

Developing a Winning Outlook

Leaders are made, they are not born. They are made by hard effort, which is the price which all of us must pay to achieve any goal that is worthwhile.

Vince Lombardi

This chapter is all about attitude. So let's kick off by exploring your views about yourself. Of course, I'll explain everything shortly.

Below are a set of rating scales for different qualities and characteristics. Take a couple of moments to weigh the extent you believe each one is either an innate talent or something that can be developed, taught and honed.

For example, if you think that intelligence comes down entirely to a natural endowment – to the gifts that you are born with – then you'd give it a score of 1 out of 10. If you believe that intelligence is 100 per cent determined by hard work and effort, then you'd give it a score of 10 out of 10. Or if you consider that it's 50/50, then you'd give it a score of 5.

Want to give it a try?

Intelligence:

1 _____ 10
Natural talent *Skill you can develop*

Creativity:

1 _____ 10
Natural talent *Skill you can develop*

Leadership:

1 _____ 10
Natural talent *Skill you can develop*

The ability to tell jokes and make people laugh:

1 _____ 10
Natural talent *Skill you can develop*

Charisma:

1 _____ 10
Natural talent *Skill you can develop*

Athletic ability:

1 _____ 10
Natural talent *Skill you can develop*

Public speaking:

1 _____ 10
Natural talent *Skill you can develop*

Patience:

1 _____ 10
Natural talent *Skill you can develop*

For as long as I can remember, I've been curious about human behaviour and what drives people. But training to become a psychologist has taken that inquisitiveness about folks to a whole new level. And now as a psychologist working mainly with businesses, it's my job to be able to size people up – to evaluate them and come to judgements about not only how good they are but also how far they'll progress in their careers.

One of the biggest differentiators between winners and runners-up in life is their attitude.

Over the years, I've learnt that one of the biggest differentiators between winners and runners-up in life is their attitude. But to illustrate exactly how outlook can matter, let me tell you about a pair of managers I first met more than a half-decade ago, whom I'll call Anna and Matthew.

It's all in the mind

Organizations often ask me to rate the strengths and weaknesses of their managers. I've been working with one particular company, an international insurance company for quite some time now. The top bosses asked me to audit 45 of their most senior executives in the UK on a four-point scale of their potential. A "1" meant that the executive was a star with plenty of potential to take on bigger roles not just within the UK but also internationally; unfortunately, a "4" meant that the executive had probably been over-promoted and should be shuffled sideways into a less demanding role.

The assessment process began with all of the executives, including Anna and Matthew, filling out surveys asking them to rate their own strengths and failings across assorted categories of capabilities, such as "Inspiring people" and "Making business decisions". Next, at least six colleagues also filled out similar surveys to rate each executive. Finally, I met with each executive individually to discuss

their scores, interview them about their leadership successes and failures, and ultimately decide what rating – on that four-point scale – I would give them in terms of their continuing potential.

I spent two hours with each executive. Matthew stood out for his confidence, charisma and unerring certainty about himself. A lanky figure with a broad smile and a crushing handshake, he was clearly someone who was used to making headlines. He received mainly complimentary comments from his colleagues, who said that he was a strong leader that they could turn to for guidance when they weren't sure what to do.

Sure, he had a few shortcomings, but didn't everyone? I told him about some of the occasional discrepancies between how he rated himself and how his colleagues rated him. For example, they said that he could at times be absolutely certain he was right even when he was later proved to have been wrong. He also tended not to revise his opinions easily.

In response, Matthew shrugged his shoulders and agreed that no one was perfect. He smiled and said, "Well, I've always been like that – it's a bit too late to change now!" The implication: as a manager in his late 40s, he was simply too old and too set in his ways to change.

Anna was much less sure of herself. A slender woman who moved with the energy of a skittish doe, she had reached the same executive grade as Matthew and was perhaps a couple of years younger than him. However, she admitted privately that she still had so much to learn about how to lead her team effectively.

She received a mixture of comments from her colleagues and clearly wasn't happy with everything she heard. They admired a lot about her analytical mind and empathy but said that she could demonstrate more energy and enthusiasm in front of her team. They felt

that she was sometimes reluctant to take decisions in the face of uncertainty too.

