

SURVIVE AND THRIVE***Turn Rigid Thinking into a Growth Mindset****By Barbara Rubel*

Whether you like it or not, a rigid mindset can prevent you from turning obstacles into opportunities. Do you think in all or nothing thinking—in extremes? Perhaps you use words like, “always,” “never” or “impossible.” Likewise, people with a growth mindset are able to replace negative thoughts with positive ones and are tolerant of their mistakes.

As one who has a growth mindset, I realize that although self-criticism can work in small doses, I am alert to my critical thoughts and change them. For example, “What can I learn from this to help me do it better next time?” Those with a growth mindset are open-minded while listening to diverse points of view prior to offering their opinion. Usually, rigid thinkers are fortune tellers who often say, “I just know things will turn out badly.” Whereas people with a growth mindset predict the future by shifting their thoughts about what is yet to come in a positive way. Write down a list of ideas about what you think will actually happen and take a hard look at how reasonable your own predictions are. Build trust in yourself and in others. In spite of obstacles, embrace the challenge.

For the most part, rigid thinkers can have a faulty focus, a cognitive distortion, where they focus on one bad thing that happened instead of any good. For example, when their supervisor says that they did a good job, they discount it and think, “Anyone could have done it.” People with a growth mindset concentrate on the positive. They learn from criticism and accept feedback, which helps them improve and succeed.

Generally speaking, it’s hard to deal with regret when you have rigid thinking. Those with a growth mindset are able to reorganize images that they hold about what happened and replace those thoughts with more precise ones. They mull over whether they are focusing on actions they did, but wish they didn’t do, or actions they didn’t do but wish they did. They don’t blame themselves for something that wasn’t entirely their fault; are aware of how much control they have over what happened; challenge irrational thoughts with reality; and are able to keep a check on whether their thinking patterns are inaccurate.

Whether you are a rigid thinker or have a growth mindset, automatic thoughts can pop into your head out of nowhere. Ask yourself whether it’s reasonable to think this way. The last word on creating a growth mindset: brainstorm positive behaviors to deal with each problem individually. Generate a lot of ideas. See what sticks. Let go of preconceived notions and bias. Find beneficial meaning in your situation.

Seems simple enough. In practice, it isn’t. That’s because you may not be willing to change your mindset. If you think about it, your life is a journey of discovery with life-long learning and brain development. In the long run, if you’re willing to try out a growth mindset, you may wind up turning obstacles into opportunities.

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