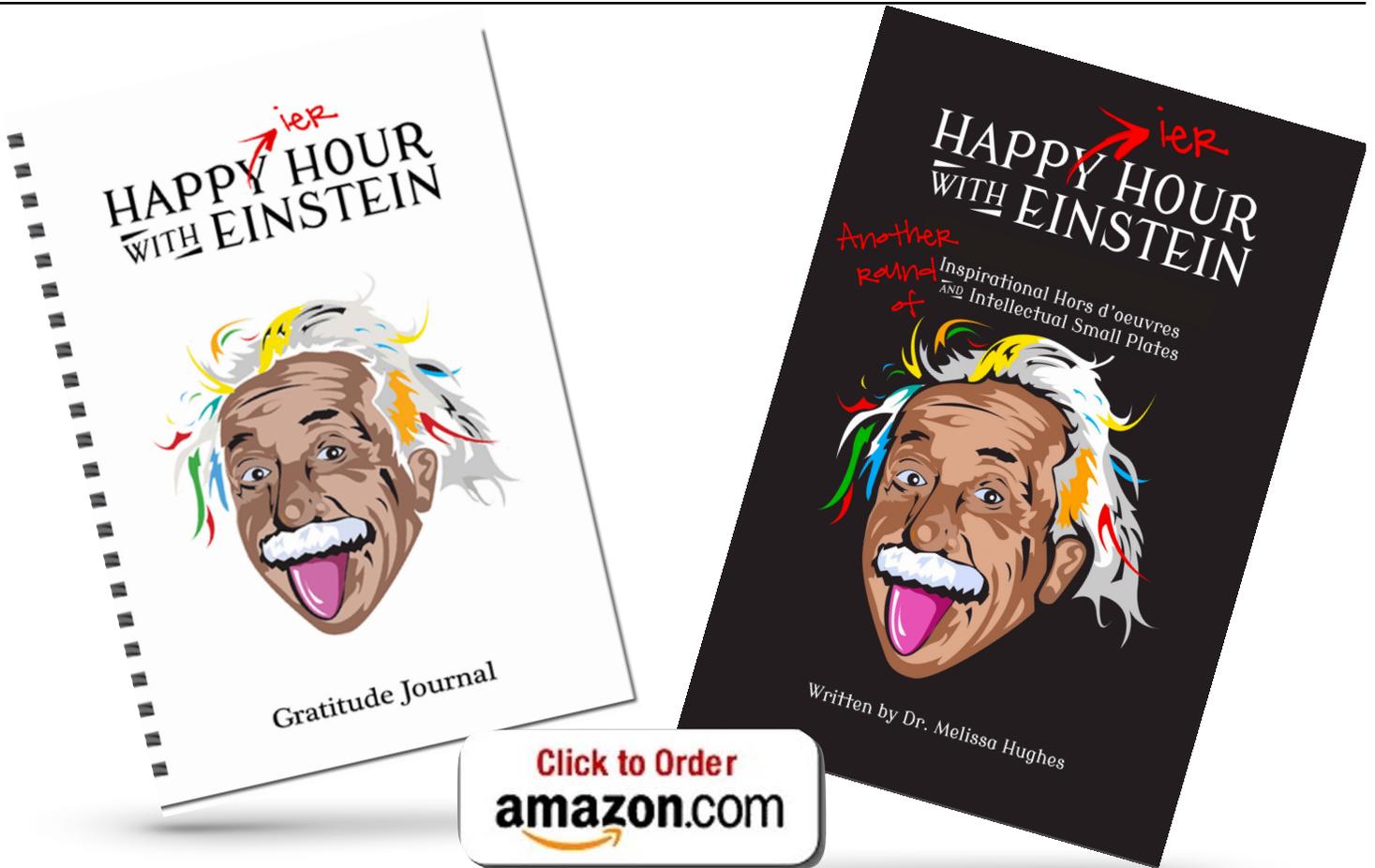

MINDSET



**Fears, Commas
& the
F-Word**



MAXIMIZE AND OPTIMIZE BRAIN FUNCTION FOR
INCREDIBLE OUTCOMES!



