

How to Change Your Mindset

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Recently, I introduced the concept of the fixed and growth mindsets that I read about in Carol Dweck's fantastic book, "Mindset". I got a really great response from the message so I thought I would add to it this week.

In order to overcome mistakes, and enjoy long-term, consistent, success in hockey, players must adopt a growth mindset. Players with a growth mindset see mistakes as an opportunity to learn and grow, while players with a fixed mindset think that every game must be perfect and view mistakes as a sign of weakness. Making mistakes is inevitable and unavoidable in hockey. What makes the difference between good and great players is how they choose react to these mistakes mentally. Our mental TV is fully under our own control and players must learn how to change the channel from a fixed to growth mindset.

Before we get into how to change the channel, let's quickly review the difference between a player with a fixed mindset and one with a growth mindset. Players with a fixed mindset feel that they must always look good and do the right thing out on the ice. As a result, they may avoid challenges in order to avoid making a mistake. This means that they'll give up easily when faced with a challenge and probably even see putting extra effort to get better as worthless. If they receive any criticism for their mistakes, even if it's constructive, they will view this as a sign of weakness.

On the other hand, players with a growth mindset are always looking to get better and will therefore embrace challenges. They show great persistence when faced with setbacks and know that their extra effort is the key to mastery. When they receive criticism, they choose to learn from it. They watch players who can execute the skill successfully and see them as a source of information, instead of as a threat.

:::: So how do we help players change their mindsets? ::::

We have to help them understand that it is their beliefs that guide their mindset. We always keep a running tally in our minds of what is going on around us, what it means and what we should do as a result. We're not always completely conscious of this train of thought - but it's always there. We then take that information and interpret it. Sometimes we interpret the information in a calm rational way, and sometimes we completely blow things out of proportion. Players with a fixed mindset put a lot of weight on every piece of information. So when things are going well, they interpret them as going very well, and when something goes wrong, they interpret it as a complete disaster. There really isn't much of a grey area in the interpretations by those with a fixed mindset. If they do something wrong, it means that they are a bad player. Their actions are directly tied to what kind of player and person they believe they are.

Players with a growth mindset are also monitoring themselves constantly, but their beliefs about themselves as players and people aren't tied to what happens out on the ice. They still recognize when things are going well and when things aren't going well, but they aren't quick to make a judgment about themselves as a result. When they make a mistake in a game, they don't react immediately with "I suck at this" as a player with a fixed mindset might. They are more likely to tell themselves, "I need to work at this. What can I learn from this? How can I get better at it?" The main difference between those with a fixed and growth mindset is the nature of their internal monologue. Fixed mindset players judge themselves and jump to unreasonable conclusions while growth mindset players cut themselves a little bit of slack and look for ways to improve.

::: How can players change their internal monologue - which is often called their "self-talk"? :::

It's not easy to let go of the fixed mindset - especially in a sports culture that's so driven by winning and performance. It's especially hard to replace that mindset with one that makes you face all the things you found stressful: challenges, criticism and setbacks. But that's the key to success – whether it's on the rink, in the classroom or in life. You have to change your self-talk and face your fears head-on. You have complete control over your mental TV and only you can change the channel from the fixed to growth mindset. It won't be easy, but it will be worth it.