Anna puffed out her cheeks with disappointment at a few of the comments but listened and made careful notes. She asked sensible questions to understand the less flattering remarks that colleagues had made about her perceived failings.

She was eager for my input too. Whereas Matthew had demonstrated much greater certainty in his own ability to progress in his career, Anna sought much more guidance from me. She asked questions such as “In your experience, how have other managers addressed such issues?” and “What could I do to make the biggest difference to my leadership skills?”

So who would you think had the greater potential? Matthew or Anna?

Gifts versus growth

I first met Matthew and Anna nearly six years ago. And as I’ve continued working with the insurance company, I’ve seen how the two have progressed. Eighteen months after I first met him, Matthew was promoted into an even more senior role, looking after all of the human resources managers within the UK business. It was what Matthew and everyone else around him had expected. He was a formidable performer within the business and to this day remains a solid, dependable executive with a lot to contribute.

But what about Anna, who felt she still had so far to go?

She got promoted twice and now looks after all of the people – not just the sales team but also the finance managers, technology experts, human resources folk and so on – across all of northern

Europe, including the UK. She skipped a grade ahead of Matthew and is now his boss too.

But when I met her only a few months ago, she said that she still doesn't have all the answers. She maintains that she has a great deal to learn. She believes that the world is changing so swiftly and she can only just keep up.

And so we come to the crux of the tale. An increasingly convincing tidal wave of research shows that one of the biggest predictors of how well we do in not just our careers but our lives in general is down to our attitude, our outlook on life.

Matthew has an example of what I call a “gifts mind-set”.^{1*} He believes himself to have certain gifts or talents but also certain weak spots that he doesn't think he can change. His strengths are that he is confident, charismatic and decisive. At the same time, he accepts that he has flaws: he can be more certain of himself than situations sometimes warrant. And he doesn't always listen to what others have to say – he doesn't change his mind often.

He sees his strengths as well as his weaknesses as aptitudes that have been bestowed upon him – as traits that are pretty much fixed and difficult to modify. You might as well ask him to alter his eye colour or height. Take him or leave him. That's the way he is now.

Anna, on the other hand, possesses what's known as a “growth mind-set”. She tackles every new situation with the attitude that it's an opportunity for her to learn. In my very first meeting with her,

* Most readers can enjoy the book without turning to the notes at all. Notes are provided principally for more academically minded readers who may wish to read the original scientific papers.

she was almost greedy to learn all she could and find out how she could improve. Far from feeling confident about her abilities, she was almost painfully aware of how much more she could learn.

She felt that everything was amenable to change – her strengths as well as her failings. She saw herself as a work in progress rather than a finished product. Even today, she continues to feel that she has much to learn – that she is *still* a work in progress.

Of course, you may be thinking that other factors have determined Anna's and Matthew's careers. Perhaps Anna got lucky. Maybe Matthew had personal problems that distracted him. But actually, there is a huge body of scientific evidence confirming that our belief in our own capacity to change matters so, so much.

Here's the science bit

People with the gifts mind-set believe that their traits and psychological characteristics are fixed.

Broadly speaking, people with the gifts mind-set believe that their traits and psychological characteristics are fixed. Such individuals feel that their intelligence, creativity, empathy, ability to learn new languages and so on are gifts that they only have a certain amount of. What you get when you're born is all you get – and that's the end of the story. Whether you're good, great

or below average at something is due to the endowments that were passed on to you. And when you falter at a task, it's down to an absence of that ability.

In contrast, those with the growth mind-set believe that their traits are much more malleable and amenable to change. They feel that, yes, even their most fundamental qualities such as their very creativity, or even morality, can be improved through education and effort. As a consequence, they look at failure as demonstrating not an

insufficient ability but a lack of exposure, opportunity or hard work.

So what? How do these different ways of thinking help us?

It turns out that growth-oriented people tend to do better in all sorts of situations. They tend to tackle new challenges with relish because they believe that they will learn more from taking on fresh challenges than from sticking to tasks and issues that they're familiar with. They tend to stick with difficult problems for longer. They also bounce back from failures more swiftly as they see mistakes as a necessary part of the learning process. Ultimately, they are more open to learning because they believe that even their most essential qualities can be developed through training and effort.

