

Ep #220: Lessons from Carol Dweck



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Brooke Castillo

Ep #220: Lessons from Carol Dweck

Welcome to *The Life Coach School Podcast*, where it's all about real clients, real problems, and real coaching. And now your host, Master Coach Instructor, Brooke Castillo.

What is up my friends? How are you guys doing? Hey, I want to tell you guys about something. I have created a podcast book. It's amazing. It is a page for every podcast, up to Episode 200.

If you ever use my podcast as a reference, you're going to need to get a copy of this book. I'm using this book all the time for my own reference. It is so awesome. Every topic that I've ever covered, in 200 episodes, is summarized in one page. You can grab your own copy by going to thelifecoachschool.com and clicking on podcast book. There you go, my friends.

Okay, today we're talking about Carol Dweck, who is amazing. I love her. We're sisters, she doesn't know it. We're best friends, she doesn't know it, but I love her.

I had my Mastermind students, all my coaches, read her book, maybe four years ago. It really has changed my life, and it's changed the way I've raised my kids. It changes the way I teach. It's amazing.

I want to offer some of the insight from that book to you here. I want to summarize it, but I also really want to recommend that you grab a copy of it. If you haven't read her book yet, it is so good, that I could not recommend it more highly, especially if you have kids. It is brilliant. It's called *Mindset*. It's on Amazon, Carol Dweck, exactly how it sounds, with a C-K.

All right, so the thing about Carol is, I was looking on Wikipedia, I think she's covered all the Ivy League schools. I think she's gone to all of them. She's crazy smart, very intelligent. It's kind of ironic because the way she teaches isn't about intelligence. She's currently teaching at Stamford University. She's on the Stamford faculty.

Ep #220: Lessons from Carol Dweck

She communicates and teaches in a way that all of us lay people can really understand, and not only understand and increase our knowledge, but also apply to our lives. She was always fascinated by how people deal with failure. She talks about how when she was in grade school, they sat them in order of intelligence and IQ. In school, the students were rewarded for having the highest IQ and for being the smartest.

She was really curious as to why some students love a challenge, and why some students shy away from challenges. Here's what's so interesting about that, because you think that if you believe that you are intelligent and you believe that you are very smart, it would tend to reason that you would want challenges. You would want to use your brilliance on complex problems.

But what she found, and what's so fascinating, is that highly intelligent people shy away from challenges, because they don't want anything that could take away that "label" of them being smart. If you are labeled with a high IQ, you don't necessarily want to try, and take a challenge, that you don't think you can complete, because then it may mean that somebody got it wrong. It may mean that you're not as smart as some test told you, or not as smart as someone told you.

You want to preserve that belief system that you're smart. You want to make sure everyone else keeps thinking that you're smart. The less that you do, the more you're able to preserve that. Isn't that fascinating?

What she found was that ... She called that the fixed mindset, which is basically a fixed theory of intelligence, which is success is based on innate ability. With that fixed mindset comes a fear of failure.

One of the things that's really fascinating about this is that our school system really perpetuates this idea. We are very much rewarded for being smart. We are not rewarded for effort. It's really interesting because my kids are able to do very well in school. They both get about straight A's, most of the time with very little effort. I feel like they are rewarded for not working hard. They're rewarded for just knowing the answer. What's really

Ep #220: Lessons from Carol Dweck

interesting is that, when stuff comes really naturally to you, and you start believing that you're really smart, you actually want to do less, and fewer things that challenge that.

I've seen that really clearly with my kids. It's really fascinating, even though I've told them that the grades aren't the important part to me. The important part to me is what they learn and how they apply themselves. But because they're able to do so well in school with so little effort, they are getting rewarded for the least amount of effort, and being told that, hey, that is good. It is good, even though you didn't put any effort in, totally fascinating to me.

The opposite of the fixed mindset is the growth mindset. This is the mindset that is based on hard work, learning, training, and doggedness. Now, the growth mindset is always willing to face a challenge, is always willing to put themselves into a puzzle, because they know that the process of doing the challenge, and the process of going through the puzzle, will make them smarter and more capable.

