

# Benefitting Your Organization with a Growth Mindset Culture and Neuroscience

A Q&A with Dr. Britt Andreatta, Chief Learning Officer,  
Lynda.com, a LinkedIn Company



*Times are changing. For organizations to survive modern disruptions, they must adapt. One of the best ways to adapt and prepare for the uncertain future ahead is to create a growth mindset culture within your organization.*

*In this Q&A orchestrated by IQPC Exchange's Kristen Schipfer-Barrett, Dr. Britt Andreatta, Chief Learning Officer, Lynda.com, a LinkedIn Company, gives key insights into why you should create a growth mindset culture, the best first steps and challenges to doing so, how neuroscience can help, and how any organization can use neuroscience for talent development. She also shares what she is looking forward to about the **2016 Chief Learning Officer Exchange**.*

## **What is a growth mindset culture and why would an organization want to create one?**

The success of every organization depends on its ability to grow and adapt over time. A growth mindset culture means that everyone, from its top leaders to its newest employees, believes that they can always grow and improve, and that the learning and talent management systems align to empower and support continuous learning.

The concept of the growth mindset was first identified by Stanford psychologist, Dr. Carol Dweck. She studied what differentiated people who were successful from those who were not and found that it came down to their mindset, or belief about themselves. People who succeeded overwhelmingly had a growth mindset, while the others had a fixed mindset.

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People with a fixed mindset believe their traits or characteristics—such as their IQ (intelligence quotient), technology or people skills—are set once they reach adulthood. A person with a fixed mindset thinks, “I’ve got what I’ve got and I just have to make the most of it; but I can’t change it.” In contrast, a person with a growth mindset believes that they can always get better, that they can always learn something new, or practice something more, and that studying and effort are the pathways to improvement and even mastery. A person with a growth mindset thinks, “I may not be able to do this yet, but I can work hard and get better.” In fact, the word “yet” is the hallmark of the growth mindset.

Recent discoveries by neuroscientists confirm that the growth mindset is not just a belief; it is the truth of our brains. The human brain grows and changes over our lifetimes, an ability known as neuroplasticity.

The benefits of creating a growth mindset culture are numerous but the most obvious is that when you have every person embracing the idea that you can always improve and that effort is required, it can catapult the productivity and innovation of the organization forward. It also builds a more positive culture of collaboration and recognition, which can increase employee engagement, reduce attrition of your top talent, and enhance customer satisfaction.

## **What is one of the best ‘first steps’ to creating a ‘growth mindset’ culture?**

There are 3 key steps to creating a growth mindset culture. First, the leaders and the learning professionals have to believe in it. This is not too difficult to achieve if you can show people the data. The studies are overwhelmingly conclusive so I have yet to find an executive who can say that their organization would not benefit from growth mindset culture.

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Second, you have to make learning accessible and valued. A growth mindset rests upon the notion that people can always get better—they can improve their knowledge and skills through learning and experience. So naturally, a robust learning and development program is key. This includes on-demand learning options so that employees are empowered to pursue their own learning as well as structured programs that are designed to address specific needs within the organization.

I'm always struck by the shortsightedness of organizations that believe that learning is not the "real work". I know of one tech company who mandated that all their managers go through management training but wanted the sessions scheduled during the lunch hour so it wouldn't interfere with their jobs. What could be more related to work than getting better at managing your team? If learning is not valued, you cannot build a growth mindset culture.

Third, you have to value growth and improvement in your performance system. If you only assess how people perform, then you will not create a growth mindset culture. Demonstrating growth and improvement, in addition to performance, is the key.

This is because most performance rating systems are based on outcomes, not effort. We all know top performers who never grow or improve—they have managed to find a job that is a nice match to their current skills. And while they may do good work, they are not reaching for their fullest potential.

I recommend that you also assess every employee's growth mindset, which you can measure through effort put into learning, measurable improvement in a skill, and passion for growing. Demonstrating a growth mindset should comprise 25-33% of your overall assessment. This means that in addition to top performers getting rewards, your top learners get rewards too. If someone went from "needs improvement" to "meets expectations", that represents focused and committed effort. A growth mindset culture recognizes and rewards all growth and improvement.

## **"Real behavior change is what we are all after, and most behaviors in the workplace are habits."**

### ***Referring to the last question, what are some of the challenges an organization can face when doing so?***

The toughest challenge is getting the people who have a fixed mindset to change their view. They are likely to push back with comments and criticisms because the concept can be threatening. This is especially challenging if you have leaders who have fixed mindsets, because they can undermine your efforts. But I have found it is possible to shift them by showing them the overwhelming and compelling scientific evidence that proves the truth of our biology is growth mindset.

A second challenge is if your learning team is not delivering quality learning programs that make a difference for the business. Learning must connect to key strategic objectives and create the behavior change needed to move the right needles. Whether the learner liked the program is the lowest level of the five levels of evaluation is which is why I do not recommend using net promoter score (NPS) as your only measure of learning. We must design learning to deliver on all five levels of evaluation and track the results. This not only helps us show real ROI on learning but course correct as needed so that we are always delivering metrics that matter.

### ***Referring to the last question, what are some of the ways that neuroscience can solve those challenges?***

The science is irrefutable and it's coming from all kinds of brain specialists from around the world. Other researchers in biology, psychology, and even anthropology also back up the compelling results. The problem is that these scientists do not coordinate with each other nor are they on the front lines solving today's workplace and talent challenges. That's why I focus my thought leadership on synthesizing the latest findings and creating easy-to-implement solutions that we can use today.

Real behavior change is what we are all after, and most behaviors in the workplace are habits. Habits are behaviors you do so routinely that they become well-grooved neural pathways that can be done without much thought. We all have habits around how we communicate, how we use technology, and even how we manage others. So I encourage learning professionals to get really crisp on what the habit is that they want to instill in the learners. If you can identify the words and actions they need to be using out on their jobs, and you know

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what they are doing today, you can design a powerful learning solution that moves them from here to there.

***Can any organization adopt talent development approaches backed by neuroscience?***

Yes, they can! I have built my thought leadership and consulting practice around doing just that. I see myself as a translator—bringing news from the labs around the world back to talent management professionals so that we can all maximize the potential of our organizations and people. Over time, I have built a holistic and integrated system for talent management that includes performance management, talent development, and leadership and management training that not only shifts the culture of an organization to be a growth mindset but delivers phenomenal results on all the business metrics that matter. I also have solutions for individual contributors because they are already hungry to grow and learn and when we support lifelong learners, the organization reaps phenomenal results.

***What do you look forward to about the 2016 Chief Learning Officer Exchange the most?***

I love our industry because you are likely to find lots of growth mindset folks! I am looking forward to the synergy that happens when smart people with deep expertise come together to share ideas and explore what's possible.

**Join Britt for her closing day session,  
*The Neuroscience of Talent Development* at**



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