

The LAUNCH Podcast – Growth Mindset with Chelsea Cichocki

[00:00:00] **Kayla Hogrefe:** [00:00:00] Hi everyone. This is Kayla Hogrefe, Academic Advisor UConn Hartford.

[00:00:10] **Emma Bjorngard:** [00:00:10] Hi, this is Emma Bjorngard-Basayne, Academic Advisor in Stamford.

[00:00:15] **Kayla Hogrefe:** [00:00:15] Welcome to another episode of what was formally the School of Business Office of Undergraduate Advising Podcast. We now have an official name. It is The LAUNCH Podcast because we're helping you launch your academics here at UConn.

[00:00:29] So on this episode we're talking to Chelsea Cichocki. She is the Assistant Director of Student Support Services at UConn. She's based on the Storrs campus, and she's talking to us today about what a growth mindset is and how you can develop one and two. I don't know about you, Emma, but this is one of my most favorite interviews that we've done so far.

[00:00:53] I just think it's such an interesting topic and it's really inspiring to know that you can change your [00:01:00] thought patterns like scientifically, psychologically change your thought patterns to achieve in the areas that you want to achieve in.

[00:01:08] **Emma Bjorngard:** [00:01:08] Exactly. And you can change your behavior to be more successful in what you want to achieve.

[00:01:14] **Kayla Hogrefe:** [00:01:14] Yeah. So without further ado, I don't want to steal Chelsea's thunder. Please listen to Chelsea as she explains what a growth mindset is and how you can develop a growth mindset.

[00:01:33] **Emma Bjorngard:** [00:01:33] Please tell us your name and what you do at UConn.

[00:01:36] **Chelsea Cichocki:** [00:01:36] My name is Chelsea Cichocki, and I am an Assistant Director for Student Support Services at UConn. I'm in Storrs and we serve first generation low income and underrepresented students at the university by providing services to support, access, retention, and graduation from the university.

[00:01:52] So I do a lot of counseling, financial aid things. I plan different programs for students, so it's kind of a mix.

[00:01:59] **Emma Bjorngard:** [00:01:59] Great. [00:02:00] Okay. So what does it mean to have a growth mindset?

[00:02:03] **Chelsea Cichocki:** [00:02:03] Okay, so growth mindset was the term was coined by Carol Dweck. So for anyone who wants to know in depth about it, they should really read the book called mindset.

[00:02:11] Uh, but the abridged version of it, of what growth mindset is. It's this belief in your ability to grow and change and get better at things over time, through deliberate effort.

So people with a growth mindset developed through small, repeated actions, and they dedicate themselves to showing up every day no matter what.

[00:02:30] Okay. So that would be somebody who has a desire to learn. They know that skills come from hard work, they're embracing challenges. They think that feedback is something to learn from, no matter if it's positive or negative, and if they mess up, they learn from it. Knowing it's only a temporary setback. And when other people are successful, they're finding inspiration in it.

[00:02:51] So in a nutshell, those are the components of growth mindset according to Carol Dweck.

[00:02:56] **Emma Bjorngard:** [00:02:56] So have you, do you have an example of a student that you know or [00:03:00] yourself where you showed growth mindset?

[00:03:02] **Chelsea Cichocki:** [00:03:02] I have a lot of examples of growth mindset. So first, I mean, I can give you the, an example of students. So first students, if you see somebody who's studying weeks in advance.

[00:03:16] Someone who literally day one of the semester, they're there in the library, they're reading their texts, they're doing everything that. Students quote should do. and they know that there is always work to be done. That's someone who's striving to get better. That's somebody who has growth mindset. And then there are others who, you know, save it to the last minute and they're taking a test for the grade and kind of cramming up that last second and just hoping for the best.

[00:03:46] That's fixed mindset. And the. Issue with fixed mindset thinking is that that students setting themselves up for failure and when they get the result back and it's less than what they had hoped for or [00:04:00] intended based on the amount of effort they're going to say something like, well, I guess that's just not meant to be.

[00:04:05] I'm not a math person, or I guess I'm not cut out for this major, or should I not be at UConn? When really had they put in the effort. They could've had more of a success rate and have more of a growth mindset for that subject. So that's an example as it relates to students.

