



Six Elements of a Leadership Mindset

HOW TO TRANSFORM BELIEFS INTO BEHAVIOR CHANGE

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**“Whether you
think you can,
or you think
you can’t,
you are right.”**

— HENRY FORD



INTRODUCTION

Six Elements of a Leadership Mindset

Researchers have put Mr. Ford's idea to the test. And compelling evidence suggests that it proves true in several facets of life: personal happiness, health and well-being, goal achievement, and professional success.

Ford clearly understood the power of mindset.

Mindset describes your attitudes, beliefs, and expectations that serve as the foundation of who you are, how you lead, and how you interact with others.

It shapes how you see, interpret, and react to situations in the workplace. As the product of your values, preferences, experiences, and environment, mindset is deeply personal. It shifts and evolves based on where you are in your life and what's going on around you. Your mindset filters what you see, hear, and experience to influence your response.

Organizations have historically focused on assessing and developing skill sets. While skills are important, as you will learn in this e-book, mindsets enable skill sets. Put another way, mindset is the bandwidth your skill set travels through—like a hose is used to transport water. If your mindset is constrained, so is your skill set.

For a leader, mindset affects every aspect of how you show up at work:

- how you interact with colleagues,
- how you approach problems and decisions, and
- how you view the future.

The vibe and values of your organization and your personal level of engagement in your professional role significantly impact your leadership mindset in the workplace.

After studying the research into the leadership mindset, we found a range of dimensions, descriptors, and points of view that detail its importance to personal, educational, and professional success. Dion Leadership has distilled this work into a model that groups the concept of a leadership mindset into six practical and actionable elements.

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ELEMENT ONE:

Growth Oriented

As humans, we are sometimes inclined to wallow in conditions that are out of our control, lamenting circumstances we deem unfair and cursing their negative impact on our business and personal lives. We can either cling to the current situation and its accompanying resource limitations, or we can focus on change and embrace a growth-oriented approach.

Neuroscience has shown us that the brain is quite malleable. Research on brain plasticity shows how connectivity between neurons can change through our experience. There is a link between mindset and achievement. If you believe your brain can grow, you behave differently.

This brings us to the first element of mindset, which may sound familiar: being growth oriented. When you have a leadership mindset, you consistently seek growth—for yourself, for others, and for the organization. This element draws from the work of Stanford University researcher and author Carol Dweck, a thought leader on the concept of mindset. Dweck's work describes and contrasts two different types of mindset:

- The fixed mindset maintains that success is attributable to talent, intelligence, and personality—things that are innate, that we're born with, and that really cannot be changed.
- The growth mindset, by contrast, attributes success largely to factors that are variable and can be developed or increased—such as effort, persistence, resilience, and hard work.

Dweck's work has been widely applied to K–12 education and presents a way of approaching the goal of making students successful. It also provides useful insight into aspects of life beyond education, including the workplace.

As you're considering how to develop a leadership mindset, remember that the belief that people are capable of growth is fundamental: organizations are made up of people, we lead people, we are people.

This belief is evident in a leader's actions. Growth-oriented leaders set goals, make decisions, and focus their efforts on moving the bar. They are persistent, persevering, and inspired by others' success. They actively seek and act upon feedback, and they are eager to give it.

“*Becoming is better than being.*”

—Carol Dweck

When you consider how to develop a mindset that is growth oriented, ask yourself the following questions:

- 1 To what extent is being growth oriented part of the culture at your company? What is the impact?
- 2 What could be done to encourage leaders in general to be more growth oriented?
- 3 What support do you need to be a more growth-oriented leader?

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ELEMENT TWO:

Resilient

Sometimes being growth oriented is difficult, but it is in difficult times that it's most critical. The next element of a mindset that effective leaders demonstrate, being resilient, is about how you respond to adversity. It involves withstanding the impact of a crisis or setback and having the capacity to bounce back.

Failures, mistakes, and other challenges happen in every workplace. Stress is inevitable. Some leaders may find themselves overwhelmed by the daily pressures of meeting deadlines, working with others, and achieving results. Their emotions overwhelm their body, their confidence is shaken, and their ability to make decisions and solve problems is diminished. Some may tread lightly in hopes of avoiding adversity altogether, opting instead for a state of artificial harmony—don't rock the boat, don't take risks, don't "poke the bear." Others may lash out, convinced that an aggressive response is how a leader demonstrates power and strength.

