use and flipped it."

Coaches are teachers, too, but their students' successes and failures are played out in front of crowds, published in the newspapers, and written into the record books. Their jobs rest on producing winners. Let's look closely at three legendary coaches to see their mindsets in action.

COACHES: WINNING THROUGH MINDSET

Everyone who knows me well laughs when I say someone is complicated. "What do you think of so-and-so?" "Oh, he's complicated." It's usually not a compliment. It means that so-and-so may be capable of great charm, warmth, and generosity, but there's an undercurrent of ego that can erupt at any time. You never really know when you can trust him.

The fixed mindset makes people complicated. It makes them worried about their fixed traits and creates the need to document them, sometimes at your expense. And it makes them judgmental.

The Fixed-Mindset Coach in Action

Bobby Knight, the famous and controversial college basketball coach, is complicated. He could be unbelievably kind. One time he passed up an important and lucrative opportunity to be a sportscaster, because a former player of his had been in a bad accident. Knight rushed to his side and saw him through the ordeal.

He could be extremely gracious. After the basketball team he coached won the Olympic gold medal, he insisted that the team pay homage first and foremost to Coach Henry Iba. Iba had never been given proper respect for his Olympic accomplishments, and in whatever way he could, Knight wanted to make up for it. He had the team carry Coach Iba around the floor on their shoulders.

Knight cared greatly about his players' academic records. He wanted them to get an education, and he had a firm rule against missing classes or tutoring sessions.

But he could also be cruel, and this cruelty came from the fixed mindset. John Feinstein, author of *Season on the Brink*, a book about Knight and his team, tells us: "Knight was incapable of accepting failure. Every defeat was personal; *his* team lost, a team *he* had selected and coached. . . . Failure on any level all but destroyed him, especially failure in coaching because it was coaching that gave him his identity, made him special, set him apart." A loss made him a failure, obliterated his identity. So when he was your coach—when your wins and losses measured him—he was mercilessly judgmental. His demeaning of players who let him down was, hopefully, without parallel.

In Daryl Thomas, Feinstein says, "Knight saw a player of huge potential. Thomas had what coaches call a 'million dollar body.'" He was big and strong, but also fast. He could shoot the ball with his left hand or his right hand. Knight couldn't live with the thought that Thomas and his million-dollar body weren't bringing the team success:

"You know what you are Daryl? You are the worst f— pussy I've ever seen play basketball at this school. The absolute worst pussy ever. You have more goddam ability than 95 percent of the players we've had here but you are a pussy from the top of your head to the bottom of your feet. An absolute f— pussy. That's my assessment of you after three years."

To make a similar point, Knight once put a Tampax in a player's locker.

Thomas was a sensitive guy. An assistant coach had given this advice: When he's calling you an asshole, don't listen. But when he starts telling you *why* you're an asshole, listen. That way, you'll get better. Thomas couldn't follow that advice. He heard everything, and, after the tirade, he broke down right there on the basketball court.

The ax of judgment came down on players who had the audacity to lose a game. Often Knight did not let the guilty parties ride back home with the rest of the team. They were no longer worthy of respectful treatment. One time, after his team reached

the semifinals of a national tournament (but not *the* national tournament), he was asked by an interviewer what he liked best about the team. “What I like best about this team right now,” Knight answered, “is the fact that I only have to watch it play one more time.”

Some players could take it better than others. Steve Alford, who went on to have a professional career, had come to Indiana with clear goals in mind and was able to maintain a strong growth focus much of the time. He was able to hear and use Knight’s wisdom and, for the most part, ignore the obscene or demeaning parts of the tirades. But even he describes how the team broke down under the yoke of Knight’s judgments, and how he himself became so personally unhappy at some points that he lost his zest for the sport.

“The atmosphere was poisonous. . . . When I had been playing well I had always stayed upbeat, no matter how much Coach yelled. . . . But now his negativism, piled on top of my own, was drowning me. . . . Mom and Dad were concerned. They could see the love of the game going out of me.”

THE HOLY GRAIL: NO MISTAKES

Says Alford, “Coach’s Holy Grail was the mistake-free game.” Uh-oh. We know which mindset makes mistakes intolerable. And Knight’s explosions were legendary. There was the time he threw the chair across the court. There was the time he yanked his player off the court by his jersey. There was the time he grabbed his player by the neck. He often tried to justify his behavior by saying he was toughening the team up, preparing them to play under pressure. But the truth is, he couldn’t control himself. Was the chair a teaching exercise? Was the chokehold educational?