On the other hand, the gifts-oriented crowd who believe in the fixed, unchangeable nature of their own traits and qualities are more likely to focus on assignments or projects that they feel comfortable with. They implicitly believe that if you have talent or ability in any area of your life, then everything should come naturally – without effort. When they make mistakes or fail at tasks, they are more likely to feel that it's a sign of lack of ability rather than lack of effort.

Gifts-focused thinkers tend to give up fairly quickly when things go wrong, which is only sensible. After all, if someone really believed that a skill or personal quality was an innate gift and couldn't be upgraded, it would be stupid to keep working at it, right?

As a result, people with more of a growth mind-set have been shown in dozens of studies to perform more strongly than those with a gifts mind-set in all sorts of domains. For example, a survey of business owners found that growth-focused entrepreneurs felt

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more resilient and were more confident about taking on challenges than their gifts-focused counterparts.² In another study, managers who believed that human attributes could be cultivated and improved were more likely to coach the members of their teams than managers who believed that personal attributes are innate and unalterable.³

I can tell you about plenty of studies that have been conducted away from the workplace with similar results too. For instance, adolescent children with a growth mind-set worked harder and had better exam results at school than peers who believed more strongly in their fixed gifts.⁴ Women with a growth mind-set about their bodies (i.e. those who believed in the changeability of their bodies) lost weight more successfully than women with a gifts mind-set, who perhaps blamed their circumstances or genes.⁵ And students suffering from debilitating levels of shyness tended to become less shy over time if they viewed shyness as something that could be changed as opposed to a fixed trait that they were stuck with.⁶

I'm sure you can see that such results make sense. If any individual truly believed that some aspect of himself or herself could not be changed, then it obviously wouldn't be worth wasting any effort endeavouring to alter it.

Ultimately, the drawback of the gifts mind-set is that it traps people. Those who feel that they are no good at a skill or activity feel it's pointless to try to get better. So they stop trying. They give up, which only guarantees that they can never get better at it.

The gifts mind-set is equally pernicious even for those who've been told that they are a natural at something – that they are better than

most people. They may be tempted to believe that they don't need to hunker down and work at it. After all, natural talent doesn't need coaching, training and practice; natural talent doesn't need to identify shortcomings or spot mistakes in order to lift performance even higher.

Those blessed – or should it be cursed? – with true natural talent often coast to early success. But if they get stuck in the rut of the gifts mind-set, they may not learn how to hone their skills further; they don't learn how to cope with setbacks or frustration. They may lose out on the chance to develop their grit and fighting spirit – the ability to dig deep and find the strength to battle on even when things are going wrong.

Reconceptualizing success and failure

Think back to times in your life when others seemed to out-shine you. Perhaps they did better in exams, at sport, in dating and relationships, at work, *anything*. Back then, you may have thought that they were simply more intelligent or had more natural ability.

But now that you understand the gifts versus growth mind-sets, consider the following:

- Did they work harder than you?
- In what ways may they have sought out more (or better) feedback, advice or coaching?
- What kind of different tactics or training strategies may they have used to make more progress?

Your mind-set

So what does all of this mean for you exactly?

Let's head back to those rating scales at the beginning of the chapter. What scores did you give each of those traits and characteristics? Essentially, the higher the scores you gave each attribute, the more you have a growth mind-set about that attribute. And the lower your scores, the more you are currently inclined towards a gifts mind-set.

Your views may have been shaped by the people around you in your upbringing. Perhaps teachers, parents or other adults helpfully encouraged you to work at things (fostering the growth mind-set) or less helpfully told you what you were good at or weren't so good at.

If you're like most people, you probably have a scattering of scores rather than believe that all attributes are either 100 per cent innate or 100 per cent trainable. You doubtless believe that some attributes are more amenable to alteration than others – perhaps you believe that leaders are born rather than made or that public speaking is a skill at which we can all improve (or vice versa).

You can shift your mind-sets and, more importantly, super-charge your motivation and performance.

But it almost doesn't matter which ones you feel you can or can't change – your *current* beliefs are only a starting point. I say current, because the good news is that you can shift your mind-sets and, more importantly, super-charge your motivation and performance. The more you have the growth mentality, the more you will get out of the later chapters of the book when we work through the skills of winning arguments, pitching ideas and so on.

How? What can we do to swing our mind-sets from the gifts end of the spectrum towards the growth end?

