

Dear Journalist:

Why are some teams and organizations more collaborative, innovative, and resilient than others? Why are some better at fostering diversity and inclusion, and competing successfully with integrity and ethical behavior? In short, why do some excel at bringing out the best in people?

In her first book, [\*\*CULTURES OF GROWTH\*\*](#) (Simon & Schuster; March 12, 2024), social psychologist **Mary C. Murphy, Ph.D.**, protégé of *Mindset* author Carol Dweck, demonstrates that every organization—not just every individual—possesses a palpable and defining mindset, embodied in its dominant policies, practices, and leadership messages.

Dweck showed the consequences of thinking with either a fixed or a growth mindset, and Murphy takes that research one step further. According to Murphy, we operate along a *mindset continuum*. Fixed mindset organizations—or Cultures of Genius—believe and communicate the idea that people’s abilities are unchangeable. Whereas people in Cultures of Growth believe that talent and ability can be developed with persistence and support. Shifting between Cultures of Growth and Cultures of Genius is not like flipping a switch, but like adjusting a dimmer influenced by the environment, predictable situations, and people around you.

Murphy’s Cultures of Growth model transforms mindset from a *me* paradigm to a *we* paradigm. It explains what catapulted Microsoft to a \$2 trillion market valuation, *saved lives* at Shell, and ameliorated inequity while strengthening academic performance across a New York school district. In her book, Dr. Murphy unveils how to recognize an organization’s mindset and strategically embed a growth mindset within its culture. She also shows how to discern the triggers that move you—and those you work with—along the mindset continuum so you can create environments that shift you towards growth more often.

Dr. Murphy has spent over a decade pioneering research on motivation, performance, and interracial relations at **Stanford and Indiana University**. Now, she shares her award-winning knowledge and strategies to teach you how to:

- Strengthen employees’ organizational commitment and trust, reducing turnover.
- Mine mistakes for valuable learning opportunities.
- Identify the four mindset triggers that push people into a fixed or a growth mindset.
- Recognize and attract a more diverse workforce, increasing your chances of besting competitors by 35%.
- Stop being a know-it-all and become a learn-it-all.

In a world where success seems reserved for a chosen few, Dr. Murphy shatters the barriers with a powerful alternative. She teaches us how to create organizations that people want to be a part of and enact change in. Throughout her book, Dr. Murphy equips us with the indispensable tools we need to propel expansion, empower communities, and transform ourselves.

I’ll contact you soon to discuss coverage possibilities for this groundbreaking book.

Warmly,

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**Author Bio: Mary C. Murphy, PhD**, is Professor of Psychological and Brain Sciences at Indiana University, the founding Director of the Summer Institute on Diversity at the Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences at Stanford University, and founder and CEO of the Equity Accelerator, a research and consulting organization that works with schools and companies to create more equitable learning and working environments through social and behavioral science. Murphy conducts pioneering research on motivation, performance, and intergroup relations. Among many other awards, she received the 2019 Presidential Early Career Award for Scientists and Engineers, the highest award bestowed on early career scholars by the US government. Originally from San Antonio, Texas, she earned her BA from the University of Texas at Austin and her PhD in social psychology from Stanford University in 2007, mentored by Claude Steele and Carol Dweck. She splits her time between Bloomington, Indiana, and Palo Alto, California.

**Select Praise for Mary C. Murphy, PhD, and CULTURES OF GROWTH**

“Practical advice from the preeminent authority on growth mindset and organizational culture. . . Required reading for anyone who has wondered how to create a culture that supports innovation, risk taking, integrity, and inclusion. I simply loved this book!” —**Angela Duckworth, *New York Times* bestselling author of *Grit***

“Growth mindset is more than a belief that we carry in our heads—it’s weaved into the cultures of our workplaces. Mary Murphy is a pioneering scholar of mindsets at work, and her book is not only engaging and informed by evidence—it’s a useful road map for building a learning organization and unlocking the potential in people.” —**Adam Grant, #1 *New York Times* bestselling author of *Hidden Potential* and *Think Again*, and host of the TED podcast *WorkLife***

“Cultures of Growth is a wildly important book about how we can work together better. I’m recommending it for everybody on our team.” —**Robert Reffkin, entrepreneur and CEO of *Compass, Inc.***

“[A] new and valuable perspective. Mary has now studied and worked with countless organizations around the world... In this book, she shares this fascinating and incredibly valuable information so that all organizations and groups can get on the path of growth—creating cultures that support everyone to fulfill their potential and contribute to the success of the whole. I saw at once that this was a really new and really important idea—an important idea for research and, even more so, an important idea for society. . . . Mary has demonstrated over and over that organizations and teams that hold a growth mindset and infuse their policies and practices with it have employees who are more motivated and committed, more mutually supportive, and more creative and innovative. . . Imagine if this happened on a national or even global level. This is the book that can make it happen.” —**Carol Dweck, bestselling author of *Mindset***

**Conversation Starters and Q&A with Mary C. Murphy, PhD,**  
**Author of CULTURES OF GROWTH**

**1. How can you determine if your environment is fixed or growth oriented?**

In a fixed-mindset culture—a *Culture of Genius*, as I call it—the focus is primarily on star performers, with the belief that these people are inherently more capable due to their superior intelligence or ability. Conversely, the main belief in a *Culture of Growth* is that given the right supports, everyone can succeed. The reality is that most cultures aren't one or the other, but a mixture.