Written by Dr. Melissa Hughes

Dr. Hughes is the Founder and President of the Andrick Group and the author of *Happy Hour with Einstein*, *Happier Hour with Einstein: Another Round*, and the *Happier Hour with Einstein Companion Gratitude Journal*. She holds her Ph.D. in curriculum and instruction and her research focuses on the achievement gap impacted by summer learning loss and parental involvement. Throughout her career, she has taught in both the public K-12 sector as well as at the university level and has authored more than a dozen instructional resource publications for teachers. Melissa currently delivers keynote speeches and workshops to help people work smarter and to help organizations build collective Intelligence. For more information about bringing Dr. Hughes to speak to your organization and better understand how the brain works and how to make it work better, visit www.melissahughes.rocks

FEARS, COMMAS & THE F-WORD

Professionally or personally, no one likes to fail. Some people are so adverse to failure that it becomes paralyzing. There's a name for that. Atychiphobia – an irrational fear of failure that prevents sufferers from any task or activity that does not guarantee their success – is number 15 on the top 100 phobias list. When we allow fear to prevent progress in school, at work, or in life, we're going to miss great opportunities along the way. New research demonstrates that success is determined by how we use the F-word: FAILURE.

**“Everything you want is just on the other side of fear.”
-Jack Canfield**

We're taught at a very young age that the brightest kids get the right answers. Wrong answers are evidence that we aren't smart. As adults, intellectually we know that mistakes are essential to the learning process, but no one wants to make them let alone *embrace* them or shine a light on them. The mind is a powerful thing. The way we see ourselves and the stories we tell ourselves can either fuel success or sabotage it. That internal dialogue doesn't just impact our success; it profoundly influences our goals. Our worldview, our behavior, our perception of success and failure professionally and personally, and ultimately, our capacity for happiness springs from the mindset we nurture. Nurturing a growth mindset means facing fears, using commas rather than periods, and learning how to use the F-word as a bridge to success rather than a barrier.

People with a fixed mindset use periods:

- *It is what it is.*
- *There is nothing else I can do.*
- *This is impossible.*
- *I can't do this.*
- *I give up.*

People with a growth mindset use commas:

- *That didn't work, so there must be another way.*
- *I don't know, and I'm determined to find someone who does.*

Mindset Influences How and What we Learn

According to Stanford researcher Carol Dweck, the difference between what she calls a “fixed mindset” and a “growth mindset” determines *what is learned* and *how well it is learned*.

Dweck maintains that a fixed mindset assumes our character, intelligence, and creativity are fixed traits that we have no control over. A growth mindset is the belief that even though we each have unique talents, aptitudes, and interests, our mental traits can change through effort and experience.

Dweck contrasts the two mindsets this way:

In a fixed mindset, students believe their basic abilities, their intelligence, their talents, are just fixed traits. They have a certain amount, and that's that, and then their goal becomes to look smart all the time and never look dumb. In a growth mindset, students understand that their talents and abilities can be developed through effort, excellent teaching, and persistence. They don't necessarily think everyone's the same or anyone can be Einstein, but they believe everyone can get smarter if they work at it.

—Carol Dweck, Stanford University

Much of Dweck’s research explores how and how early on in life these mindsets are formed. In a study on hundreds of school-age children, she examined how different types of praise are likely to influence mindset as well as how each mindset impacts learning and academic achievement. Some students were praised for how hard they worked on various tasks while others were praised for their ability.

Two critical findings stood out: (1) praise that focuses on effort nurtures a growth mindset while praise that focuses on ability nurtures a fixed mindset, and (2) students with a fixed mindset will reject learning experiences to avoid failure. When students were asked to choose the tasks they wanted to complete, those who were praised for ability chose the most straightforward tasks. They declined to try more challenging tasks that could result in failure or spotlight their weaknesses. To this group, failure meant they were not smart, and the risk of that far outweighed the benefits of learning something new.

**“Failure is success in progress.”
-Albert Einstein**

Conversely, those who were praised for effort weren't intimidated by the risk of failing difficult tasks. They embraced them. In fact, 90% of them wanted to tackle the *most challenging* tasks. To this group, failure was not a reflection of intellect or ability; instead, it was motivation to keep trying until they mastered a challenge.

The team expanded the research to find out if a fixed or growth mindset influences character traits such as honesty. They asked the students to write about their experience and disclose their scores on the tasks. Forty percent of the students in the ability-praised group inflated their scores to make them look more intelligent. Because a fixed mindset equates failure with intelligence, almost half of these students lied about their scores so that others wouldn't see them as stupid.