For starters, simply reading this chapter will help. Because it turns out that almost nothing about ourselves – at least our psychological characteristics – is immutable. And taking on board this understanding can begin to shift our beliefs.

Experiments have shown that it's possible to alter people's mind-set in mere minutes. In a provocative 2012 study, for example, scientists led by Alexander O'Connor at the University of California, Berkeley, divided a group of university students into two and asked them to read a total of eight quotes on the nature of creativity. Both groups of students read nearly the same list of quotes except for one.

One group was presented with the following as its final quote:

Most artists and supposed creative types just copy someone else. They adjust, tweak a little, but overall it's just the same thing. But some people have some inherent quality that lets them see the bigger picture and do something truly creative.

The second group read this quote instead:

Most artists and supposed creative types just copy someone else. They adjust, tweak a little, but overall, it's just the same thing. But some people work to a point that lets them see the bigger picture and do something truly creative.

When the two groups of students were then asked to complete several tests of creativity, the researchers found that those in the second group were significantly more inventive. In other words, the one sentence had rebooted people's beliefs about the nature of creativity, which subsequently affected their resourcefulness.

The first quote stating that creativity is an "inherent quality" plunged those who read it into the gifts mind-set – it strengthened

in them the belief that creativity is simply something you either do or don't have. So, quite unknowingly, they tried less hard on the test of creativity.

Conversely, the second quote stating that “some people work to a point that lets them see the bigger picture and do something truly creative” helped to shift the thinking of the students who read it into the growth mind-set. Consequently, these students actually *became* more sparky and imaginative.⁷

Wow. To me, that's a pretty intoxicating result. It demonstrates that just a single sentence was able to instill in people a superior way of thinking that allowed them to achieve more. So imagine what reading this entire chapter will do for your beliefs and your capacity to achieve.

Experiments have shown that it's possible to alter people's mind-set in mere minutes.

So it's not mere hyperbole to say that our beliefs matter. They *really* matter. Believe that you can change and you will.

Everything changes

Research tells us that change is possible in nearly every area of our lives – even ones that most of society would accept as fairly fixed. For instance, many folks believe that their personalities are fairly established by the time they get into adulthood. However, is that really the case?

Enter Ed Diener, a professor at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, along with a ground-breaking paper he published in 2006. One of the world's top psychologists, Diener had been measuring the personalities of 1130 adults every two years for an eight-year period. Controversially, he found that people were able to *change* their personalities. By pursuing satisfying work activities

and by getting into fulfilling relationships with a significant other, people were able to become more extraverted and less emotionally neurotic.⁸

Early-20th-century academics like Sigmund Freud believed that personality is immutable and doesn't change – or at least without years and years of intensive, expensive therapy. And that widely pervasive view persisted for nearly a century. However, modern 21st-century psychologists such as Diener have demonstrated that self-initiated change is possible.

Now you may expect younger people to change more than older adults. After all, people in their late teens and 20s usually leave home for the first time, find first love, get their first jobs and so on. Everything is shiny and new to younger people – or so you'd think.

But Diener's landmark study showed that this was not the case. He found that people were able to modify their personalities whatever their age. At the start of the eight-year study, his subjects ranged in age from 16 to 70. And those in their 50s or 60s boldly altered their personalities just as much as those in their teens or 20s.

Change isn't something restricted to the young. Old dogs can learn new tricks, it seems.

Shifting mind-set

Simply understanding that the growth mind-set exists (and tends to help people to learn more and ultimately perform better) helps most people to begin thinking about themselves and their skills in a new way. Hopefully you'll begin to see that you can get better at almost anything you want. But if you'd like to take it further and shift your mind-set even more deeply

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into the growth way of thinking, you might like to work through this exercise.

This is an activity to do over the course of several days. Over the course of five separate days, write at least a couple of paragraphs – or more if you like – answering one of the following questions on each day:

- Can you think of a skill you once weren't very good at but now perform better? This could be a skill you picked up *at any point in your life*. Recalling how you developed your skill, what lessons can you extract about how you learn best?
- Can you think of an instance of someone you know who learnt a new skill? It could be a friend, family member or colleague. Why and how did they change?
- Reflect on a time you overcame a major obstacle or solved a tricky conundrum. How did you manage it? Looking back, what did the experience teach you about how you can help yourself to succeed in future?
- Remind yourself of a different and more recent skill that you've either learnt from scratch or upgraded. What strategies or tactics helped you to improve? And what does it suggest you could do next time you're learning something new?
- Thinking back, can you recall a time you overcame a personal hardship? If you had to tell someone the story of what you did that helped you to succeed, what would you say?

