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The Power of a Growth Mindset for Law Librarians and Students

About 10 years ago, the wonderful librarians at our local elementary school selected [Mindset: The New Psychology of Success](#), by Stanford psychologist Carol Dweck, as a summer reading recommendation for parents. I checked out a copy with the expectation that I might read a section or two, but I wound up reading it cover to cover. Dweck's compelling research on the concept of a "growth mindset" has continued to resonate with me over the years.

In *Mindset*, Dweck explores the power of our beliefs and introduces the concept of fixed and growth mindsets. Simply put, someone with a fixed mindset views their intelligence and abilities as set in stone, while someone with a growth mindset believes that their intelligence and abilities are malleable. According to Dweck, those with a fixed mindset seek activities that validate their intelligence and avoid tasks that may call it into question. In contrast, people with a growth mindset believe that deliberate effort and persistence can improve their intelligence, and they view setbacks as opportunities for growth. In a 2015 [Talks with Google](#), Dweck explained that those with a growth mindset think, "Why waste my time looking smart when I could be getting smarter?"

As a new(ish) law librarian thinking about how law students could benefit from a growth mindset, I've looked back to my first year after law school graduation. As a newly minted law firm associate, I recall having a fixed mindset concern about "looking smart." This mindset would lure me into seeking assignments in areas of law I was comfortable with, or cause me to refrain from asking a question I feared might convey a lack of understanding. I now recognize that the strategies I eventually learned were more productive and rewarding--improving my skills through hard work, easing up on fears of judgment, and asking for help when needed--were growth mindset approaches.

Over the past decade, the growth mindset concept has become massively popular in education and beyond (Dweck has [addressed this surge in popularity](#), and states that her findings have sometimes been oversimplified). There are now a myriad of resources on how lawyers, educators, librarians, and students can cultivate a growth mindset. For example, the [ABA Grit](#)

[Project](#), an initiative of the ABA's Commission on Women in the Profession, provides educational tools for attorneys "about the science behind grit and growth mindset." Educators can find resources through groups such as the [Mindset Scholars Network](#), which aims to "advance our scientific understanding of learning mindsets in order to improve student outcomes and expand educational opportunity."

It is encouraging to see a growing body of research on how beliefs about learning and intelligence impact law students. In "[The Jury is In: Law Schools Foster Students' Fixed Mindsets](#)," the authors contend that students with a growth mindset are better able to learn from their mistakes and remain resilient through law school and in their legal careers. Similarly, in a [2014 article](#), Sarah Adams-Schoen, assistant professor at the University of Oregon, cites research suggesting that fixed mindset beliefs can "set us up for failure, especially in challenging, high-risk pursuits like law school and law practice." Adams-Schoen offers steps that faculty, librarians, and administrators can use to help students shift to a growth mindset. For instance, she recommends that we "lecture or share personal experiences that demonstrate the malleability of intelligence" with students and "emphasize that there is no shame in being a novice" in skill areas such as legal research and legal writing.

I believe the love of learning shared by many law librarians goes hand in hand with a growth mindset. Let's embrace this outlook and spread the word to our students, patrons, and colleagues about its power.

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