None of these extremes is tenable or healthy. Instead, a mindset that allows you to withstand adversity and reframe it as opportunity—in other words, one that is resilient—is what can set a leader apart.

An example of a common workplace challenge is being on the receiving end of feedback that is hard to hear. When we as individuals or as part of a team are confronted with our shortcomings, whether in the form of data or in critical comments from a colleague or customer, it is natural to become distressed. Emotions can run high, and the feeling of being in control can run low.

With a resilient mindset, however, recovery is fast. Those negative feelings are quickly balanced by the belief that the situation offers opportunity. For example, a leader can look at critical feedback or a failure to meet expectations as a sort of gift—something others or the situation offers to you with good intention, because they care about you

“*Smooth seas do not make skilled sailors.*”

African Proverb

and your success. You can look at it as something you didn't have before—insight, perspective, information—that can lead to something getting better.

While it's possible that you may want to wrap it up and send it back, the gift of feedback or other adversity also has the potential to be something you will cherish down the road—something you didn't realize the value of at the time.

Resilience helps you approach life with a nonjudgmental mind, kindness to self, a long-term perspective, compassion, and grace. By looking at stressful events, differences of opinion, setbacks, mistakes, and other instances of adversity and risk not as things to be avoided or dreaded but as temporary and recoverable opportunities that can lead to learning and innovation, you are demonstrating a leadership mindset.

When you consider how to develop a mindset that enables resilience, ask yourself the following questions:

- 1 What could be done to improve how adversity is viewed and supported at your company?
- 2 What support do you need to be more resilient and take advantage of the opportunity adversity can present?
- 3 What self-talk can you provide to assess your stress response to a situation, reframe it, and approach it with a resilient mindset?

3

ELEMENT THREE:

Driven

Think of a time when you were doing your best work, when you were “in the zone.” How did you feel?

A few years ago, the global consulting firm Gap International interviewed more than 500 executives to study what leaders are thinking and feeling when they are doing their best work.

This is what the study revealed, according to a summary published on Entrepreneur magazine’s website: “Overwhelmingly, leaders accomplished great things when they focused on how their own contributions connected to a larger sense of purpose. Such big picture thinking elevated leaders’ energy levels and served as a motivator to keep pushing for better results.”

How do we know what our purpose is? It can be imposed on us, in the form of top-down goals and directives, or it can come from within, based on personal values and motivations. It can be simple or complex. Regardless, leaders equate doing good, productive work with the feeling that they are serving a purpose.

A clear sense of purpose is a key aspect of being a driven leader. Leaders who are driven demonstrate a commitment to excel and a passion to produce results and exceed expectations. In the workplace, if you want to develop a leadership mindset that is brimming with drive and motivation, start by focusing on some basic questions:

- What is your individual piece of the business? In other words, what exactly are you responsible for?
- What would not get done if you were not around to do it?
- How is it that you bring value to the company and further its success?

“*Be a leader who is driven by purpose but not by position or power.*”
—Debasish Mridha

Once you have that sorted out, you can consider the second set of questions:

- In a perfect world, what would you accomplish?
- How would you perform if circumstances in the workplace were ideal?

The first set of questions is meant to put some boundaries around your thoughts and get you to consider your purpose from a functional standpoint, as part of the larger organism that is your organization.

The second set speaks to what could drive you to fulfill your purpose by asking you to think outside the box. Think big!

Mindset plays an important role and provides you the fuel you need to drive on. Knowing that you do make a difference, tapping into the broader purpose of your work, and using the other elements of mindset to overcome obstacles will help you make a difference as a leader.

When you consider how to develop a mindset that drives you to excel, produce results, and exceed expectations, ask yourself the following questions:

- 1 Is being driven to excel and serve a specific purpose part of the culture at your company? Why or why not?
- 2 What could be done to encourage more leaders and others at your company to be driven, committed, and passionate?
- 3 What support do you need as you drive to excel as a leader?

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ELEMENT FOUR:

Future Focused

It's easy for us as leaders to get caught up in the "here and now"—the work that fills our to-do list, keeps us busy, and demands our time and expertise from day to day. That's the stuff that gets our immediate attention, with immediate rewards and immediate consequences.

