

Do you ever wonder why some very smart people in organizations become toxic, less productive and defensive during organizational change or when life throws a “curve ball”? “It may come down to mindset or mental attitude, which can be more important for success than IQ.



According to [Chris Argyris](#) (2004), there are two dominant mindsets in organizations: the productive mindset and the defensive mindset. The productive mindset seeks out and tests valid knowledge. The productive mindset creates informed choices and makes reasoning transparent.

The defensive mindset is self-protective and self-deceptive. When this mindset is active, people or organizations see the hard truth as threatening and shut it out or shut it down. They only seek and listen to information that protects their self-interests. The defensive mindset leads to learning based on false assumptions or at worst, deters learning altogether (Argyris, 2004).

[Mindset](#) is “an established set of attitudes held by someone,” says the Oxford American Dictionary. It turns

out, however, that a set of attitudes needn’t be so set, according to [Carol Dweck](#), professor of psychology at Stanford. Dweck proposes in [Mindset: The New Psychology of Success](#), (2006) that everyone has either a fixed mindset or a growth mindset. [Cynthia Kivland](#), in her book “Smart2Smarter (2014) agrees with Dweck, and states the Growth mindset’s default style is hope and the Fixed mindset default style is Fear. A hopeful Mindset focuses first on the Possibilities while a Fixed Mindset focuses first on the Problems.

**A fixed mindset** is one in which talents and abilities are viewed as fixed. In other words, you are who you are, your intelligence and talents are fixed, and your fate is to go through life avoiding or running from a challenge and failure. When failure happens, and it will, the mindset moves into a fear and survival mode.



**A growth mindset**, on the other hand, is one in which you see yourself as always evolving and fluid, a work in progress. Your fate is one of growth, possibility and opportunity. When failure happens, and it will, you ask “What did I learn?” The mindset is hopeful, curious and possibility oriented. Evolving is energizing and inspires one to flourish and persevere, even when the future is uncertain.

[Dweck](#)'s more than 20 years of research proves that our mindset is not just a minor personality quirk. It creates our mental worldview and determines whether we become optimistic (hopeful) or pessimistic (fearful). It shapes our emotional engagement at work and in relationships, and it ultimately predicts whether we continue to flourish. The good news, says Dweck, is that mindsets are not set: you can learn to evolve a growth mindset.

[The Liataud Institute](#) has created a process design training methodology (known as PDT<sup>®</sup>) to retrain the brain to develop a more robust Growth (Hopeful) mindset that increases positive social connections, contributions and individual empowerment. The Institute incorporates evidenced based metrics based on neuroscience and social learning research that bridges the cognitive and emotional brain.

So how to you retrain the brain into the Possibility Mindset? Consider incorporating these five process designed learning steps into any personal, professional or leadership development program to retrain the brain for endless possibilities.

1. **Repeat often the content and the learning experience.** To create new learning, incorporate repetition and reinforcement. For example, in the PDT<sup>®</sup> program mentioned above, the content is

delivered in small groups of 6-8 using written, online, experiential and video vignettes.

2. **Provide activities and evidence for the participants to feel they have mastered the learning.** Mastery fuels positive emotions, the release of "feel good" hormones and chemicals which builds self-confidence and the desire to learn (grow) more.
3. **Build and broaden content that taps into and sparks positive emotions.** We have a biological need to connect and contribute, states [Natalie King, PhD., Neuroscience](#). Build and broaden content that lets participants connect emotionally. Why? Positive emotions increase retention of new learning. Negative emotions elicit the Fixed (Fear) mindset and anxiety, which inhibits learning.
4. **Excite the curiosity of learners.** Too much content overloads the brain. Remember, our brain is like a computer. When a computer has too many tabs open, it shuts down – and so will your brain. Keep learners curious by building an emotionally connected group and activities to experience the learning. **The goal is not to find THE answer. The goal is to inspire Curiosity (Innovation), that "intrinsic itch" to suggest a solution even when the outcome is uncertain.**
5. **Mix it up to engage different learning styles.** The saying "Different strokes for different folks" applies

to brain based learning. Retraining the brain requires a myriad of learning approaches, and participants will disengage when only one style approach is employed. Consider personality assessments to understand learning styles.

**Minimally, create curriculum that engages the senses, provides social support, repetition, a safe**

**practice field and time to appreciate and reflect (journaling)**

**So, which mindset do you possess? What step will you take to re train your brain to “live the possibilities?”**

.

- Argyris, C. (2004). *Reasons and Rationalizations: The Limits to Organizational Knowledge*. Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press.
- Surowiecki, J. (2005). *The wisdom of crowds: why the many are smarter than the few*. London: Abacus.
- "Stanford University's Carol Dweck on the Growth Mindset and Education". *OneDublin.org*. 2012-06-19.
- *The New Psychology of Success*. New York: Ballantine Books. ISBN 978-0-345-47232-8.
- Aldhous, P. (2008). Free your mind and watch it grow. *New Scientist*, 199(2670), 44-45.. 2004

[Cynthia Kivland](#) is an international expert on emotional and social intelligence, author of *Smart2Smarter: The Smarter Skills Everybody Needs*, and *CLO, Learning Services and Impact*, Liataud Institute. For speaking engagements, article reprints, or information about *The Science of Connection and Contribution: Process Designed Training PDT<sup>®</sup>* contact Cynthia Kivland; [cynthia@smart2smarter.com](mailto:cynthia@smart2smarter.com) or [cynthia@liataudinstitute.com](mailto:cynthia@liataudinstitute.com).