People with a fixed mindset are more concerned with showing what they know than taking on a new challenge and potentially exposing what they don't know.

People with a growth mindset are intrinsically motivated to learn new things and tend to gravitate toward challenges rather than avoid them.

Professional Performance with a Growth Mindset Approach

Dweck didn't confine her research to school-age children. She examined brain waves of adults to determine how mindset affects the way people receive feedback. Those with a fixed mindset were much more interested in feedback about their ability than they were in feedback about how they could improve their ability. Those with a growth mindset were much more interested in learning how to improve regardless of their current ability. They saw ability as *who they are today* instead of *who they are*. The collective body of this research confirms that mindset is an influential factor in willingness to learn as well as the ability to learn new things.

The best thing about having a growth mindset is that you don't have to be great at something to enjoy learning how to be great at it.

Dweck's research shows that the view we adopt for ourselves profoundly impacts not only our ability to learn, but also determines how we lead our lives and whether we accomplish the things we value. Mindset changes what people strive for and how they define failure and success. It also changes the most fundamental meaning of effort. In the fixed mindset, effort is a bad thing. Like failure, effort means you're not smart. In the growth mindset, effort is what *makes* you smart. She writes in, *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success*: I've seen so many people with this one consuming goal of proving themselves — in the classroom, in their careers, and in their relationships. Every situation calls for a confirmation of their intelligence, personality, or character. Every situation is evaluated: Will I succeed or fail? Will I look smart or dumb? Will I be accepted or rejected? Will I feel like a winner or a loser? . . .

There's another mindset in which these traits are not simply a hand you're dealt and have to live with, always trying to convince yourself and others that you have a royal flush when you're secretly worried it's a pair of tens. In this mindset, the hand you're dealt is just the starting point for development. This growth mindset is based on the belief that your basic qualities are things you can cultivate through your efforts. Although people may differ in every which way — in their initial talents and aptitudes, interests, or temperaments — everyone can change and grow through application and experience.



The Neuroscience of Mindset

Reacting to challenges with a fixed or growth mindset determines how open one is to feedback as well as how motivated one is to learn and improve performance. The human brain reacts differently to feedback when in a state of growth mindset. It enables us to not only be open to feedback by decreasing resistance to change, but also increases intrinsic motivation to learn and grow.

The human brain reacts differently to feedback when in a state of growth mindset. We are not only more open to feedback, but we are less resistant to change and more intrinsically motivated by challenges and opportunities to grow.

We are better able to learn from corrective feedback because the region of the brain used to process this type of information is more active. Those with a fixed mindset tend to be more concerned with proving their intelligence than engaging in new learning opportunities. As a result, this leaves them highly vulnerable to any feedback that isn't positive. In addition, in situations where they anticipate a high risk of making mistakes, the default is to disengage from the task.

In contrast, those with a growth mindset are more likely to gravitate toward tasks that offer real challenges, and these challenges motivate them for deeper learning. In addition, in line with their view that there is always potential for intellectual growth, they are more willing to accept constructive feedback and ask for help when they experience difficulty.

Many current models explore the neural relationship between growth mindset and grit. Grit is a form of self-regulation that manifests in the prefrontal cortex – an area that helps us make decisions and control our behavior. Self-control helps us make the right decisions on a daily basis while grit is affiliated with a long-term commitment to a goal. Together, they contribute to overall success and accomplishment.

People who were rated high for both grit and growth mindset showed greater connectivity in the prefrontal and anterior cingulate cortices – the networks responsible for executive function as well as perseverance, impulse control, self-assessment, and delayed gratification. In other words, the part of the brain that enables us to interrupt the current processing and then integrate new information, possibilities, or suggestions (i.e., constructive feedback) is more active in people with a growth mindset. This enables them to recalibrate their thinking, see alternative perspectives, and better recover from mistakes.

Transform Company Culture with a Growth Mindset Approach

Helping employees adopt a growth mindset can make an organization more agile, more resilient, more creative, and even smarter. It is actually possible to use a growth mindset to enhance the IQ of the individual and, by extension, the collective intelligence of the organization.