Being future focused doesn't usually involve the same type of time-sensitive energy or stress, and the impact and reward of future-oriented actions are by definition delayed. But without due attention, that impact may sneak up on leaders.

You'll notice some overlap with being growth oriented. If you are growth oriented and want yourself and others in the organization to learn and develop, you are of course doing so with the future in mind. When we are future focused, we're attending to other aspects of growth—those that are market-driven, for example.

To that point, think about how your organization and your industry are different today from a decade ago, or even a few years ago. Market changes, customer needs, product and technology innovations, new competitors, and industry trends and threats are among the variables organizations must navigate. Leaders who can anticipate, prepare for, and keep ahead of their impact make the difference.

The pace of change shows no sign of slowing down. It is actually speeding up for both organizations and individuals. We are constantly being asked to adapt, evolve, transform, and reinvent our professional selves right along with our companies and industries. Achieving short-term goals, such as responding to your ever-growing inbox of requests,

can provide immediate gratification. As leaders mature and obtain a future-focused mindset, they tap into the satisfaction achieved by setting a long-term strategy for enduring success.

This is where being future focused comes in. Effective leaders actively consider where they, their team or function, and the organization need to be in both the short term and the long term to achieve success. They craft strategies, set goals, make decisions, and act with the future in mind.

When your mindset is future focused, you plan and act with a long-term orientation, and you are willing to adapt and evolve. As a result, you are prepared to lead your team and the organization where it needs to go to survive and thrive.

As you consider how to develop a mindset that is future focused, ask yourself the following questions:

- 1 Is being future focused part of the culture at your company? Why or why not?
- 2 What could be done to encourage more leaders and others at your company to focus on the future?
- 3 What support do you need to develop as a future-focused leader?

“*Tomorrow belongs to those who can hear it coming.*”

—David Bowie

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ELEMENT FIVE:

Accountable

For effective leaders, accountability has two dimensions: demonstrating personal accountability and holding others accountable for results and behavior. As the leader, you set the tone for how others behave and for what's acceptable and not acceptable in the workplace. Specifically, the extent to which you demonstrate accountability yourself—or not—will affect the performance of your team.

The intersection of accountability and mindset is most evident when results are not achieved. When this happens, it can be tempting to deny accountability and deflect blame, rationalize behavior, or ignore the problem—in other words, to act like a victim instead of a leader. This powerless approach drains energy and reduces self-esteem, and it will not create the culture or results you expect for yourself or others.

If you're accountable, however, you own the results and your hand in them, you take action to make things right, and you reflect on and learn from your experiences. When you model this approach to those you lead, you set the expectation that they should do the same.

Clear expectations are key to holding those you lead accountable for meeting them. Frequent and specific performance feedback that lets others know exactly where they stand is also crucial.

Leaders who value and follow through on these points, even when they require having a difficult conversation, take a broad view of accountability for themselves and others and make it part of the way the organization works.

When you consider how to develop a mindset that values accountability, ask yourself the following questions:

- 1 Are being accountable and holding others accountable part of the culture at your company? Why or why not?
- 2 What could be done to encourage more leaders and others at your company to be accountable and to hold others accountable?
- 3 What support do you need to consistently demonstrate accountability?

“He that is good for making excuses is seldom good for anything else.”

—Benjamin Franklin

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ELEMENT SIX:

Inclusive

The final element of a leadership mindset is seeing the value in being inclusive. Organizational structures are shifting from traditional hierarchies to those that are more interdependent, cross functional, and complex. Teams are increasingly globally focused, culturally diverse, and linked primarily by technology. The ability to effectively collaborate is critical. Leaders who are inclined to seek out different perspectives, talents, and concerns are the ones who will move an organization forward. In fact, inclusion is an important aspect of not only how work gets done, but how we create a better society.

“ *Many ideas grow better when transplanted into another mind than the one where they sprang up.* ”

—Oliver Wendell Holmes

Organizations regularly talk about being more collaborative. Let's take this concept a step further. To harness the full potential of collaboration, you need to add an inclusion element. It takes a concerted effort and focus to benefit from a diversity of thought and ideas. Organizations and individuals with cultures that previously favored top-down power structures or entrenched processes and protocols can find inclusion a challenge. Creating a safe place for others from different organizational levels, worldviews, ideologies, and approaches to collaborate fully and authentically requires intentionality. For individuals, skills and motivation may be lacking, or it may be difficult to relinquish control, share credit, or trust others. Leaders may question if the effort is worth it.