I suggest writing about just the one question per day for a couple of reasons. First, you don't overload yourself with too much. You can focus on quality of thought rather than trying to rush through all five questions at once. In addition, going more slowly allows you to ponder the notion of the growth mind-set longer – and prompt a greater shift in your beliefs – than if you answer all of the questions in a single session.

The potential to grow in whatever we do

How much potential do we have in life? Well, the research on the growth mind-set that we've covered suggests that we may have substantially more room for growth and improvement than we may have been led to believe.

Several years ago, I wrote a book which was initially titled *The Extra One Per Cent*, but it was more recently re-published with the title *E is for Exceptional: The New Science of Success*.⁹ I wanted to tell the story of exceptional people and so interviewed dozens of high achievers such as James Averdieck, founder of dessert company Gü Puds, and Josephine Fairley, co-founder of Green & Black's chocolate.

I'm very proud of that book for some of the insights I uncovered. Absurdly, though, I found that many of these thriving entrepreneurs and leaders had been told at school not to strive for their dreams. A few had been told by their teachers that they weren't clever enough. One woman was told that she had no real ability at anything and that her only hope in life would be to land a successful husband! But they all succeeded anyway – with some of them selling their businesses and making millions of pounds in the process.

So don't ever let anyone put you off by telling you that you're not good enough. Just because you may not be very good at something *now* doesn't mean you can't work at it and be good – or even great – at it later.

In my own life, I can think of so many things I've worked at. An example: I've now written more than two dozen books on careers, high achievement and self-improvement – some of which have been translated into dozens of languages and sold to hundreds

of thousands of readers worldwide. Sometimes people who don't know me reason that I must be really clever or talented – that writing must be some kind of gift that I possess. But I know the truth.

My first book was less than a third the length of the book you're currently reading but still took me several hundred hours to write. And given that it didn't sell that many copies (mostly because it wasn't terribly good, probably!), it didn't make me very much money. In fact, when I worked out how much I earned from writing it on an hourly basis, I would have earned more if I had washed dishes in a restaurant kitchen or cleaned toilets in a hotel.

But with each book I wrote, I became more methodical in how I researched the topic. I discovered that I write better when I can work from home away from my colleagues and ideally when it's dark outside so the world is quieter and there are fewer distractions. I studied business and self-help books to see how other authors used language and told stories. I scoured magazines ranging from *Wired* to *Men's Health* and *Psychologies* to learn how journalists wrote about research studies. I learnt to pitch my ideas more successfully to bigger publishers and to negotiate better contracts.

And even though I hope that every book I write is a little better, I accept that my writing is a work in progress. The point is: writing books is not a gift that I have always possessed. It's a skill that has grown – that I have honed through lots of hard work. If I had written my first book and believed it was simply a gift that you either had or didn't have, I would have given up.

Learning is possible at any age, whatever a person's upbringing, education or current circumstances.

I believe that most people could write a book if they only put enough work into it. More broadly, I believe that learning is possible at

any age, whatever a person's upbringing, education or current circumstances.

My mother – a retired woman in her 60s who looks at least a decade younger – is a wonderful example of this (and my answer to the second question in the “Shifting mind-set” box on page 24). She only got her first computer a couple of years ago and has managed to turn herself into something of a technology guru.

She's an active user of Gmail, Flickr and Facebook. She takes photos and videos on her digital camera, uploads them to her computer and shares them with friends and family worldwide. She streams music on Spotify and transfers tracks to her Android phone but uses iTunes for managing her iPod Touch. She knows how to navigate her way around her computer and the World Wide Web better than many 20 or 30-somethings!

But there was nothing special about her upbringing that gave her any special advantages: she grew up in a small village in rural China, studied to become a nurse at a hospital in Hong Kong and spent most of her adult years as a full-time, stay-at-home mum. No, the only thing she has is her enquiring mind-set: a willingness to learn, ask questions, try new things and keep growing.