Do you see the two different mindsets? The fixed mindset is I'm already as smart as I will ever be. I'm already as talented as I will ever be, based on my IQ, so there's no reason for me to challenge myself, or put myself in a position where I could be knocked off that throne. Because I'm already as smart as I need to be or that I will be, increasing my practice, and increasing my challenges, and working hard, doesn't really serve me.

Whereas, when you have a growth mindset, you're always believing that you can get better and stronger, and learn more, and that will actually make you smarter, which is actually true. All of the scientific support that she puts in her book shows and proves that that is true, that our brain is adaptable, and that our IQ is not fixed. We can continuously be making ourselves smarter and more capable.

I think that it's fascinating that we have set up our school system to teach us the opposite of that. That in fact, she talks a lot about this in the book. When you introduced opportunities for growth, and the growth mindset, that

Ep #220: Lessons from Carol Dweck

the level of competence and the level of completion skyrockets through the roof.

She talks about this really cool school, that instead of giving out F's, they just give out, not yet's, which I think is so brilliant, and so does she, obviously. It's like, you're not yet there. If we all could look at our own lives, this is really powerful for in school, right? This is how we're training our kids, but also, we went through that same school system.

We approach our life based on all that imprint that we got from school. When we fail, we see that as an F. A lot of us didn't get a chance for a retake of that test. An F is an F. But in real life, there's no such thing. There's always just not yet's, right? You cannot yet something for the rest of your life, and keep growing, and keep getting better, and keep getting stronger.

One of the things that I love about the growth mindset is, it allows for all of the things that are strategic byproducts in the process. If you put someone in school and you say, "Here is the test that you need to pass," and if you take it and you don't pass, you're just in not yet, I stay engaged. I stay interested.

I always thought it was so strange when I would get a test back in school, and they would tell me that I got a bad grade on it. They'd say, you got a C or a D, or whatever. I would say, "I want to see the test. I want to see what I got wrong." They'd be like, "Nope, you can't see the test." I was like, "What? If I got things wrong on the test, doesn't make sense that my learning would be perpetuated by understanding what I got wrong, and correcting that?"

I remember lots of teachers would tell me, "No, you don't get a copy of the test, because we want to use that same test next year, and we want to make sure you're not showing it to anybody." It's like, what are you talking about? I want to know what I got wrong. I want to know why I got it wrong. I thought I understood all this material, but I clearly don't.

Ep #220: Lessons from Carol Dweck

That's where the, not yet, would come in so powerful, right? It's like, you understand this about 80 percent. You only have 20 percent to go. You understand this 70 percent. Think about this. If you got an F on a test, which is a 50 percent, it means you understand half of the material well enough to pass. You're halfway there.

What if they said ... Instead of giving you an F, they said, "You're halfway there," brilliant, right? Okay, I can do this. I'm already halfway there. I don't want to turn around. I don't want to give up. I want to keep going. Now apply that to your life. How many of us receive what we think is an F, and decide we're not smart enough to do something? We're not good enough to do something because of that, because of the way that we've been trained.

The fixed mindset tells us, I'm not smart, period. The growth mindset says, I can get smarter with learning and practice. The growth mindset gives us control over our ability, over our success. It makes us feel empowered.

One of the things she talks about is that, when we are giving feedback to our children, when we are giving feedback even to our employees, to our co-workers, to our colleagues, instead of saying, you're very smart, and attributing success to smartness, it's way more powerful to say, you worked very hard on something, to give credit to the thing that we do have control over.

Praising intelligence actually harms motivation. It makes us so, oh, we've already got the A. We already have an A+. Don't move, just hold still with the A+ right? Whereas, when there is no end to the intelligence, there is no perfect score, there's always just growing and growth, then we can be intrigued by our mistakes. We can enjoy our effort, and we can keep learning. We can always just be in the place of, not yet.

I love the term that she uses, which she calls, "Engage with your errors." Most of us avoid our errors, right? It's kind of like me when I wouldn't get that test back and I'd say, I want that test back. I want to engage with my errors. I want to understand what I did wrong, so I can learn from that. I

Ep #220: Lessons from Carol Dweck

want to learn from that. I want this to be a fluid, ongoing learning process. I don't want there to just be one shot at this.