He motivated his players, not through respect for them, but through intimidation—through fear. They feared his judgments and explosions. Did it work?

Sometimes it “worked.” He had three championship teams. In the “season on the brink” described by John Feinstein, the team did not have size, experience, or quickness, but they were contenders. They won twenty-one games, thanks to Knight’s great basketball knowledge and coaching skills.

But other times, it didn’t work. Individual players or the team as a whole broke down. In the season on the brink, they collapsed at the end of the season. The year before, too, the team had collapsed under Knight’s pressure. Over the years, some players had escaped by transferring to other schools, by breaking the rules (like cutting classes or skipping tutoring sessions), or by going early to the pros, like Isiah Thomas. On a world tour, the players often sat around fantasizing about where they *should* have gone to school, if they hadn’t made the mistake of choosing Indiana.

It’s not that Knight had a fixed mindset about his players’ ability. He firmly believed in their capacity to develop. But he had a fixed mindset about himself and his coaching ability. The team was his product, and they had to prove his ability every time out. They were not allowed to lose games, make mistakes, or question him in any way, because that would reflect on his

competence. Nor did he seem to analyze his motivational strategies when they weren’t working. Maybe Daryl Thomas needed another kind of incentive aside from ridicule or humiliation.

What are we to make of this complicated man as a mentor to young players? His biggest star, Isiah Thomas, expresses his profound ambivalence about Knight. “You know there were times when if I had a gun, I think I would have shot him. And there were other times when I wanted to put my arms around him, hug him, and tell him I loved him.”

I would not consider myself an unqualified success if my best student had considered shooting me.

The Growth-Mindset Coach in Action

A COACH FOR ALL SEASONS

Coach John Wooden produced one of the greatest championships records in sports. He led the UCLA basketball team to the NCAA Championship in 1964, 1965, 1967, 1968, 1969, 1970, 1971, 1972, 1973, and 1975. There were seasons when his team was undefeated, and they once had an eighty-eight-game winning streak. All this I sort of knew.

What I didn’t know was that when Wooden arrived at UCLA, it was a far cry from a basketball dynasty. In fact, he didn’t want to work at UCLA at all. He wanted to go to Minnesota. It was arranged that Minnesota would phone him at six o’clock on a certain evening to tell him if he had the job. He told UCLA to call him at seven. No one called at six, six thirty, or even six forty-five, so when UCLA called at seven, he said yes. No sooner had he hung up than the call from Minnesota came. A storm had messed up the phone lines and prevented the six o’clock phone call with the job offer from getting through.

UCLA had grossly inadequate facilities. For his first sixteen years, Wooden held practice in a crowded, dark, and poorly ventilated gym, known as the B.O. Barn because of the atmospheric effect of the sweating bodies. In the same gym, there were often wrestling matches, gymnastics training, trampoline jumping, and cheerleading workouts going on alongside basketball practice.

There was also no place for the games. For the first few years, they had to use the B.O. Barn, and then for fourteen more years, they had to travel around the region borrowing gyms from schools and towns.

Then there were the players. When he put them through their first practice, he was shattered. They were so bad that if he’d had an honorable way to back out of the job, he would have. The press had (perceptively) picked his team to finish last in their division, but Wooden went to work, and this laughable team did not finish last. It won the division title, with twenty-two wins and seven losses for the season. The next year, they went to the NCAA playoffs.

What did he give them? He gave them constant training in the basic skills, he gave them conditioning, and he gave them mindset.

THE HOLY GRAIL: FULL PREPARATION AND FULL EFFORT

Wooden is *not* complicated. He's wise and interesting, but not complicated. He's just a straight-ahead growth-mindset guy who lives by this rule: "You have to apply yourself each day to becoming a little better. By applying yourself to the task of becoming a little better each and every day over a period of time, you will become a *lot* better."

He didn't ask for mistake-free games. He didn't demand that his players never lose. He asked for full preparation and full effort from them. "Did I win? Did I lose? Those are the wrong questions. The correct question is: Did I make my best effort?" If so, he says, "You may be outscored but *you will never lose*."