Modifying your mind-set with help from your friends

Research tells us that one major difference that separates those in the growth versus gifts mind-sets is their willingness to ask for help and explore new strategies. So when it comes to be time for you to invest in your self-development, you may want

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to interview at least a couple of friends or colleagues who have successfully improved themselves in the same field.

Suppose you're trying to hone your networking skills. Who in your social group are the best networkers? Ask if you can buy them a coffee some time to seek their advice on what they say or do that helps them to be so effective.

If you're aiming to run a marathon next year, sit down with a buddy who has done it to pick up training tips. Or if you yearn to lose weight, quit smoking, write a novel or anything else, again, find your way to a friend – or even a friend of a friend – to ask for practical dos and don'ts. What helped them to achieve the same goal?

Growing your confidence and capabilities

I only came across the growth versus gifts mind-sets a few years ago and it has transformed the way I coach and run leadership training workshops. After all, there's no point training managers in how to become better leaders unless they believe that they *can* change – that they can hone their people management skills, their strategic thinking, their political savvy and so on.

Shifting into a growth mind-set will set you up for the other chapters in this book: to get the most out of putting together winning arguments, constructing clever pitches, getting the job offers you want and ultimately getting ahead. But to finish off, here's a summary of how growth-oriented versus gifts-oriented folks tend to think and behave.¹⁰

It almost goes without saying: you may want to follow the example of the growth-oriented winners rather than the gifts-minded crowd.

DEVELOPING A WINNING OUTLOOK

	What do growth-oriented winners do?	What do gifts-oriented people do?
When thinking about themselves	Say: "I am a work in progress."	Say: "I am as good as I'm ever going to get."
When approaching a task	Ask yourself: "How can I get better at this?"	Ask yourself: "Can I do this or not?"
When setting goals	Focus on learning as much about the task or topic as possible because learning is a desirable outcome in its own right.	Focus mainly on outperforming others and/or looking good.
When a task begins to feel tough	Accept that it's only through tackling difficult tasks and projects that we achieve growth.	Give up and focus on easier or entirely different tasks that can be accomplished successfully.
When struggling	Seek advice or help from others; think about further tactics or strategies which may work better.	Feel embarrassed and keep mistakes to themselves; keep working longer rather than trying something different.
When experiencing failure	Accept that glitches and disappointment are necessary on the way to improvement.	Get upset or feel hopeless about the task and want to give up.
When speaking about failure	Say: "I failed at this one task on this occasion but can try again."	Say: "I am a failure and should quit."

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HOW TO WIN

	What do growth-oriented winners do?	What do gifts-oriented people do?
When receiving feedback	Actively ask questions to seek out criticism about what could be done better.	Dodge criticism or seek out only positive comments and praise.
When being criticized	Thank the other person for the criticism and try to extract the lessons from the criticism.	Get defensive, make excuses or go on the offensive to criticize the other person.
When praising others	Say: "I notice you did well at that. That tells me you are working hard at it!"	Say: "I notice you did well at that. That tells me you're a natural at it!"

Remember that growth is possible in just about every area of our lives. Pretty much every skill – from public speaking to sporting performance, assertiveness to dealing with numbers – can be improved if you set out to learn. No matter what teachers or other adults may have said in the past; no matter what colleagues, friends or even you yourself may currently say about your weaknesses or limitations, trust the research.

Slipping back into gifts-oriented thinking

Some people don't even realize they're stuck in the rut of the gifts mind-set. A few months ago I was brought into a law firm to coach a world-weary 40-something IT support manager, whom I'll call Keith. He had worked his whole career on computer systems and

software, including more than seven years at the law firm, but his performance had deteriorated in the last year or so.

His performance wasn't so terrible that his boss wanted to fire him. But his boss had tried to talk to him and support him, without success.

When I first met Keith, he was only able to muster a wan and fairly unconvincing smile. He revealed that a part of the strain and the trigger for his current work difficulties was an acrimonious divorce. However, when we delved deeper, it transpired that the nature of his work was also changing radically. The firm was outsourcing more work abroad and altering many of its technical requirements. He was struggling to get to grips with the new ways and methods and, as a consequence, he wasn't staying organized and on top of his work.

