

Put Me In Coach! Growth Mindset in the World of Sports

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January 04, 2017

Mindset in Action



What does growth mindset mean for coaches in sport? Fundamentally it is about looking at coaching philosophy, coaching methods, and the systems and processes operating within sporting organisations, to ensure that all three are tuned in to the growth mindset message. In our book, *The Growth Mindset Coaching Kit*, we help coaches understand how to do this.

Applying a growth mindset in sport does not mean removing competition,

nor that we avoid selecting individuals. It doesn't mean we start believing that everyone can be the best in the world. These are some common misconceptions around the growth mindset message in sport. Instead, a growth mindset provides a framework for how best to focus responses to competition, a rationale for how to communicate selection, and an understanding of how to help people always improve and to go beyond their current best performance. In a growth mindset we do not know what a person's potential is, or how good they could become--there are no glass ceilings.

In our book [*The Growth Mindset Coaching Kit*](#), we explore a range of different situations in sport. One area of particular interest to us is examining coaches' beliefs and behaviours around areas of mental toughness such as resilience, motivation, performing under pressure, and determination. It is helpful in sport to know where people hold fixed and growth mindsets about aspects of mental toughness. Most coaches would put an exceptionally high price on mental toughness, especially at an elite level; however, we have found that this is often the area where most fixed beliefs are held. If coaches hold a fixed belief about any element of mental toughness, then their behaviour is likely to be about identifying this in players (they either have it or they don't) rather than teaching and developing it. Some people may have a fixed mindset about the behaviours that come from a growth mindset, believing that resilience, motivation, or determination are predetermined at birth.

One high-leverage move is to break down any sport into the component parts that make a successful athlete in that sport. Then, eliciting from coaches and athletes where they hold fixed and growth mindsets about these components allows growth mindset interventions to be more effectively targeted. For example, if a coach believes that the ability to kick with a non-dominant foot in football is fixed, then they are likely to spend less time helping players develop this skill than a coach with a growth mindset. Likewise, a footballer holding a fixed belief about this is less likely

to practise developing skills with their non-dominant foot. Bringing this to someone's conscious awareness enables them to challenge any fixed belief, and will help to plan an intervention to change the belief and the behaviour. We have developed a tool to look at beliefs in such a way which can be found in *The Growth Mindset Coaching Kit*.

We have worked with coaches, sports and athletes to look at everything they do through a growth mindset lens, and have written *The Growth Mindset Coaching Kit* to help a wider audience do the same! The book helps coaches gain a deep understanding of a growth mindset within the context of sport. The ten points below are a practical framework for coaches to use with their athletes.

1. Self Awareness – Helping people understand their own mindsets and behaviours.
2. Teaching the Mindsets – Helping people understand the theory, the behaviours, and the implications for achievement.
3. YET – Communicating to people that it's not that they'll never achieve a goal, it's just that they haven't quite got there... yet.
4. Role Models and Learning Journeys – using real life examples and stories to help people understand how goals are achieved whilst helping them understand their own journeys in learning.
5. Malleable Intelligence and the Brain – physical skill is located within our brains, and our brains can change. Educating people about the brain and its malleability is significant in developing a growth mindset.
6. The Learning Line, Risk, and Challenge – understanding how we learn, taking on challenges, and taking risks are vital in developing a growth mindset.
7. Struggle, Failure, and Making Mistakes – making it explicit that failure and making mistakes are vital if we are to learn, improve, and ultimately be successful.
8. Conscious and Unconscious minds – helping people understand about the conscious and unconscious minds are important for two reasons.

First, when we are learning a skill we are transferring it from our consciousness to our unconsciousness the more we practise. Second, to ensure that all of the unconscious messages communicated by the environment are in line with, or promoting, a growth mindset - context matters!

9. Effort, Praise and Feedback – adjusting our language and rewards to value the process of learning.
10. Process is Primary – helping people to focus on the things they can control (process goals) rather than the things they can't.

The Growth Mindset Coaching Kit: Practical Coaching Tips

Conscious and Unconscious Minds



Teach athletes about the conscious and unconscious minds. 1. When learning we transfer skills from our consciousness to our unconsciousness with practise. 2. Context matters! Ensure unconscious messages in the environment promote a growth mindset.



Teaching the Mindsets

Help people understand the theory, the behaviours and the implications for achievement.

Malleable Intelligence



Physical skill is located within our brains and our brains can change. Educating people about the brain and its malleability is significant in developing a growth mindset.



Yet

Communicate that it's not that someone will never achieve a goal, it's just that they haven't quite got there... yet.

Self Awareness



Help people understand their own mindsets and behaviours.

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Feedback Effort Praise

Adjust language and praise to value the process of learning.

Struggle, Failure, and Mistakes



Make it explicit that failure and mistakes are vital if we are to learn, improve, and ultimately be successful.

Process is Primary



Help people focus on things that they can control (process goals) rather than things that they can't.



The Learning Line, Risk, and Challenge

Understanding how we learn, being willing to take on challenges, and take on risks are all vital in developing a growth mindset.

Role Models and Learning Journeys



Use real life stories to help people understand how goals are achieved whilst helping them understand their own journeys in learning.



Jeremy Frith and Rachel Sykes work on projects to create a growth mindset culture across the community in which they work, including schools, sports and businesses.



See excerpts and order their book here:
www.frithsykes.com/growthmindsetcoachingkit

More at: blog.mindsetworks.com/put-me-in-coach



By Jeremy Frith and Rachel Sykes. Jeremy is a Level 4 cricket coach and Performance Director for the Guernsey Sports Commission. Rachel is a Senior Educational Psychologist. For the past 5 years they have worked on a project to create a growth mindset culture across the community in which

they work, including schools, sports and businesses. See excerpts from their book here: www.frithsykes.com/growthmindsetcoachingkit

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