**2. Wouldn't an organization want to hire geniuses? Aren't they the high performers?**

In a Culture of Genius, most of the focus is on a handful of geniuses who are counted on to make the biggest impact, much like a sports team that has a few standouts who carry the team. In a Culture of Growth, everyone has the potential to be a high performer. My research reveals that high performers actually perform better in Cultures of Growth. Why? These environments are both more rigorous and more supportive. They expect more, but they also provide the tools and resources necessary to learn and grow.

And, as it turns out, even geniuses don't fare well in Cultures of Genius. In these environments, high performers are put on a pedestal, and that puts them in a fragile place where they're afraid to fall. We see this when we label schoolchildren as "gifted." They're terrified of underperforming, so they play it safe or hide their mistakes.

**3. What have we gotten wrong about mindset?**

There are three main points we've misunderstood about mindset:

- 1) **There are two mindsets—fixed and growth—and you have either one or the other.** In reality, it's not either/or. Instead, mindset is on a continuum, and we all move along that continuum between our fixed and growth mindset. What causes us to move one way or another is actually the basis of our second misunderstanding.
- 2) **Mindset is located only in your mind.** It's false that if you have a certain mindset, it's only based on who you are. In reality, mindset is influenced largely by our environment.
- 3) **Mindset is all about effort.** With a true growth mindset, effort is not the only important factor. Rather, it is about what I call *effective effort*: working hard *and* moving in the right direction.

**4. What are mindset triggers, and why are they significant?**

Mindset triggers are the situations that cause us to move between our fixed and growth mindset—they are what moves us along our mindset continuum. Our research has identified 4 common and predictable situations that shift us toward our fixed or growth mindset. These are:

- Evaluative Situations
- High Effort Situations
- Critical Feedback
- Success of Others

We find that almost everyone can identify with at least one of these triggers. Understanding our own mindset triggers and those of the people we interact with, mentor, and supervise is important because it enables us to shape these situations so they are more likely to shift us towards our growth mindset.

### **5. How can we shape our environment to encourage a growth mindset?**

I want to be clear that what I'm not saying is that we're victims of our environment. We're all culture creators, meaning we shape our surroundings. Shifting an entire culture is a group effort, but we each play an important role. The key is to look at everything through the lens of learning—how you can grow and develop in each task and interaction.

Say your boss says, “Good job” after your presentation. That feedback doesn't exactly tell you what you did well and how you can repeat that success in the future. You can ask them what they specifically liked about what you did—and what you could improve in the future. You are getting the growth-minded feedback you need and you're moving your boss toward their growth mindset too.

If you're the boss, you can give clear and specific feedback that includes suggested ways your subordinates can replicate success and stretch further. This helps gear the whole team towards their growth mindset and maximizes learning and development.

### **6. How does mindset impact the bottom line?**

Let's say you have two companies. One is rife with internal competition; backbiting and information hoarding are common because people are trying to maintain their advantage. Risk-taking and mistakes expose who is smart and belongs. In the second company, collaboration is encouraged, incentivized, and praised. Mistakes are normalized and the learning is shared widely so that everyone benefits. Risk-taking is encouraged and supported, and the attitude is that good ideas come from everywhere, not just a select few “geniuses.” Which do you think is going to have a stronger bottom line? The second company—the Culture of Growth.

[In a study my team and I conducted](#) of hundreds of startup and early-stage organizations, we found that those with strong Cultures of Growth were more likely to meet and exceed their fundraising goals. In more established companies, those with strong Cultures of Growth are more innovative, resilient, and financially successful than those with strong Cultures of Genius.

### **7. How does mindset shape whether organizations identify, recruit, and retain staff from diverse groups?**

One of the biggest problems with Cultures of Genius is that they have a specific prototype of who is likely to be successful. While that prototype might vary by industry, we find that people

mostly picture geniuses as Albert Einstein, Elon Musk, or Bill Gates—a homogenous group. When we're in a Culture of Genius, we look for those who match our genius prototypes. Those are the people we seek out, hire, and promote in the organization. This leaves behind everyone else: women, people of color, people with disabilities, LGBTQIA people, and more. That's why Cultures of Genius overlook and miss out on identifying and recruiting talented people from diverse groups. And if they find them and manage to hire them, Cultures of Genius are less likely to retain employees from diverse groups because these people are less likely to be given the prestigious opportunities that lead to promotion and leadership roles.