[00:04:24] **Emma Bjorngard:** [00:04:24] Great. So how, like what is the main difference between a growth mindset and a fixed mindset since you mentioned

[00:04:31] **Chelsea Cichocki:** [00:04:31] yes. So a fixed mindset is very different. So someone with a fixed mindset, instead of having that desire to learn. More of a, coming from a desire to just look good and to look smart in certain situations. So they'll avoid challenges oftentimes to avoid looking inadequate. And then if they struggle or experience a setback, like the example that I just shared when they do try, they get discouraged and often [00:05:00] don't try again.

[00:05:01] So, and they'll, they'll, you'll hear them say things like, I'm just not meant to be this, or I'm not a good. You know, I'm not good at studying or a good test taker, but really it's

that they hadn't learned yet. Um. And they'll get defensive often when they receive feedback. So if it's a test score and maybe there are some comments, someone with a fixed mindset often won't even read the comments on a paper because they're like, well, I don't even want to go there.

[00:05:30] It's, it's too hard for me to hear. And if they see somebody else who's successful. Oftentimes they'll feel threatened by that person's success instead of encouraged by it. and when they have to put an effort into something, they're thinking that that must mean I'm not good at it. When really anyone who's become good at something has had to put in the work to be there.

[00:05:52] So it's not like this thing where growth mindset equals good and fixed mindset equals bad. [00:06:00] They're just different and the concept of growth mindset. It's like one of those things that I always tell people. It ruins you once you learn about it, like for the better. As soon as you hear about it and you understand growth mindset thinking and things that people say in relation to it versus fixed mindset.

[00:06:17] You're, I can guarantee that you're, anytime you hear somebody say something, you be like, that's growth mindset thinking or that's fixed mindset thinking and you can reflect on yourself and challenge the way that you think about your skillset and your abilities. So that's kind of the difference there.

[00:06:35] **Emma Bjorngard:** [00:06:35] Yeah. It's funny because. I remember with papers, like what you were mentioning, not wanting to read the comments. That was totally me. Like for a while I just wouldn't even look at the, I just looked at the grade and then I wouldn't read the comments and I had to like push myself to say like, okay, maybe I take two days. I want to look at them, but then I will

[00:06:52] **Chelsea Cichocki:** [00:06:52] Right because, because it hurts at first because we're thinking it's an attack on our character and. Again, that's why I like to clarify. We [00:07:00] can have fixed mindset thinking in some areas of our life. Like some people are fixed mindset, academically, growth mindset athletically or vice versa.

[00:07:08] And it's capable of changing over time, but, you know, as far as something like a comment on paper, that's right. We have to take a step back and look at it like, all right, this isn't defining me. it's just something that I can improve upon in the minute we flip the script and change the way that we're thinking about it and the way that we're talking to ourselves [00:07:33] internally about our abilities and what this feedback means. Once we change that, then we can start to make progress. But I can totally relate because that was me as a student too. I'm not going to lie. I was always about the grades, and it wasn't until I learned about growth mindset that I. I changed my ways.

[00:07:53] **Emma Bjorngard:** [00:07:53] No, totally. So does science support growth mindset?

[00:07:58] **Chelsea Cichocki:** [00:07:58] Yes. Yes, [00:08:00] yes, yes. Science is rooted in growth mindset through and through, and it's really comes down to two main things. our

capacity in our brain and this concept called neuroplasticity. So. Long story short for brain capacity. You know, there's, if you want to learn in depth about this, take a psych class.

[00:08:22] Um. Because you'll, without a doubt, they talk about this, you know, in that first semester psych. So our brains have like 86 billion neurons and there are over like 150 trillion synapses or something like that. It's wild. So, and the synapses, those are neural connections and it's like how our brain will communicate with through different neurons.

[00:08:46] So we're not using all of those connections inevitably. Um. But we have the capacity. So we literally have the storage to learn new things and develop over time and get [00:09:00] better at whatever it is that we choose to get better at. So our brains capable. Yes. So that's step one. Step two is the concept of neuroplasticity, which if you break it down, it essentially means the malleable brain. So our brain is capable of changing and there's research to support that. If you look at somebody who's say they lost their eyesight in an injury, then they'll gain a keener sense of hearing as a result of their brain adapting. So our brains can adapt to the circumstances and react in an effort to really survive.

