

The Coachable Mindset

At its heart, coachability is a mindset. It's a way of thinking about feedback and how we **improve**.

Let's look at the coachable mindset from two perspectives. First, let's view it from the perspective of the coach or mentor who gives feedback. Then let's consider it from the perspective of the massage therapist who receives feedback. The giving and receiving of feedback are often seen from very different perspectives.

The Coach's Perspective

Here is the attitude and mindset of the coach at Oak Haven:

You are the best of the best, and we are going to help you be even better. We don't know the upper limit of how much you can improve. Let's find out. You are someone who is at the top of your game. I don't need to spend time stroking your ego and telling you repeatedly how great you are. You are a grown adult; I should not have to walk on eggshells due to a fragile ego. I'm going to tell you the truth as I see it. I told you that you are fantastic, and I meant it. You're in the program; you were hired as a team member at Oak Haven Massage, which speaks to your ability and talent. Now let's get to work to make you even better.

Excellence involves making finer and finer distinctions—refinement after refinement, iteration after iteration—as they relate to the business of massage. Constant and never-ending improvement is a lovely saying, but in practice, it is exhausting. And the progress never ends. It's constant.

The coach says:

I'm going to look for tiny areas where you can improve. That's all there is, small bits of improvement. You don't have any huge glaring problems; otherwise, you would not be at the top. I will look for a seemingly insignificant area of your work where we can improve. Together, these small improvements will contribute to an overall upward trajectory. This upward movement eventually lands you at the top of the mountain.

If coaches are worth their salt, they have one aim—to help you become better and not stroke your ego.

The Therapist's Perspective

There are two points of view when it comes to the therapist's perspective of coachability—**fixed mindset** and **growth mindset**. Carol Dweck covers these in her book *Mindset* (please read this amazing book if you have not).

The Fixed Mindset Perspective

A fixed mindset believes that success in life is a function of talent—talent you were given at birth. Whatever you are good at in life is because you were fortunate enough to be born with that talent. Hence the term *fixed*. You either have it, or you don't. It's fixed.

With this viewpoint, you as a massage therapist have been told from the moment you entered massage school that you had "it." It being the talents and skills necessary to excel in the massage business. Your

fellow students praised you, your teachers praised you, and your clients praised you. You were amazing, and you bought into this idea. It felt good to know that you were at the top of the heap. You liked the acknowledgment, and your self-esteem was a little bit wrapped up in your ability and talent.

Then you start training at Oak Haven Massage. The coach or mentor acknowledges that you are great, but his or her focus is on making you better. The coach starts the process of training you and seems pretty critical.

Keep in mind that everything I mention in this section will be magnified if the therapist has unresolved identity, self-image, or self-esteem issues. If therapists do not feel good about themselves, no degree of outside praise or adoration will offset their feelings of self-hate, inferiority, and self-loathing. As the mentor finds areas the therapist should shift or change, the therapist may be triggered by the feedback and confuse it with destructive criticism, which generally makes the receiver push back to preserve self-esteem.

The therapist might feel like this:

The mentor is too nitpicky. These are not real issues. The mentor couldn't find anything wrong with my work, so he's bringing this up. This is bullshit. The mentor is so negative. Do I do anything right? Does this mentor know I have a ____% request rate? My clients think I'm amazing.

How sad it would be for a therapist to see a mentor as an enemy or someone who doesn't value them. Some fault may indeed rest with the mentor if his or her style is too negative or abrasive. After all, the therapist is only human. But a mentor typically just wants to make the therapist better.

The Growth Mindset Perspective

A massage therapist who has a growth mindset believes that independent of what talent they had at birth, they can expand that talent through practice, effort, and persistence.

- They believe their natural talent is merely a starting point for building and developing further talent and skill.
- They believe any mistakes or setbacks actually contribute to their overall knowledge pool and will ultimately benefit them.
- They welcome constructive feedback and are able to tell the difference between proper helpful feedback and destructive criticism.

Growth-minded therapists do more than welcome feedback; they actually seek out feedback from mentors who can help them shorten the learning process.

As you might expect, therapists with a fixed mindset and therapists with a growth mindset have entirely different training experiences. One despises it; the other thrives on it.

The Value of a Mentor

I don't think we've done a good enough job teaching therapists how important it is to have a mentor. To state the obvious, **we don't know what we don't know**, which is a problem. A mentor or coach can help

us uncover what we don't know. They can also help us ascertain the level of skill we have in critical areas of our game.

- ✓ Where do we need a skill upgrade?
- ✓ Where is our philosophy off?
- ✓ Where do our beliefs need an adjustment or overhaul?

Mentors can save us years of learning. What a mentor teaches us could take decades for us to learn on our own. Every great athlete has a coach. If someone can help accelerate your learning process, what is that worth to you? If a mentor can help you avoid the pitfalls he or she has already experienced, what value is that to you? If someone could summarize a lifetime of learning and save you decades of trial and error, would you receive it from them?

Take a look at a video by Will Smith called "Is It True?" <https://vimeo.com/472597431>