

The Growth Mindset Worksheet

What we know about Burnout

Research shows that many professions, including medical ones, experience stress and burnout. For surgeons, there are many reasons for this, but some of the most common causes include:

- Increasing patient workload in both private and public practice
- Patient expectations that have increased due to social media and other public pressures
- Administration and bureaucracy that is increasing in most countries
- External pressure that can include regulators, public health bodies, and the media
- And surgical complexity that requires ongoing training to stay abreast of new techniques

Yet despite these pressures, surgeons must continue to deliver excellent patient care and reliable patient outcomes, all the while successfully leading their teams and their practices. As the profession continues to evolve, the potential for greater stress and burnout is being magnified.

Research from Healthcare

ISAPS professionals have contributed to the research on this topic, showing that stress and burnout are significant risk factors for surgeons, and plastic surgeons in particular. Dr. Gregory Evans, ISAPS Member, Professor of Surgery and Biomedical Engineering, and Director for the American Board of Plastic Surgery, has published papers in the *Aesthetic Surgery Journal* suggesting that over 40% of US surgeons experience burnout (*Burnout in the Plastic Surgeon: Implications and Interventions*, G. Evans et al. 27 Sept 2016).

In this research, symptoms of burnout are defined as the presence of three conditions:

- Emotional Exhaustion (from excessive emotional demands)
- Depersonalization (cynical, negative, or detached responses to patient care)
- Reduced Personal Accomplishment (belief that one can no longer work effectively)

Clearly, these symptoms can deeply affect surgeon effectiveness and personal wellness.

Research from Business

There are also many consultants and professional coaches who routinely advise professionals on the topic of burnout. One such firm, *Tonic 365* of the UK, lists some of the most common causes of stress and burnout among working adults, including:

- Work Pressure
- Lack of Time
- Excessive Travel

- Lack of Facilities
- Lack of Motivation
- Boredom (with routines or small tasks)
- Inconsistency (mismatched expectations compared with actual work outputs)
- Family Commitments (including both children and elderly parents)

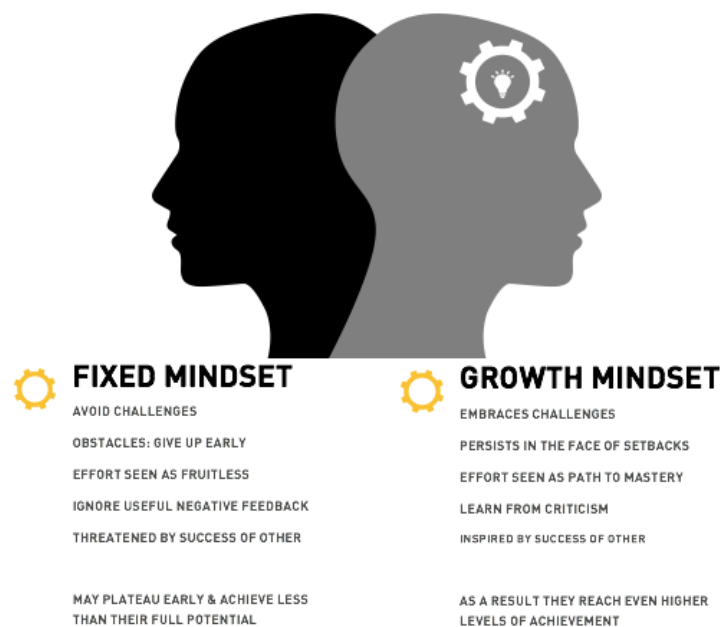
Jeff Archer, MD at *Tonic 365*, also challenges his clients to interrogate their level of “agency” around these issues. In other words, is the list above a series of real barriers to wellness, or are some items self-imposed, or even invented as excuses to avoid tackling difficulty? Either way, these challenges feel real to busy professionals and can be significant sources of stress and burnout. So the question is, what can we do about them?

