

# Coaching Matters

Summer 2011



***cricket***  

---

***scotland***

Welcome to Coaching Matters, the first edition of our new web based newsletter for Cricket Coaches. We hope you find the information within both useful and thought provoking. In the first edition we will examine the concept of mindset. As coaches we have traditionally had a very technical view of what talent looks like. Could it be that real talent resides more in the five inches between our ears and is the mindset of coaches and players



key to improving performance? We will leave you to ponder this once you have read the article. As well as being thought provoking we would like the content to be debate provoking. To allow this to happen we have started a discussion on the Cricket Scotland Facebook page. We hope some of you will wish to contribute to this and link details are provided at the end of the article. We hope you enjoy the first edition of Coaching Matters and look forward to being in touch again for our autumn edition; when we will provide a detailed look at the Coach Development opportunities taking place throughout the winter.

***Cricket Scotland Coach Education & Development Team***

## **Mindset - Is it the key to improving performance?**

**By Andy Tennant, Cricket Scotland Head of Performance** – Andy currently sits on the sportscotland Institute of Sport “Talent” Coaches Group, which is currently exploring and developing the concept of mindset and how it can help Scotland produce world class performers.

Why is it that some player’s who are labelled as being “less talented” become more successful than their “more talented” peers? This is a question that has vexed coaches through the years. Not surprisingly it would appear that the answer can be found in the mind. Many people believe that it is innate ability rather than practice that ultimately determines whether we have it within us to achieve excellence. This raises the further question; does our perception of how talented we are affect the way in which we approach the challenges that lie before us? This topic has been extensively researched by one of the most influential modern day Psychologists, Professor Carol Dweck from Stanford University in California. As part of that research, Dweck and her team carried out two simple experiments on the topic of mindset. Both of these have great relevance to coaches and coaching and are worth considering.

In the first experiment Dweck took over three hundred students of similar age and range of ability and gave them a questionnaire which looked at their beliefs around intelligence and talent. The group were then split in two. Those who believed that intelligence and talent was innate and a result of genetics were labelled the “Fixed Mindset” group, while those who believed that intelligence can be developed through hard work and effort were labelled “Growth Mindset.”



Both groups were then given the same task, which was a series of increasingly difficult problems. What happened next was highly illuminating. The fixed mindset group became disillusioned very quickly once faced with the more complicated problems, blaming their intelligence (or lack of it) for their failure. They typically used phrases which questioned their ability such as “I guess I’m not good at this type of thing” or “I never had a good memory”. This is



despite the fact that they were performing extremely well only a few minutes earlier, when the problems were perceived to be easier. As a result, the majority of the fixed mindset group abandoned the task or became incapable of

***They did not seem to consider themselves to be failing at all but merely to be “not yet successful”***

employing any strategies that may have helped them solve the set problems. The results from the “growth mindset” group could not have been more different. Despite also struggling with the more difficult problems, they did not appear to blame themselves for their lack of success in failing to solve the more difficult problems. In fact they did not seem to consider themselves to be failing at all but merely to be “not yet successful”. In stark contrast to the other group, more than eighty percent of the “growth mindset” group maintained or improved their performance in applying strategies to solve the more complex problems.

These remarkable findings would appear to have significant implications for us as Coaches. Given that the huge difference in performance cannot be put down to intelligence (ability) or motivation (the group were all equally motivated by personally chosen extrinsic rewards if successful). The difference had been created solely by the students’ mindset. In other words those who believed their performance could be improved simply through effort significantly outperformed those who believed that their talent was innate. This seems to tell us that, if we as coaches want to help our players improve their performance when facing increasingly complex tasks (cricket), then helping them develop a “growth mindset” would be a great starting point.

This begs the question, how do we achieve this?

Part of the answer lies in the outcome of a second experiment carried out by Dweck. Four hundred students were given a series of simple puzzles. On completion each student was given their score and one additional piece of information. Half the students were praised for their intelligence, i.e “being good at this” while the other half were praised on their effort i.e “worked hard at this”. Dweck was testing whether the subtle difference in the language used could make a difference to the mindsets of the students. What happened next was remarkable.

***Dweck was testing whether the subtle difference in the language used could make a difference to the mindsets of the students***

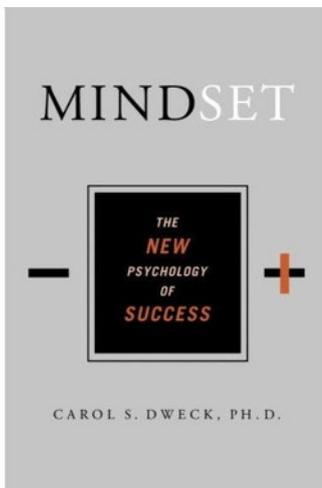


The students were given the choice to take either a difficult or an easy test. Two thirds of the group that were praised for “being good” at the previous task opted for the easy test, to protect their “good” status. In contrast, ninety percent of the group praised for effort chose the harder test, naturally seeking a tougher challenge without considering whether they would be judged on success or failure or for being “good” or “bad”.



The second experiment shows how a simple alteration in the use of language can influence the mindset of the recipient. There was a clear tendency to become more fixed in their thinking if praised for being “good” or “talented” at something; while displaying a more positive can-do growth mindset when being praised simply for effort. This clearly shows the power of the words we use as coaches to influence the players we work with. The inference of Dweck’s research is that a growth mindset is ideally suited to the pursuit of excellence. It appears to create a willingness to strive for ever higher levels of performance using effort to push past the many failures that are required on the journey. It is also clear that a fixed mindset can lead to players to shy away from challenges and more likely to give up easily. This in turn makes the player much less likely to achieve excellence.

***The second experiment shows how a simple alteration in the use of language can influence the mindset of the recipient.***



Dweck uses this research as the foundation to her book, *Mindset: the New Psychology of Success*, published in 2006. According to the author, individuals can be placed on a continuum according to their implicit views of where ability comes from. Those tending towards the fixed mindset end believe that their success is based on innate ability. While towards the “growth” end of the continuum there are those who believe their success is based more on hard work and learning. Fixed-

***Fixed-mindset individuals dread failure because it is a negative statement on their basic abilities***

mindset individuals dread failure because it is a negative statement on their basic abilities, while growth mindset individuals don't

***Dweck argues that the growth mindset will allow a person to live a more successful life, whether that is in sport or any other area.***

failure as much because they realise that their performance can be improved principally through effort. Dweck argues that the growth mindset will allow a person to live a more successful life, whether that is in sport or any other area.



If we accept Dweck's assertions then there are some clear lessons for us as coaches –

1. Understanding our players and their mindset is crucial in helping build an effective Coach / Player relationship.
2. Having a growth or fixed mindset is not an either / or but people exist on a continuum which tends towards one or the other. It can also be situational, but most importantly, it can be altered.
3. Developing a growth mindset can help players (and coaches) achieve excellence by being less judgemental, accepting failure as part of the process and using a combination of effort and purposeful practice as a blueprint for success.
4. The environments we create and the language we use as coaches is fundamental to developing a growth mindset in our players.



I hope this article has stimulated some thoughts and encourages you to reflect on the content and how it may relate to your coaching. We are always keen to encourage debate in our coaching community and should you have any thoughts on this article feel free to contribute to the discussion on our facebook page which can be found at

<http://www.facebook.com/pages/Official-Cricket-Scotland/132336860172175?sk=wall>



Cricket Scotland Lions Coach and Head of Performance Andy Tennant, watches a recent Regional Series match with Eastern Knights Coach Steve Knox.