[00:09:34] And through that you can retrain your brain. So, you know, if we take out the injury thing we can look at, alright, how can I build a new skill based on these synapses and connections I have in my brain and the capacity to learn more. And it's hard. So it's like anytime you learn a new habit, if it's, you know, my say my instant reaction, anytime my alarm goes off is I hit snooze, [00:10:00] alarm goes off.

[00:10:01] Ah, I don't, I don't want to get up today, and I'm sure no college student can relate to this, but we want to hit snooze. So then if we want to change that habit, anyone who's tried that or set a new year's resolution, you know how hard it is to start that habit. But once you change it and you say, okay, if I could do it just one day, and then one more day, over time, what you're doing is forming a new connection in your brain, and when you're forming that new connection, the other one, it doesn't go away completely.

[00:10:30] It's not totally dissipated, but it's less. It's not as strong. So, you know, it's like with anything, if our instant reaction when we're angry is thought we end up in fights with people. And, you know, if over time we'd say, okay, maybe I can take three deep breaths and maybe I work on some meditation.

[00:10:52] We're creating a stronger pathway for that new habit we want to form, and we're lessening the one that's, um. [00:11:00] That's maybe not as desirable, so it's less salient over time. So we can do, we can train our brain in different ways, so we have the capacity. And we can retrain our brains. So yes, there is there science behind it.

[00:11:15] And that's where growth mindset was developed from is the brain science. So I know when I first heard about it, I was like, this is a bunch of like hoopla, like who you know, Oh yeah, you can do it if you just believe you're new yourself and try like, I was a total skeptic. But as soon as you look at the science behind it and you're like, okay, this, this is legit.

[00:11:36] And you know, if I just take the steps and make effort. You can see yourself growing at something, maybe you're not going to be the next Einstein or the Mozart or whatever, whoever the best is in the field, but you can certainly get better.

[00:11:50] **Emma Bjorngard:** [00:11:50] And that's motivating to know that the science supports changing and improving, and you know,

[00:11:56] **Chelsea Cichocki:** [00:11:56] yes, yes, exactly.

[00:11:59] **Emma Bjorngard:** [00:11:59] So, [00:12:00] you know, talking about growth mindset, how can it contribute to students, you know, academic success, their personal success and professional success, would you say?

[00:12:10] **Chelsea Cichocki:** [00:12:10] So for that one, I could feel like I have to talk about like my story. Yes. because I think that that's where, where my passion comes from in this, and I think it illustrates how having a growth mindset helps you academically, personally, professionally.

[00:12:26] So. And also I think it'll help people to buy into what I'm saying. I'm not just pushing, like go read this book. Like I think it's really great read this book called mindset, but it's actually something that can change your life. So I first read the book when I was a grad student at Baylor university, and, um. like I said, I was very skeptical. I was like, I don't know if this is anything that I can really buy into, but it worked. So my story really illustrates the move from fixed mindset to growth mindset. [00:13:00] And to be honest, it takes some vulnerability on my part. So but I'm just going to put it out there because I think someone can relate.

[00:13:07] Yeah. So growing up, I was not athletic. I was the chubbiest kid in class. All my life. And in Connecticut you have the physical fitness test and part of it was the annual mile run, and you know, so you go around the track four times and that's one mile. And I was the slowest kid in the class. I just, I hated running and I hated looking like the slowest person.

[00:13:35] So I would cheat. And people are always like, how can you cheat on a mile run. Like, how is that even possible? It's not like, you know, there's an answer to it. I'm like, well, I would go around the track three times instead of four times. So it's three quarters of a mile, the three through three laps, and I didn't want to, cause I didn't want to look slow, even though I was, and even after skipping that one lap, I still [00:14:00] didn't pass.

[00:14:00] I think you had to do it in 10 minutes. I think I probably did it in like 13 or 14. By walking most of it, but my priority was really just don't be the slowest, don't come in last and come and stack and last, but don't be dead last. And for me it wasn't about getting better and personal growth at the time.