Companies are finding great value in how these soft skills translate in the workplace. By emphasizing self-awareness, team-work skills, and initiative, employees can prioritize the process of learning and how they overcome challenges. People who demonstrate high levels of grit and a growth mindset will typically outperform their peers - especially in fast-paced, high-stress environments. What separates them the most from others is their determination and perseverance.

This research has been expanded over the last twenty years to explore whether an organization can cultivate a fixed or a growth mindset, and, if so, how it impacts employee engagement and company culture. Any type of workplace environment—academic, business, nonprofits, and others—communicates cultural mindset through shared norms and values. In correlation with growth or fixed mindset, cultures can be defined as those of *genius* or *development*.

A culture of genius is the view that brilliance is the critical ingredient for success. These companies focus on finding the “rock stars,” and people learn quickly to be smart or smarter than the next guy.

CASE STUDY: Enron

It was a company that prized “sheer brainpower” above all else, where the task of sorting out “intellectual stars” from the “merely super-bright” was the top priority when making hires and promotions. It was an environment where one of the most powerful executives was described as being “so sure that he was the smartest guy in the room that anyone who disagreed with him was summarily dismissed as just not bright enough to “get it.”

—Description of Enron (McLean & Elkind, 2003)

This organization deemed that people were either intelligent or not, and there was little or no value placed on growth, learning, or effort. Malcolm Gladwell called this mindset the “blueprint for Enron’s culture and demise.” In a piece published in *The New Yorker* a year after the Enron scandal, Gladwell wrote:

The broader failing of McKinsey and its acolytes at Enron is their assumption that an organization's intelligence is simply a function of the intelligence of its

employees. They believe in stars because they don't believe in systems. In a way, that's understandable, because our lives are so obviously enriched by individual brilliance. Groups don't write great novels, and a committee didn't come up with the theory of relativity. But companies work by different rules. They don't just create; they execute and compete and coordinate the efforts of many different people, and the organizations that are most successful at that task are the ones where the system is the star.

Gladwell maintains that companies with a talent-mindset teach employees to define themselves and the company by that description. Genius creates value. When that image is threatened, employees would rather lie than admit to mistakes that would *invalidate their value*. Any opportunity for learning and self-correcting the system is sabotaged by the system. As Gladwell concludes, “They were there looking for people who had the talent to think outside of the box. It never occurred to them that, if everyone had to think outside the box, maybe it was the box that needed fixing.”

“They were there looking for people who had the talent to think outside of the box. It never occurred to them that, if everyone had to think outside the box, maybe it was the box that needed fixing.” -Malcolm Gladwell

CASE STUDY: Xerox

In public statements, executives proudly described their CEO's growth and learning over 35 years—from sales rep to the head of the organization. Managers expected their workers to show a passion and love for learning and expanding knowledge. Instead of proving how smart a person or division was, the company's focus was on facilitating contributions, investing in employees' experiences, developing a larger portion of talent, and intense on-the-job learning.

—Description of Xerox (George & McLean, 2005; Vollmer, 2004; Knowledge@Wharton, 2005)

When Anne Mulcahy took over Xerox in 2000, it was \$17 billion in debt with a stock value that had plummeted from \$63.69 to \$4.43 a share. On the very day that her appointment was announced, the stock had dropped 15%. But by 2003, it had delivered four straight profitable quarters. Mulcahy hadn't been groomed to become a CEO, and she didn't have a sophisticated financial background. So how did she turn a company on the verge of collapse into what *Money* magazine called the “great turnaround story of the post-crash era”? Mulcahy attributes the success to a company-wide focus on “intense on-the-job learning” starting at the top. She identified communication as the most important element of the turnaround strategy, and she expected full participation from every

employee. “When I became CEO, I spent the first 90 days on planes traveling to various offices and listening to anyone who had a perspective on what was wrong with the company. I think if you spend as much time listening as talking, that's time well spent.”

It's easy to see the difference between the genius and the development approach. Xerox created a team focused on its commitment to identifying problems and learning how to fix them together while Enron created a team focused on competing with one another, each striving to be the smartest guy in the room. Cultures of development embody the ability to learn and grow with a focus on resilience. These are the companies that place a value on employees' abilities to set high goals and take risks to reach them.

