



## COACHES NOTEBOOK

Sharron Helmke

# ENCOURAGE A GROWTH MINDSET IN TEACHERS

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**G**rowth mindset, a concept that has been influential throughout education and beyond, is core to successful instructional coaching. Coaches not only embody a growth mindset toward teaching and learning, but the very purpose of our work is helping that mindset come alive in the professional growth of teachers. We support teachers in seeing student learning needs as opportunities to improve teaching excellence, and we recognize that each experience, regardless of outcome, has a place in the learning journey.

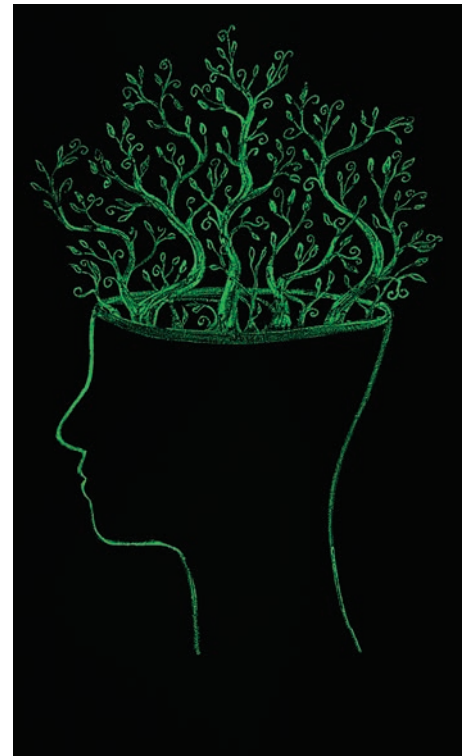
Challenges to growth mindset typically occur not with the concept, but in living *within* it. That's especially true when engaging in professional learning inquiry requires us to rethink our familiar, comfortable teaching plans. When I was a coach, I sometimes found it difficult to promote an ongoing growth mindset in teachers for this reason. But I found that focusing on growth mindset early in the school year — promoting, practicing, and reflecting on it — could help establish it within a coaching partnership or a team of teachers.

Simply reminding people to keep a growth mindset isn't enough to establish it as ongoing practice or to initiate a culture shift toward it. Instead, coaches need a repertoire of strategies and techniques to continuously promote it. Here are some of the tips I found most useful early in the school year.

**Ask teachers to define what it means for them to have a growth mindset.** Then, ask them to explain what that would look and sound like in various situations, such as during a planning conversation, data analysis, or a team meeting. List and post these examples on chart paper as visible reminders. Note: Facilitate teachers staying focused on their own professional growth rather than talking about promoting growth mindset in their students.

**Celebrate moments when things didn't go exactly as planned.** Share "A Celebration of Almost" or start "Fortuitous Fridays," where the most promising mistakes of the week are celebrated. The criteria for inclusion are thoughtful reflection and productive learning that resulted from the misstep and led to understanding next steps. Remember: Follow up to learn how this impacts teacher practice and student outcomes.

**Establish a "growth mindset champion."** This person's role is to call attention to evidence of growth mindset among team or department colleagues when it's seen or heard. You might choose to ask for a volunteer, designate someone, or assume that role yourself.



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**Foster growth mindset by prioritizing reflection with your coachees.** Ensure that there is always time for a reflection conversation after working with a teacher. It is through reflection that learning and excellence develop — the doing alone is not enough.

**Encourage a teacher's growth mindset by using some of these questions in your coaching.** Note: You can adapt these to your own coaching style.

- What would need to change for this to be an opportunity rather than a challenge for you?
- What would it take for you to feel 50% more confident trying this?
- What part of this challenge do you feel is within your control? What's outside of it?
- What would happen for students if you tried this and it was successful? What would that change for you?
- Having tried that, what are you most proud of? Most surprised by?
- If you could do that all over again, what would be the first thing you would do differently?
- What does this new learning inspire you to do next?
- How should I support you in the next step?

It's important to note that even if the individuals within a team have a growth mindset, the team may still struggle to stay in a growth mindset when working together. As a coach, you can support the group's mindset by using the same tips and questions to support the whole team and help the collaboration grow proactively and productively. ■

## WHAT WE'VE LEARNED / Melinda George

as benefit from it. We are convinced the chat box feature and the ongoing dialogue it inspires should become a regular component of professional learning. It gives voice to all who want it, when they want it, and it can help to provide real time answers, suggestions, ideas, and resources.

### Give grace and space in professional learning.

If we want educators to try new things and take risks, we need to give grace and space. We and presenters have used this expression on almost every webinar to acknowledge the power of positive intentions and respecting where each person is at in a given moment.

This means respecting others' perspectives and needs, both during the webinar and in their journey overall. It means welcoming a crying infant in the background, encouraging a flustered presenter, considering a perspective you don't initially agree with, and learning from others' missteps instead of judging them.

As we educators often tell students, some of the greatest learning comes through efforts that didn't work as

expected or didn't work at all. There is power and learning in sharing those difficult experiences. It is time to make it a priority to create safe spaces for educator learning.

### Acknowledge the power of relationships.

The pandemic has left all of us feeling isolated or even completely alone. Part of the power of the webinars is the way they connect us and show us that we are not alone. At the end of each webinar, we heard from participants that they felt rejuvenated, supported, and inspired to try new ideas in their own settings.

This is a little about the content and a lot about the people who shared, supported, motivated, and participated in community. It again supports what we know is foundational to high-quality professional learning — a strong collaborative environment. This has been a great reminder that, whether through learning communities within your school or district or in a chat box with 900 strangers, relationships are powerful and should be at the center of any professional learning experience.

Learning Forward's webinar

series has been a small step in helping educators navigate the pandemic. The learning coming from the webinars, however, should serve as a large step in reimagining what professional learning looks like in a virtual world. All of the components of quality outlined in the Standards for Professional Learning (Learning Forward, 2011) are as important as ever in an online world and can, in fact, be vibrant and exemplary.

Districts and schools need to consider the characteristics of effective professional learning — collaborative, ongoing, job-embedded — and apply them in new designs. This should include virtual coaching, virtual mentoring, virtual office hours, and online, facilitated professional learning communities. When educators have access to these new learning designs, they will feel more ready and connected to use them with their students.

## REFERENCE

**Learning Forward. (2011).** *Standards for Professional Learning.* Author. ■