[00:14:18] So. After, like fast forward, like 12 years later, I'm in grad school and I'm learning about growth mindset and I'm trying to like change my thinking and buy in because I'm like, all right, maybe this is legit. And then I, so I signed up for a couch to five K app. And over time, it, what it does is it creates the scaffold for you to become a, a better runner.

[00:14:45] It doesn't mean you're going to be the fastest runner, but can I run 3.1 miles through this? You know, this training program? Yes. I, I was able to, so over time I was able to run 3.1 miles straight after not [00:15:00] even being able to run a full mile. Looking back at my 12 year old self, like I got out of breath by running just the one lap.

[00:15:09] So I was able to change that. And I mean, now I, you know, I can go further than that last week. And I ran four miles for fun because I was like, okay, this is, this is something that's good for me. And something that I, you know, somewhat enjoy. And it doesn't mean I'm fast. I'd still run slowly and I don't desire to be a marathon runner or an Olympian or anything like that.

[00:15:31] But through this, I was able to prove to myself that I can, I can run, I can be a runner. It doesn't mean I have to be the best runner, but I can do it because it's important to me. And had I had that mindset in college, I think I would have focused more on the learning. I would have focused on what, you know, what am I, what are my instructors telling me?

[00:15:50] What can I take away from this and apply to my own life instead of, let me just study for the grade and get the test and get the a in the 4.0 and numbers, numbers, [00:16:00] numbers. Right and in grad school, I, so I, because I learned about this, I changed the way that I was approaching my classes. And interestingly, as soon as I bought into growth mindset and I've thought about, okay, let me focus on the learning.

[00:16:17] I did better in grad school than I did an undergrad. As a result, I, you know, I graduated with an incredible GPA that I didn't even know was possible for me. So like. Let me repeat that. My grades literally improved when I bought into growth mindset and started changing my approach to it. So, and as a professional now, you know, I think in my job it's, it's a very fluid position.

[00:16:44] There's always something new and innovative that's coming up. And. Now I'm not afraid of feeling dumb or looking dumb or failing because I know that that's part of the process and that's where learning and growth happen. And I'm more concerned about, let me just be a little bit better. [00:17:00] and I try new things and I'm a better professional.

[00:17:03] I know if I ever want to be a student again, I'll be a better student even moving forward because of growth mindset. and if you, you know, you change the way you think like. For any student listening to this, you can, you can change your life too, just by retraining your brain to believe in your own abilities to, to grow.

[00:17:26] **Emma Bjorgard:** [00:17:26] That's very inspiring, I have to say. Okay. So do you have any final thoughts or, you know, words of advice for students wanting to develop a growth mindset in any area? Like what's, what could be a first step for them?

[00:17:41] **Chelsea Cichocki:** [00:17:41] So I think one of the things. There's, there's a few things you could do. One thing is put yourself in a situation that's intentionally challenging and don't be afraid to fail.

[00:17:51] I'm not saying go take bio chem, calc together or math 10 71 psychology stats, econ, all your criticals or [00:18:00] whatever it is all at once. Like, don't set yourself up for disaster, but puts yourself in a situation that's maybe going to push you a little bit and put effort in. Um. And feel what it's like to have to put effort into something.

[00:18:13] I know in high school, a lot of students you're able to get by without having to put in the level of effort that's really required at college level. So. This might be the first time that students have to really have to try it to be a good student, and that's okay. I think that's a normal experience. Most students find that that a failure at some point, but let yourself fall down and find ways to pick yourself up and like look at the work that you've put in in your life before.

[00:18:45] Like if you think about. You know, if somebody knows how to drive, you didn't come out the womb knowing how to drive. You had to learn at some point, right? You turn 16 or 18 you get your license, you get your permit, get your license, [00:19:00] and you have to practice and, and fail over time and mess up the parallel parking over and over again until you get it right.

[00:19:07] So. There's something in your life, whether it's something like, you know, driving or athletics, a musical ability artistic endeavors, whatever it is. There's something that you've had to get better at in your life. So look at that and think, what did I do to get better at that? Did I have a coach? Was there somebody who was rooting for me, who were my mentors?

