

URL: <https://ecorner.stanford.edu/in-brief/dont-prove-yourself-improve-yourself/>

Combining Stanford psychology professor Carol Dweck's concept of a "growth mindset" and psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi's ideas about "flow," Airbnb strategic advisor and Modern Elder Academy founder Chip Conley explains that sustainable growth involves an even balance of challenging yourself and playing to your skills.



Transcript

- So, the first lesson is learn the difference between a fixed and a growth mindset.. Carol Dweck, great psychologist here at Stanford, popularized the idea that we can actually have a fixed or a growth mindset.. When you have a fixed mindset, you have a tendency to want to prove yourself.. And for you, success is defined by winning.. And in some parts of our life, that may be how we operate.. And the beauty in that is you win a lot.. The sadness about that is you actually play in a relatively small sandbox, because if you actually believe that success is defined by winning, you don't try things that you're not gonna win.. A growth mindset, on the other hand, is not about proving yourself, it's about improving yourself.. And so, if you're actually focused on improving yourself, success is not about winning, it's about learning.. And that's not just something that's appropriate for someone who's young, someone at any age can be learning..

So, one of the things I did when I joined Airbnb and started mentoring Brian, the CEO, is I taught him about the idea of a fixed versus a growth mindset, and how could we create a company that had a growth mindset.. I also sorta took advantage of a relationship that I've had for maybe 10 years now with a guy named Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi.. You know who that is? So, the guy who sorta, he popularized the concept of flow, the idea of being in the flow, what brings you in the flow.. And one of the things he taught me was the following.. This is the flow diagram.. On the vertical axis is challenge, on the horizontal is skill.. What he taught me was this, is when you're in the flow or in the zone, you're in a place where you sort of feel like you are in exactly where you're supposed to be, and you're tapping into your natural talents.. He says what you do is you actually, in order to get into the flow zone, which is about at the 45-degree angle here, you actually have to do the following physics.. You have to go up and then over.. What does that mean? It means you actually have to go challenge, skill, challenge, skill, challenge, skill..

If you don't do challenge, skill, if you say I'm just gonna do skill and no challenge, where do you end up? The place that a lotta people end up in mid life (laughs): boredom, down here.. Now, if, on the other hand, you're only doing the challenge and not building the skill, you end up in anxiety.. The better your mindset, the more you actually expand your mindset such that you have a growth mindset, the wider this arrow is.. Now, that's my own little conceit of what I've, mixing Carol Dweck's work with Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi's work, is if you have a very skinny flow zone, you have a fixed mindset.. And if you have a very wide one, you're open to learning and building a skill even though it's hard.. I'm 58 years old, I have learned how to surf at 58, and I'm learning Spanish for the first time.. I'm not very good at either, but I've learned that actually if you have fun, it's easier to try a new skill.. And once I understood the challenge-skill two-step, I understood that's the only way I was gonna get better..