He was not a softy. He did not tolerate coasting. If the players were coasting during practice, he turned out the lights and left: "Gentlemen, practice is over." They had lost their opportunity to become better that day.

EQUAL TREATMENT

Like DeLay, Wooden gave equal time and attention to all of his players, regardless of their initial skills. They, in turn, gave all, and blossomed. Here is Wooden talking about two new players when they arrived at UCLA: "I looked at each one to see what he had and then said to myself, 'Oh gracious, if he can make a real contribution, a *playing* contribution, to our team then we must be pretty lousy.' However, what I couldn't see was what these men had inside." Both gave just about everything they could possibly give and both became starters, one as the starting center on a national championship team.

He respected all players equally. You know how some players' numbers are retired after they move on, in homage to their greatness? No player's number was retired while Wooden was coach, although he had some of the greatest players of all time, like Kareem Abdul-Jabbar and Bill Walton. Later on, when their numbers were retired, he was against it. "Other fellows who played on our team also wore those numbers. Some of those other players gave me close to everything they had. . . . The jersey and the number on it never belong to just one single player, no matter how great or how big a 'star' that particular player is. It goes against the whole concept of what a team is."

Wait a minute. He was in the business of winning games. Don't you have to go with your talented players and give less to the second stringers? Well, he didn't *play* all players equally, but he gave to all players equally. For example, when he recruited another player the same year as Bill Walton, he told him that he would play very little in actual games because of Walton. But he promised him, "By the time you graduate you'll get a pro contract. You'll be that good." By his third year, the player was giving Bill Walton all he could handle in practice. And when he turned pro, he was named rookie of the year in his league.

PREPARING PLAYERS FOR LIFE

Was Wooden a genius, a magician able to turn mediocre players into champions? Actually, he admits that in terms of basketball tactics and strategies, he was quite average. What he was really good at was analyzing and motivating his players. With these skills he was able to help his players fulfill their potential, not just in basketball, but in life—something he found even more rewarding than winning games.

Did Wooden's methods work? Aside from the ten championship titles, we have the testimony of his players, none of whom refer to firearms.

Bill Walton, Hall of Famer: "Of course, the real competition he was preparing us for was life. . . . He taught us the values and characteristics that could make us not only good players, but also good people."

Denny Crum, successful coach: "I can't imagine what my life would have been had Coach Wooden not been my guiding light. As the years pass, I appreciate him more and more and can only pray that I can have half as much influence on the young people I coach as he has had on me."

Kareem Abdul-Jabbar, Hall of Famer: "The wisdom of Coach Wooden had a profound influence on me as an athlete, but an even greater influence on me as a human being. He is responsible, in part, for the person I am today."

Listen to this story.

It was the moment of victory. UCLA had just won its first national championship. But Coach Wooden was worried about Fred Slaughter, a player who had started every game and had had a brilliant year up until this final, championship game. The game had not been going well, and, as it got worse and worse, Wooden felt a change had to be made. So he pulled Fred. The replacement player did a great job, and Wooden left him in until the game was virtually won.

The victory was a peak moment. Not only had they just won their first NCAA title by beating Duke, but they had ended the season with thirty wins and zero losses. Yet Wooden's concern for Fred dampened his euphoria. As Wooden left the press conference and went to find Fred, he opened the door to the dressing room. Fred was waiting for him. "Coach . . . I want you to know I understand. You had to leave Doug in there because he played so well, and I didn't. I wanted to play in the worst way, but I do understand, and if anyone says I was upset, it's not true. Disappointed, yes, but upset, no. And I was very happy for Doug."

"There are coaches out there," Wooden says, "who have won championships with the dictator approach, among them Vince Lombardi and Bobby Knight. I had a different philosophy. . . . For me, concern, compassion, and consideration were always priorities of the highest order."

Read the story of Fred Slaughter again and you tell me whether, under the same circumstances, Coach Knight would have rushed to console Daryl Thomas. And would Knight have allowed Thomas to reach down to find his pride, dignity, and generosity in his moment of disappointment?

Which Is the Enemy: Success or Failure?