[00:19:31] And then apply that to the situation that you're looking to grow in. So if it's academics that you're looking to get better at, like, okay, who can be like a coach? Maybe it's an advisor. If I'm looking for a mentor, is there a peer that I look up to who's doing really well and can support me? Um. Did I learn from my feedback in those previous experiences?

[00:19:51] Where can I learn from my feedback in these current experiences? So looking, look at what you've already done and find some inspiration [00:20:00] in yourself. really you want to find things that you find value and purpose in because. It's, it's much, much easier to put in work for something when you feel like it matters to your life.

[00:20:13] and I think it's beautiful because then you get to build upon something that you love and grow and get better at that instead of feeling like you're beating your head against the wall, day in and day out. And finally, the last thing I would say is just be kind to yourself throughout the process. just like you can't learn, you know.

[00:20:33] An entire semester's worth of calculus overnight. you can't just grow a growth mindset overnight, overnight. It's takes time. It takes effort, but show up for yourself and believe in your ability and, uh, show yourself self-compassion because it's hard. And if you challenge your thinking and you take your time with it and you dedicate yourself to it.

[00:21:00] [00:21:00] I'm, I am an example of this is possible and you can change your life.

[00:21:05] **Emma Bjorngard:** [00:21:05] Thank you so much. Very inspiring. I'm going to work in my growth mindset.

[00:21:19] **Kayla Hogrefe:** [00:21:19] so there you have it. That's Chelsea Cichocki telling us all about what a growth mindset is and how you can develop a growth mindset. I hope you found it as fascinating as I did the first time I heard her describing what this is. Was there anything that you really took away from the conversation, Emma?

[00:21:36] **Emma Bjorngard:** [00:21:36] Basically what we talked a little bit about in the interview. so I used to really only focus on the grade, on a paper or an exam. So if I didn't get the grade that I wanted. I would just avoid reading the feedback that the professor was giving me. Same if I did get the grade that I wanted, I would just avoid the comments because it was just [00:22:00] anxiety, anxiety provoking to to read them. So I think that was one of the

[00:22:04] **Kayla Hogrefe:** [00:22:04] Weren't you curious about what those, how, like how did you ignore them?

[00:22:08] **Emma Bjorngard:** [00:22:08] Well, I think it is like if I didn't reach up to the potential I thought I could reach, I guess then that just made me so nervous that I didn't want to face the challenge. So I think that was probably the main thing for me personally.

[00:22:23] **Kayla Hogrefe:** [00:22:23] But what was most interesting to me about Chelsea's discussion on that topic specifically was how she, when she was in grad school, after she started utilizing this growth mindset framework, how she focused more on the learning and less on the grade. And she ended up doing better. Like her GPA was the highest it's ever been. So to me that. That speaks volumes that, you know, when you employ a growth mindset and you actually learn something, rather than just do what you need to do to get the a as fast as possible without retaining any information, you know, you're actually going [00:23:00] to end up doing better in the long run.

[00:23:01] **Emma Bjorngard:** [00:23:01] Yeah, and I think too, for me, once I I guess developed a growth mindset in graduate school I enjoyed it more. You know, I enjoyed studying for exams. The professors suddenly appeared more approachable and I wanted to talk to them, and I felt that they weren't as scary as I thought that maybe they were, you know, initially. So I think, yeah, it's, it's beneficial on many different levels.

[00:23:25] **Kayla Hogrefe:** [00:23:25] So last episode, we are talking to Ada Rivera from the Academic Achievement Center, and we spoke a little bit about resources on the Academic Achievement Center website. And I just wanted to bring this up because on that website there are some awesome resources under the category of strategies for deeper learning.

[00:23:43] And so when we think about. Actually learning something rather than just memorizing or just regurgitating something into a paper. There are strategies that students can employ to make sure that they're actually processing the information and retaining, retaining it. [00:24:00] So be sure to check out the Academic Achievement Center website if you hadn't already, and make use of those awesome resources. Anything else?

[00:24:08] **Emma Bjorngard:** [00:24:08] Read the comments on your papers and exams.

[00:24:10] **Kayla Hogrefe:** [00:24:10] Read the comments on your papers and exams. But so that's it for this episode of the LAUNCH Podcast, and we look forward to speaking with you next time.