The Growth Mindset

Original research by Prof. George Land in the 1960s showed that creativity declines steadily as we grow from childhood to adulthood. There are many factors explaining this, but essentially, as adults we “learn” non-creative behaviors in order to control outcomes and work in more predictable and “safe” ways.

Yet when it comes to stress and burnout, it is adaptability and openness to change that are key if want to alter our routines and be more creative about how we work and live.

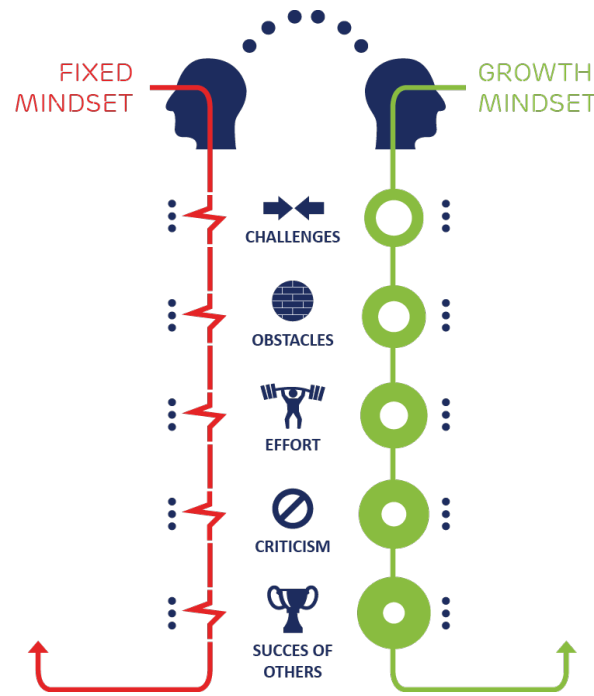
The Growth Mindset builds on this original data and became popularized by Carol Dweck, Professor of Psychology at Stanford University. A large part of her research aims to help leaders move from a Fixed Mindset to a Growth Mindset to better spur innovation, build creativity, and manage change in professional settings – including coping with stress and burnout. The model can be summarized as follows:



Source: Dweck, C. *Growth Mindset* 2012

Self Assessment

To measure your Growth Mindset, consider the following themes in the context of your normal working environment. How do you react to each area? Do you recognize a dominant side in terms of how you address challenges, deal with obstacles, direct your efforts, handle criticism, or relate to the success of others? Note that because of our education, conditioning and reward systems, most adults will operate predominantly on the left (Fixed) side of the graph.



Source: Dweck, C. Growth Mindset 2012

Dweck found, like Land, that very few adults operate a Growth Mindset because:

- We are taught to be action oriented rather than reflective, which is key to reducing stress
- We learn to be the experts, but this blocks our ability to question our own assumptions
- We learn to avoid risk, but this highjacks our ability to experiment or test new ways of working
- We learn behavioral shortcuts based on experience, but this limits our ability to try new ideas

Actions you can Take

1. When faced with a challenge or problem, pause before action and seek more options and choices
2. When challenged professionally, ask for feedback rather than always providing the “right answer”
3. When faced with a complex issue, avoid previous “safe” approaches and try a small experiment
4. When in a hurry, notice when you are using your favorite shortcuts – is there a better way?
5. When working with others, avoid judgment or comparisons but seek to learn from how they work

Key Takeaways

- Scoring yourself as a Fixed Mindset is not a sign of incompetence, but how we are conditioned
- Research shows that most adults have the creativity trained out of them over time
- Yet finding fresh options and new pathways is how we combat stress and burnout
- The key is to pause before acting and ask yourself if you are using a Growth Mindset
- Remember: a Fixed Mindset can still be the best approach for predictable, repeatable outcomes

Questions for Reflection

- What is your current working mindset? What about in your team and in your practice?
- How much does this contribute to stress or burnout?
- What are the key sources of this burnout? Can they be reframed by adopting a Growth Mindset?
- What could be the impact of a Growth Mindset to tackle your stress and burnout?
- What is the cost of not changing? What will happen if you fail to evolve?

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