The truth is, in life, there's always more than one shot, right? Maybe it won't look exactly the same way, but there's way too much giving up, because you had your chance at your A, and there's nothing you can do about it. There's nothing you can do between now, and when I give you a grade, to learn more, to engage more, to understand more. It's like that one chance to get the A, and how we really reward those who get it easily. In fact, the ones that get it easily are the ones that are going to have the toughest time, in some areas of their life, because they don't build up that ability to overcome and to engage with their errors.

I'll tell you an example of this. I've talked about this before on the podcast, but it's really apparent to me now, as I reflect back on it. I used to be, of course, totally obsessed with soccer, when both my kids were playing soccer in U-9, because U-9 soccer is the most important thing in the whole world, at least me and all the parents that were on that team thought so. It was such a fun time.

I see the kids that were really good when they were nine years old. They had practiced when they were little kids. When they were nine years old, they were the superstars, right? They were so great.

When Christian first started, my oldest son, he wasn't that great. He was really trying. He wasn't as athletic as the other kids. He really struggled, and tried to be more athletic, and to be as fast, and just really had a hard time, always working hard, always engaging with the errors. They made him the goalie of the team. He was always getting yelled at for, anytime a goal went in. Any time he wasn't protecting the goal perfectly, he would get such a hard time. He really learned so much about resilience, and mistakes, and failure.

For the first three years in this very intensive, competitive environment as a young kid, he went to work. He got ridiculed. He got pushed back. He

Ep #220: Lessons from Carol Dweck

wasn't the fastest kid on the team, by a long shot. He just really kept going at it, kept going at it.

When they won their championship, I think it was when they were U-12, they won the championship, which at the time it might as well have been the World Cup, especially for me, I thought, we can all just die now. We have won first place in U-12 soccer. A huge part of it was because of Christian and how he was able to really stay present in the face of adversity in that situation.

I've watched these kids grow up now. They're all going to be seniors and graduating. I've seen the ones that have the resilience, that weren't as great in the beginning, some of them really having blossomed and bloomed, and been able to stick with it through the adversity of your body changing and going through what happens as you get older.

The ones that were super good, that never had to face that adversity, have had a much harder time. I've seen that that's true for the kids that do well in school. They have a belief in their own intelligence, and lean on that for confidence, and the kids that have really had to go to work.

One of the things, for me, I really had to work in school. I was smart in some ways, but in other ways, I wasn't. I knew that I had to study, and I, didn't all come naturally to me. I was in a school that was really challenging, and I'm so thankful for that. My mom always telling me I can do whatever it is that I want to do with my life, and me just believing her, that had nothing to do with how smart I was or wasn't.

I think that's really important for us to look at in our own lives. How many of us tell ourselves that we're not smart enough to do something, that you have to be smarter than you are, to run a business. You have to be smarter than you are to be a life coach, or be an entrepreneur, whatever it is that you're telling yourself about your intelligence, is a lie.

I think if you look at the mistakes you've made in your life, and you define that as being, I'm stupid, that just proves that I'm stupid. Or, you look at the

Ep #220: Lessons from Carol Dweck

challenges that you've had in your life and you see them as an opportunity to grow. That's going to completely change the whole trajectory of your life.

One of the things that's really powerful to consider, I think, one of the things I've thought about, and I was talking to some colleagues about is, this idea that if you have overcome any kind of compulsion or addiction with your brain, that effort to overcome that struggle, actually makes you so much stronger, and makes your brain have the stronger neuro-pathways than you would have had, had you not even gone through that process. The power, the strength, the muscles within your brain that it takes to overcome the natural default of your brain, actually makes you more capable.

I think a lot of times, people who have suffered with addiction, suffered with obesity, struggled with over-eating, over-drinking, all of those things, think that they are less than, they think because they went through that, because other people didn't have to struggle with those things, that they're somehow less than. What science has shown, and what we've proven is that it's actually the opposite. The effort to overcome that compulsion has made us stronger and more capable, as we move forward in our lives.

