



A Change in Mindset Comes Before a Change in Ability

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Have you ever tried to overcome a bad habit or develop a new skill only to find yourself right back where you started a few months later? Or perhaps you've tried to coach someone else on a change in their attitude or behavior only to find that your great advice was completely ignored? People regularly attempt self-improvement and helping others with little to show for their effort. Training programs, diets, and how-to books routinely fail to deliver their potential. The reason for their poor results however is not what many people blame. It is usually not because of the content of the training program, the nature of the diet, or the advice of the book.

The reason nine out of ten self-improvement initiatives end in disappointment is that they require a change in both mindset and ability. In fact, it is only when people apply the core principles of both that they can reliably expect to sustain a change in their behavior. Improvement doesn't come from simply having a desire to change or knowing how to do something. Change is not that simple because it also requires unlearning. When you embark on a change, thoughts that might have long faded into the unconscious routines of your life come roaring back into existence with a vengeance to resist you.

To reliably change your behavior or coach someone else, resist the initial temptation to begin with the "how-to" of what you're discussing. There is little else that arouses your built-in resistance to change more than jumping into the "how-to" of a new endeavor before understanding and believing in the "why" of it. If for example your desire is to become a better public speaker, your chances of success are significantly better if you start out by exploring your thinking first – not the art and science of public speaking. It is people's mindset, not a lack of knowing best-practices, that most often stifles their progress. It is their fear, biases, and self-limiting beliefs that hinder their success.

Telling yourself or others what to do is not very effective when you don't have the right foundation in place. Whether coaching yourself, or someone else, start with an accurate assessment of the situation and seek understanding of the issues. Get beyond the symptoms and dig into the root causes of the mindset that could hinder development. Deal with any biases or fears that may have derailed earlier attempts at improvement. Follow that with a clear articulation of the end goal and how to most reliably get there. Build up a solid base of internal motivation. Create a mental picture of the benefits of reaching the ultimate goal. Develop a positive can-do attitude that generates passion and confidence.

Once the right mindset is in place, turn your attention to the approach to be used and the "how-to" of the endeavor. Employ the tools of building ability such as learning, experiencing, training, practicing, and applying.

By having the right mindset in place, developing the ability is accomplished quicker and to a higher level. It produces more passion for the change and more confidence in yourself. It will lead you and your protégés to higher levels of performance at work, better marriages at home, an improved physical condition, the elimination of bad habits, or whatever goals are being pursued.

*(Adapted from *Activating Your Ambition – A Guide to Coaching the Best Out of Yourself and Others* by Mike Hawkins)*

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