### **8. Why is risk-taking necessary for an organization?**

Companies have to take risks—internally and externally—to take advantage of new approaches, markets, technologies, and ways of working so that they can effectively compete in the global marketplace. A company that doesn't take risks is going to be bested by their competitors who continually develop. Plus, on a people level, most individuals do not want to do the same thing in the same way forever and ever. They want to try new things, be creative, and stretch themselves in ways that better themselves and their work. Companies that don't allow or encourage risk-taking will not attract the best talent available.

### **9. How can being challenged change our brains?**

There was a really interesting [neuroscience study](#) that looked at brain activation when people did a variety of tasks. What they found was that the more challenging the task was and the more effort it required, the more areas of the brain were recruited to help. Not only was there more activity and connectivity among different parts of the brain, but challenge also activated higher-level functions that help us solve complex problems, like our working memory and abstract reasoning.

But it's not just *any* effort or challenge that makes us grow new neural cells and pathways; it's effort expended *in the process of learning*—something I call effective effort. When we're working hard *and* learning something new mentally, we develop more connections among different parts of our brain, and that helps us complete tasks more quickly and effectively in the future.

What makes our brains hold on to these pathways—and create more—is not simply repeating the same things we've learned over and over again, but continually taking on difficult problems. If you've heard the advice that the way to keep your brain sharp is to tackle Sudoku or *The New York Times* crossword puzzle, those activities may serve you up to a point, but only so long as they remain challenging.

### **10. How does equity result in *all* students performing better?**

A lot of people get equity and equality mixed up. Equality is making sure everyone gets the same thing, so if you have someone who has advanced training in an area and someone who is just a beginner, equality is giving both the same training and development opportunities—and we can see the problem with that. Equity on the other hand pays attention to differences. It asks whether people's different needs are understood and provided for, and it seeks to level the playing field. When an organization invests in equity, it takes into consideration everyone's starting point and

provides people with the resources they need to succeed. It also removes systemic obstacles that could limit their advancement or access to opportunities. Therefore, an equity-based approach results in all students performing better because everyone gets what they need to learn, grow, develop, and maximize their potential.

### **11. How can you cultivate a growth mindset?**

It sounds counterintuitive, but one of the best ways to lean into your growth mindset is to normalize your *fixed* mindset. Recognize that we all have times when we embody our growth mindset and when we embody our fixed mindset. Then, identify which triggers shift you towards your fixed mindset. When those situations arise, you can be vigilant for signs that you're moving along the continuum and take actions to shift yourself towards your growth mindset.

So, for example, if the success of others is something that pushes you towards your fixed mindset, you can approach the person who just got praised for their presentation or scored well on the test. Ask them what they did to prepare so that you can find ways to authentically pursue your own success. If critical feedback sends you right into your fixed mindset, you can ask your supervisor to share critiques in a way that maximizes your learning and development, and you can ask for resources and support to help you build those skills.

### **12. What do you say about mindset research not really holding up?**

Mindset research holds up, but to understand where and for whom our mindset is going to have the biggest impact, we need to look at the mindset culture of our environment. One critique is that some of the original research on mindset doesn't always replicate. Well, that's true. However, my research on Cultures of Growth actually explains why we see some of this variability in the results. Our capacity to use our talents and abilities largely depends on the people and context around us. People can have the strongest growth mindset at the personal level, but if they are in a fixed-minded Culture of Genius, they won't be able to use or benefit from their growth mindset.

Take Michael Jordan and Scottie Pippen. If you put either of them on a different team, with different players, with a different coach and a different team culture, would they have achieved the same success? They may still have been great, but it's unlikely we'd have seen the same outcome as that legendary championship team because it took everyone, together, to create a Culture of Growth.

[One of our studies that shows this most clearly was a randomized controlled trial](#)—the gold-standard of research—that included a nationally representative sample of more than 12,000 students. Students who participated in an online program designed to instill a growth mindset earned higher grades and were more willing to take on challenges by enrolling in more advanced classes. However, we also studied where this program did not work. It didn't help students when the students' *teachers* were in their fixed mindsets and engaged in teaching practices consistent with those fixed mindset beliefs, creating Cultures of Genius in their classrooms. When that was the case, it actually squelched students' freshly activated growth mindsets. That's why Cultures of Growth are so crucial for helping us get into, stay, and maximize the benefits of our growth mindset.