I think it's very important, as adults, to decide what is the meaning in your life of effort and difficulty? What will you make it mean? If something's hard for you, does it mean you're not smart? A lot of us are taught that in school, and if we don't get the answer right away, it must mean that we're not smart. Or, can we make it mean that because we put that effort in, because we had more difficulty with it, that we are stronger because of it. We are stronger because we lifted that heavier weight for us.

Here's a good way to imagine it. If I go into the gym, let's say with a big bodybuilder, and he's presented with the challenge of lifting a 25-pound weight. For me to lift that 25-pound weight ten times is going to make me stronger. For him to lift that 25-pound weight will not make him stronger. It will make him confident, right, because in his mind he'll think that he is very capable and very intelligent and very strong. But as I keep lifting, and as I keep practicing, I will continuously grow into my capacity, and my capability, and my belief in myself.

[The Life Coach School Podcast](#) with Brooke Castillo

Ep #220: Lessons from Carol Dweck

For that bodybuilder who's already strong enough to lift that 25 pounds, there has to be another reason that they would be willing to go through that effort, and they'd be willing to go through that difficulty. If they've always looked great, because they've been able to lift everything their whole life, they may not want to struggle with a weight in front of other people, because they've never had to struggle before.

It's a really powerful way of looking at your own life and looking at the world. Making sure that you're coming from that place of the growth mindset, and focusing on your relationship with effort and difficulty, in order for you to grow.

All right. I'll end with reading a few of Carol Dweck's quotes. "Becoming is better than being. Did I win? Did I lose? Those are the wrong questions. The correct question is, did I make my best effort? If so, you may be outscored, but you will never lose."

"We like to think of our champions and idols as superheroes who are born different from us. We don't like to think of them as relatively ordinary people, who made themselves extraordinary."

"No matter what your ability is, effort is what ignites that ability, and turns it into accomplishment."

"What should we say when children complete a task, say math problems quickly and perfectly? Should we deny them the praise they have earned? Yes, when this happens, I say, woops, I guess that was too easy. I apologize for wasting your time. Let's do something you can really learn from."

"Picture your brain forming new connections as you meet the challenge and learn. Keep on going."

"Why waste time proving over, and over, how great you are, when you could be getting better?"

"Why hide deficiencies, instead of overcoming them?"

[The Life Coach School Podcast](#) with Brooke Castillo

Ep #220: Lessons from Carol Dweck

"Why look for friends or partners who will just sure-up your self-esteem, instead of ones who will challenge you to grow?"

"Why seek out the tried and true, instead of experiences that will stretch you? The passion for stretching yourself, and sticking to it, even, or especially when it's not going well, is the hallmark of a growth mindset. This is the mindset that allows people to thrive during some of the most challenging times in their lives."

"After seven experiments with hundreds of children, we had some of the clearest findings I've ever seen. Praising children's intelligence harms their motivation and it harms their performance. How can that be? Don't children love to be praised? Yes, children love praise, and they especially love to be praised for their intelligence and talent. It really does give them a boost, a special glow, but only for a moment. The minute they hit a snag, their confidence goes out the window, and their motivation hits rock bottom. If success means they're smart, then failure means they're dumb. That's the fixed mindset."

"If parents want to give their children a gift, to the best thing they can do is teach their children to love challenges, be intrigued by mistakes. Enjoy effort and keep on learning. That way, their children don't have to be slaves of praise. They will have a lifelong way to build or repair their own confidence."

All right my friends, have a beautiful week. I'll talk to you next week. Make sure you go grab a copy of Mindset, by Carol Dweck.

Hey, if you enjoy listening to this podcast, you have to come check out Self-Coaching Scholars. It's my monthly coaching program where we take all this material and we apply it. We take it to the next level and we study it. Join me over at the TheLifeCoachSchool.com/join. Make sure you type in the TheLifeCoachSchool.com/join. I'd love to have you join me in Self-Coaching Scholars. See you there.