Research conducted over the last decade or so has begun to provoke more questions about the interplay between talent and effort and success and failure. This is true in academic and professional settings as well as in personal growth. Understanding that it isn't just ability or intelligence that determines success or failure is the first step in redefining how to make success and failure part of a productive vocabulary. We are all born with an innate curiosity and a love of learning. A growth mindset nurtures both.

“When I became CEO, I spent the first 90 days on planes traveling to various offices and listening to anyone who had a perspective on what was wrong with the company. I think if you spend as much time listening as talking, that's time well spent.” -Anne Mulcahy

CASE STUDY: Google

Google has studied the concept of team dynamics for years spending millions of dollars measuring everything from how frequently coworkers eat lunch together to which personality traits foster collaboration and effective communication. In 2009, one of the top three challenges facing the company was high employee turnover due to poor management. So the set out to build a better boss. The initiative was called Project Oxygen, and the goal was to determine what leadership traits were the most important to a healthy, engaged company culture.

The project culminated in a list of leadership traits name the Eight Habits of Highly Effective Google Managers. Developing a growth mindset topped the list. They believe this simple construct develops leaders who are more eager to learn, challenge themselves and grow and take risks – even if those risks result in mistakes or failure. They embrace these mistakes and failures with humility that everyone has room for growth. In doing so, managers learn how to be more open to the employees’ potential for growth.

Fast forward to 2012. They faced a new challenge: determine what makes some teams thrive while others struggle to merely survive. They tasked a team of psychologists, sociologists, engineers, and statisticians with Project Aristotle named after Aristotle because of his famous quotation: "the whole is greater than the sum of its parts." They wanted to find out if collective intelligence develops from different types of collaboration that is

distinct from the intelligence of any individual member.

With a sample size of 700 subjects randomly divided into small groups, the researchers gave them a series of tasks that required various types of collaboration. Some groups were incredibly innovative and successful on the tasks while others demonstrated low levels of cooperation and struggled to find viable solutions. The most interesting finding, however, was that despite the fact that the tasks were very different, teams generally succeeded or failed across the board. Success, therefore, had little to do with the task and everything to do with the team.

In addition, it didn’t matter how many *smart* people were on each team; the group dynamics impacted the collective intelligence and success more than the intelligence of the individual members. The researchers drilled down into the successful groups to explore what characteristics they shared.

Google's intense data collection and extensive number-crunching validated the same conclusions that most of us inherently know. In the best teams, members listen to one another, feel safe to take risks, and are sensitive to the feelings and needs of other members on the team. The researchers found that what really mattered what less about who was on the team and more about how the team worked together. These are the top 5 dynamics of effective teams in order of importance.