On being questioned further about his work, Keith talked about how he couldn't cope and how he didn't have the energy to deal with all of his work and the new technical requirements. He admitted that he was avoiding people and spending more time corresponding via email rather than speaking to them face-to-face. Neither was he asking his colleagues in the technology team for help. In other words, he was stuck in the gifts mind-set.

So I encouraged Keith to think back to earlier, less troubled times in his life when he had acquired new skills and learnt about bleeding-edge technologies. We talked about earlier occasions in his 20-year career when he had coped with corporate changes of direction. We also discussed ways for him to prioritize his work so that he could focus on the big, important projects that would make a super-sized difference to his growth and performance.

Over the course of just a few months, Keith's performance lifted, so much so that his boss remarked upon Keith's visible transformation.

But the point is we may not always realize when we may be stuck in the gifts mind-set. Even if we currently have the growth mind-set, it's possible to lose it when things get tough.

Building your growth mind-set momentum

Here's an additional, final exercise to shift your mind-set if you're ever feeling stuck in a gifts frame of mind. Imagine that a close friend is struggling with a quandary or issue – it could be to do with work, family, sports, anything.

Your friend seems to be stuck in the gifts mind-set. He or she feels that there's nothing more to be done. You hear your friend saying things like, "Maybe I'm just no good at this" and "I'm never going to get this – I should give up."

Now type an email or write a letter to your friend explaining the difference between the gifts and growth modes of thinking. And add some advice on how your friend could make progress with the issue.

An alternative would be to bring to mind a particular pal who is actually grappling with something in life. Offer your support and see whether you can coach him or her out of the gifts mind-set and into growth.

The more clearly you can explain it to someone else, the more you will help to cement the notion of the gifts mind-set in your own head.

Keeping up with the world

When I speak at conferences in front of executives and business leaders, I often ask them whether things are changing faster now

than they were as little as 10 or even five years ago. Their answer is always an unequivocal “yes”.

The Internet is a prime example of how the world is continuing to transform how we do things. Can you believe that it was only in 2007 that MySpace was the world’s most popular social networking website? Of course, Facebook is the current king. But who’s to say what will be top of the pile in just a few years’ time?

Things change daily in the worlds of technology, media, communication and medicine. Scientists are constantly discovering new things about the human mind as well as the far reaches of the universe. Upstart companies spring up while once-great giants disappear. Today’s innovations swiftly become yesterday’s news. Even the global balances of political power and cultural influence are shifting evermore noticeably. In this age of bewildering, turbo-charged change, it’s worth reminding ourselves that every day can be an education, an opportunity to learn and grow.

I shall finish this chapter with a quote from Alfred Binet, the early-20th-century educational psychologist who famously invented the forerunner of the modern IQ test: “With practice, training, and above all, method, we manage to increase our attention, our memory, our judgement and literally to become more intelligent than we were before.” Even though IQ tests are often taken as proof that our gifts are fixed, Binet had the opposite view: that with diligence and effort, we could enhance even our very intelligence.

It’s worth reminding ourselves that every day can be an education.

So what would you like to upgrade in your life? And, looking at the table above and the column describing what growth-oriented people do, how will you apply it to your own life?

Onwards and upwards

- Throughout this chapter, we've seen that almost no psychological skills, qualities or characteristics are set in stone. Remember that we may be able to modify even our personality and intelligence through effort and discipline. People who feel that they only have certain limited gifts (and therefore certain fixed flaws) curtail their own development; those with the growth mind-set are much more open to learning and ultimately tend to outperform those who believe in their innate gifts.
- Help yourself to shift away from the gifts mind-set and into the growth way of thinking by re-reading this chapter occasionally and bringing to mind occasions when you improved your own skills.
- Continue to foster the growth mind-set by revisiting past difficulties that you overcame in either your professional or personal life. The more you remind yourself how you grew in the past, the more you will bloom in the future.
- Cultivate the growth mind-set by asking for help as well as for constructive criticism from people who are that little bit better than you. Seek out role models who excel at what you want to improve at and ask their advice too.
- Remind yourself of the superior outlook that growth-oriented winners have when it comes to setting goals, dealing with failure and taking on board criticism. The table on page 29 of this chapter has helped many of my coaching clients in the past and may be a useful summary for you too.