Pat Summitt is the coach of the Tennessee women's basketball team, the Lady Vols. She has coached them to six national championships. She didn't come into the game with Wooden's philosophical attitude, but was at first more Knight-like in her stance. Every time the team lost, she couldn't let go of it. She continued to live it, beating it to death and torturing herself and the team with it. Then she graduated to a love-hate relationship with losing. Emotionally, it still makes her feel sick. But she loves what it does. It forces everyone, players and coaches, to develop a more complete game. It is success that has become the enemy.

Wooden calls it being "infected" with success. Pat Riley, former coach of the championship Los Angeles Lakers team, calls it the "disease of me"—thinking *you* are the success, and chucking the discipline and the work that got you there. Summitt explains, "Success lulls you. It makes the most ambitious of us complacent and sloppy." As Summitt spoke, Tennessee had won five NCAA Championships, but *only once* when they were favored to win. "On every other occasion, we were upset. We've lost as many as four or five titles that we were predicted to win."

After the 1996 championship, the team was complacent. The older players were the national champions, and the new players expected to be swept to victory merely by being at Tennessee. It was a disaster. They began to lose and lose badly. On December 15, they were crushed by Stanford on their own home court. A few games later, they were crushed again. Now they had five losses and everyone had given up on them. The North Carolina coach, meaning to comfort Summitt, told her, "Well, just hang in there 'til next year." HBO had come to Tennessee to film a documentary, but now the producers were looking for another team. Even her assistants were thinking they wouldn't make it into the March championship play-offs.

So before the next game, Summitt met with the team for five hours. That night, they played Old Dominion, the second-ranked team in the country. For the first time that season, they gave all. But they lost again. It was devastating. They had invested, gone for it, and still lost. Some were sobbing so hard, they couldn't speak, or even breathe. "Get your heads up," Summitt told them. "If you give effort like this all the time, if you fight like this, I'm telling you, I *promise* you, we'll be there in March." Two months later they were the national champions.

Conclusion? Beware of success. It can knock you into a fixed mindset: "I won because I have talent. Therefore I will keep winning." Success can infect a team or it can infect an individual. Alex Rodriguez, one of the best players in baseball, is not infected with success. "You never stay the same," he says, "You either go one way or the other."

OUR LEGACY

As parents, teachers, and coaches, we are entrusted with people's lives. They are our responsibility and our legacy. We now know that the growth mindset has a key role to play in helping *us* fulfill our mission and in helping *them* fulfill their potential.

Grow Your Mindset

- Every word and action from parent to child sends a message. Tomorrow, listen to what you say to your kids and tune in to the messages you're sending. Are they messages that say: *You have permanent traits and I'm judging them?* Or are they messages that say *You're a developing person and I'm interested in your development?*
- How do you use praise? Remember that praising children's intelligence or talent, tempting as it is, sends a fixed-mindset message. It makes their confidence and motivation more fragile. Instead, try to focus on the *processes* they used—their strategies, effort, or choices. Practice working the process praise into your interactions with your children.
- Watch and listen to yourself carefully when your child messes up. Remember that constructive criticism is feedback that helps the child understand how to fix something. It's not feedback that labels or simply excuses the child. At the end of each day, write down the constructive criticism (and the process praise) you've given your kids.
- Parents often set goals their children can work toward. Remember that having innate talent is not a goal. Expanding skills and knowledge is. Pay careful attention to the goals you set for your children.
- If you're a teacher, remember that lowering standards doesn't raise students' self-esteem. But neither does raising standards without giving students ways of reaching them. The growth mindset gives you a way to set high standards *and* have students reach them. Try presenting topics in a growth framework and giving students process feedback. I think you'll like what happens.
- Do you think of your slower students as kids who will never be able to learn well? Do they think of themselves as permanently dumb? Instead, try to figure out what they don't understand and what learning strategies they don't have. Remember that great teachers believe in the growth of talent and intellect, and are fascinated by the process of learning.
- Are you a fixed-mindset coach? Do you think first and foremost about your record and your reputation? Are you intolerant of mistakes? Do you try to motivate your players through judgment? That may be what's holding up your athletes.

Try on the growth mindset. Instead of asking for mistake-free games, ask for full commitment and full effort. Instead of judging the players, give them the respect and the coaching they need to develop.

- As parents, teachers, and coaches, our mission is developing people's potential. Let's use all the lessons of the growth mindset—and whatever else we can—to do this.