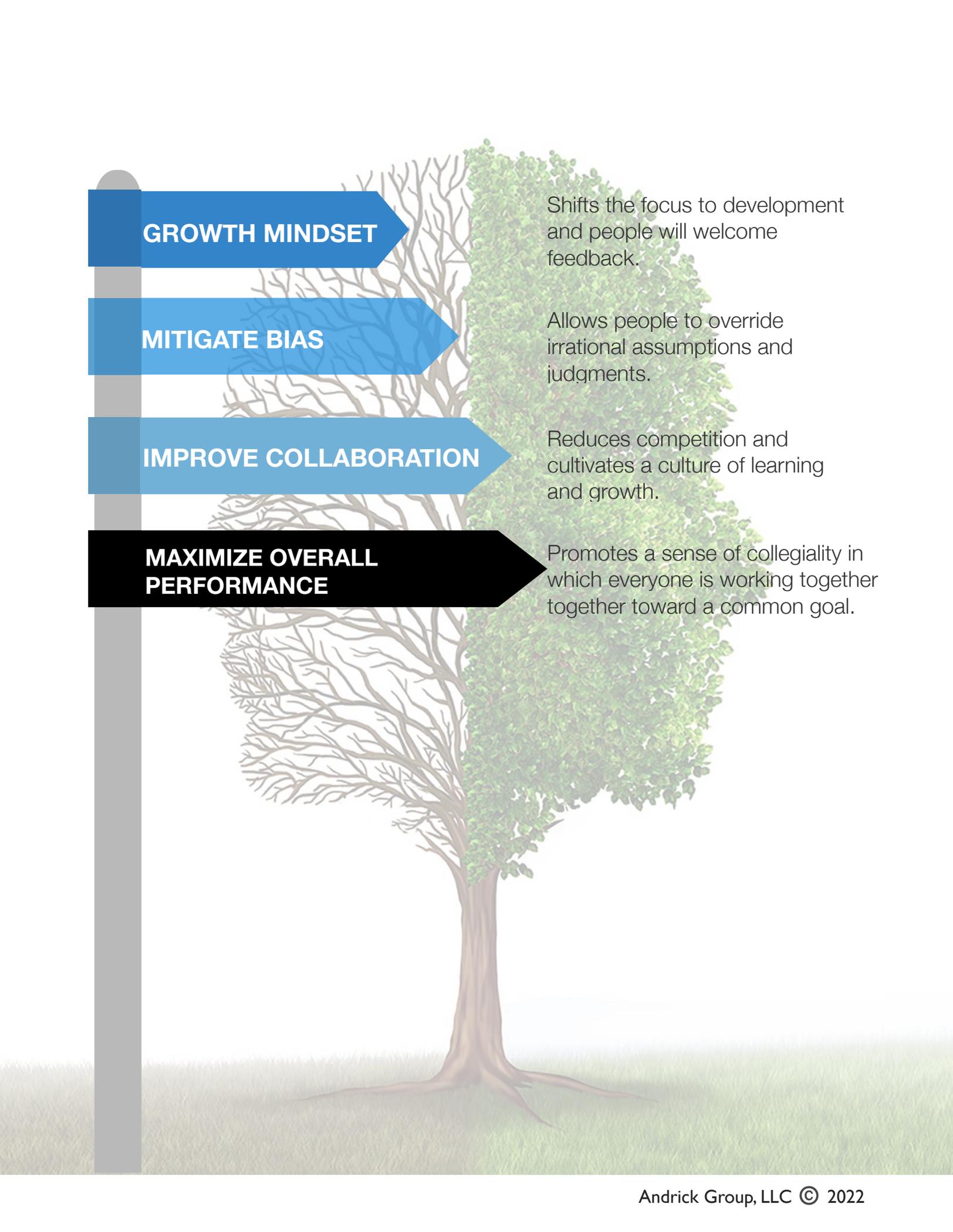
Google's focus on putting people first has contributed to their continued success and put it on the "Best Company to Work For" list seven times. Google created a professional development resource called [re:Work](#) designed to share research, ideas, and practices that put people first and make work better.

Transforming Organizational Performance with a Growth Mindset

A growth mindset isn't something we're born with; it's something we can all learn to nurture and develop. And doing so is a remarkably effective way to stretch and grow individually as well as collaboratively to maximize organizational outcomes. People with a growth mindset are more open to feedback and growth mindset team cultures show higher levels of trust, empowerment and collaboration. In addition, organizations that cultivate growth mindset cultures enjoy higher employee engagement, lower turnover, and overall improved employee experience.

Here are five guiding principles to make the shift from fixed to growth mindset in your organization:

1. Think of *learning as training the brain*. Remember that the brain is like any other muscle in the body; it gets stronger with more use.
2. Replace the words *failure* and *mistakes* with the words *learning* and *experience*. This shift in perspective turns the fear of failing into opportunities to improve. Eliminating the fear makes trying new things easier and promotes learning from mistakes and successes.
3. Embrace the word "yet." Instead of saying, "I'm not good at that," try, "I'm not good at that yet." That tiny word reinforces the idea that learning is a process and that process is never done.
4. Remember that the brain is not fixed, and neither is our ability to learn. Acknowledge that neuroplasticity at work with every new skill, every "aha" moment, and every goal reached. Remember that we're never done growing cells, pruning cells, cleaning out the dead cells as all designed to help sculpt a better brain.
5. Cultivate grit. Think of grit as setting a goal so big that it can't possibly be reached and then growing into the person meets that big goal. Embrace the challenge with the confidence that each of us has far more control over the brain than anything or anyone else does.
6. Create a psychologically safe environment. Make those around you feel comfortable trying new things and sharing information and demonstrate your desire to learn and try new things, too.



GROWTH MINDSET

Shifts the focus to development and people will welcome feedback.

