

FIXED OR FLEXIBLE?

Taking Care of a Highly Successful Academic's Growth Mindset

In the academic health sciences, where “extraordinary” is an everyday expectation, a fixed mindset might be dominating our actions and priorities more than we think.

Because academics are high achievers with high stakes in their professional reputations, they may become over-reliant on previous successes and get stuck in a fixed mindset.

Paying attention to and activating a personal (or team) growth mindset can help health science educators bounce back and excel beyond the expected career disappointments, like rejected publications or bumpy teaching innovation rollouts.

In order to develop a growth mindset, we must first identify and weed out signs of a fixed mindset.

» Which column sounds more like you or your team?

Potential Plateau

Likes to look and feel smart

“I’ve been a professor since before you were born.”

Avoids challenges

“I am not changing a lecture that has always worked.”

Gives up easily

“I knew that wouldn’t go well.”

Effort is pointless

“I don’t have time to waste on this.”

Ignores negative feedback

“This generation of students is just plain lazy.”

Threatened by the success of others

“They just pander to their students.”



Unlimited Improvement

Likes to learn new things

“Reading about new learning science is fascinating.”

Embraces challenges

“I think I can make this better.”

Persists even with setbacks

“I need to tweak some things.”

Effort leads to mastery

“I am going to test another approach.”

Values constructive criticism

“I am going to ask some students for feedback.”

Inspired by others

“I wonder how [my colleague] would approach this.”

Additional Resources

Clark, A. M., & Sousa, B. J. (2018). Definitely unfinished: Why the growth mindset is vital for educators and academic workplaces. Stoffel, J. M., & Cain, J. (2018). Review of grit and resilience literature within health professions education. *American Journal of Pharmaceutical Education*, 82(2), 6150.