MITIGATE BIAS

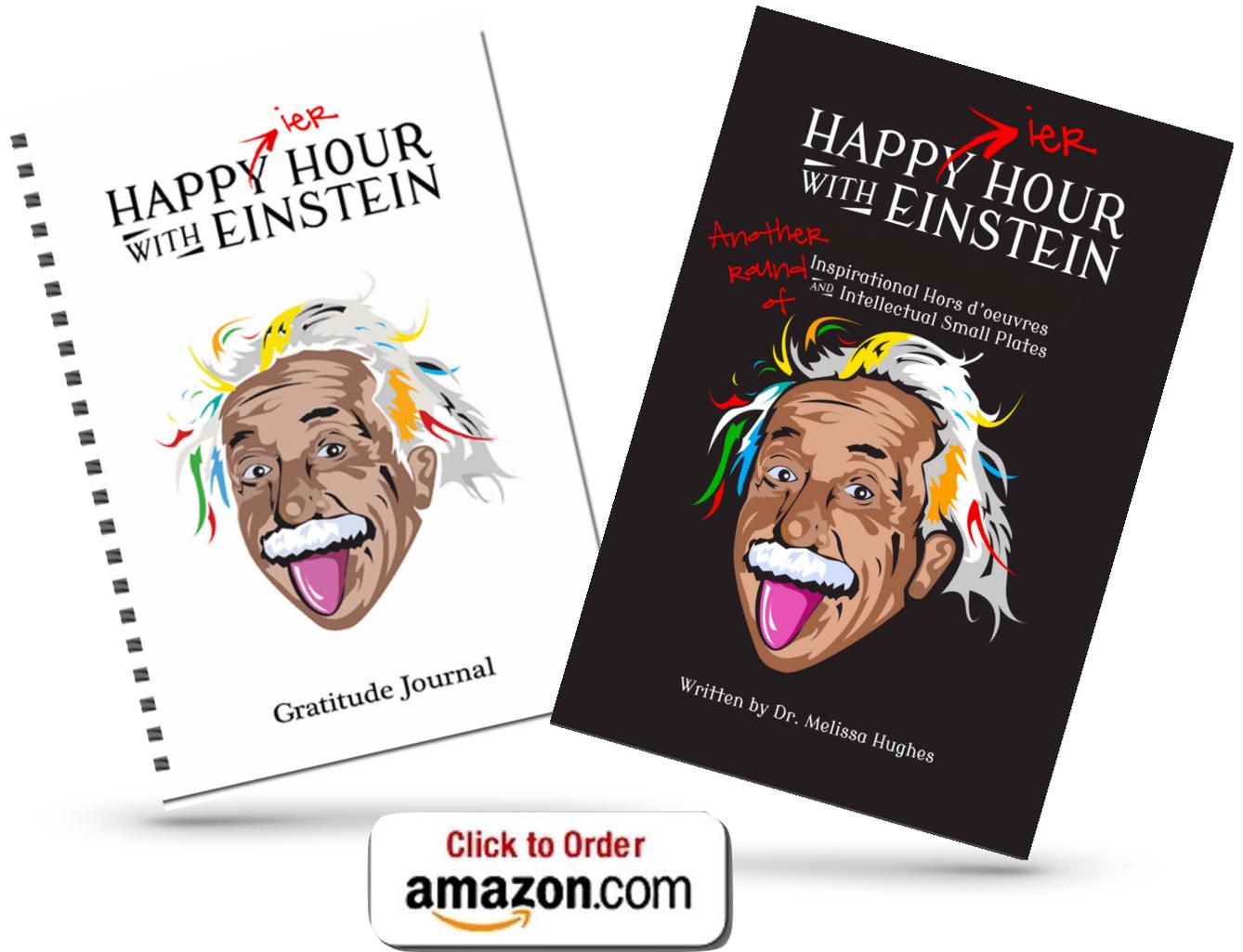
Allows people to override irrational assumptions and judgments.

IMPROVE COLLABORATION

Reduces competition and cultivates a culture of learning and growth.

MAXIMIZE OVERALL PERFORMANCE

Promotes a sense of collegiality in which everyone is working together together toward a common goal.



Thinking about Thinking | Learning about Learning

To learn more about the brain and how to make it work better, subscribe to receive a weekly Neuro Nugget delivered right to your inbox. No salesy stuff, no spam... just a fascinating bit of information about the brain that will help you tap into your inner genius!

*Want to receive
a brain boost
every Friday?*



*Click here to
add your name
to the list!*