Leaders with a mindset that prioritizes inclusion, however, are not limited by such barriers. They welcome others' perspectives, willingly share

information and ideas, and find inspiration in the process. They weigh the impact of decisions broadly. They take a big-picture view of success and see inclusion as an opportunity to achieve the best results. And they know that inclusive teams are more innovative, productive, and able to respond to new and challenging tasks.

Inclusion is also a capacity builder and culture enhancer. Inviting others into important decision-making processes and creating a safe place for everyone to use their talents and share their perspectives helps all concerned to grow and develop. People want to be heard and make a difference. Allowing others to fully contribute will increase engagement, reduce turnover, and create a pipeline of talent ready to grow as the organization grows.

Being inclusive requires skill and effort, and it can be time-consuming and complex. Dissent must be skillfully managed, and communication must be consistent and thorough. An inclusive mindset is key to navigating these factors.

When you consider how to develop a mindset that favors inclusion, ask yourself the following questions:

- 1 What can leaders at your company do to be more inclusive?
- 2 What do you tell yourself about others you work with that leads you to include or not include them, and how can you manage these ideas for the better?
- 3 Who can you engage in new and meaningful ways at work?

Summary

These six elements show the various ways that mindset translates into behavior, and how behavior affects success. However, it's unrealistic for us as leaders to expect that we can speak in absolutes. There are times, for example, when practical circumstances call for a decision that could be characteristic of a fixed mindset, or where inclusion gives way to the unilateral, or when it's prudent to be cautious or maintain the status quo.

However, let's go back to that earlier quote by Carol Dweck: "Becoming is better than being." Leaders who are able to prioritize "becoming"—for themselves, for those they lead, and for the organization—are poised for success.

Let's talk about becoming a leader. Being a leader is not static. Leaders are constantly being asked to stretch and change. That is not always easy. In reviewing the six elements, you may have recognized behaviors and practices and tendencies that align with your own, and you may have recognized aspects of your mindset that run counter to these ideas.

Maybe you're thinking, How do I change my mindset? The following suggestions will help you get started:

- **Believe in** your ability to change your mindset.
- **Seek new** experiences.
- **Step outside** your comfort zone.
- **Take small steps** each day—don't overwhelm yourself.
- **Seek self-awareness** and make time to reflect on who you are as a leader.

To the last point: we all have an image in our head of who we are as a professional and what that means to us. Consider whether the story you are telling yourself is serving you well now and into the future. Is your image of yourself as a leader outdated? Is it going to hold you back?

These are challenging questions that you may not be able to answer immediately. However, pondering them is part of evolving your mindset.



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Leadership Mindset

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Seek growth—for yourself, for others, and for the organization



Resilient

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Driven

Seek growth—for yourself, for others, and for the organization



Future Focused

Plan and act with the future in mind, and be willing to adapt and evolve



Accountable

Take a broad view of accountability for yourself and those you lead, and embrace it



Inclusive

Welcome others' ideas, share what you know, and strive for the best result



WORKING ON

My Leadership Mindset



When you are at your best, which element comes most naturally to you?

- How can you cultivate this state more often?
- In what specific aspects of your job can you apply this strength?
- How can you help others cultivate this mindset?

Which element does not come naturally to you?

- What beliefs drive your thinking today about this mindset?
- What are some ways you can improve how you see, interpret, and react to situations when it comes to this element?

Make a commitment

- List one new experience you commit to engaging in to expand this mindset.
- When you have this experience, how will you ensure you step out of your comfort zone?
- When you look in the mirror after this experience, what do you want to be able to say to yourself about your leadership mindset?



ABOUT THE AUTHORS



STEVE DION

Founder & CEO

Steve has dedicated his career to understanding and improving organizational cultures through the creation and deployment of innovative assessment, leadership, and team development programs. His passion for improving businesses by harnessing the power of their people has led him to work with many progressive, global Fortune 1000 organizations.

Serving in corporate roles for over 25 years, his insights and practical strategies for creating long-term behavior and culture change grew from his experience as a chief human resources officer driving business transformation and implementing best practices with two Fortune 500 companies and a midsize financial services organization.

Prior to Dion Leadership, Steve applied his corporate experience at a multitude of companies as the co-owner of a global leadership and organizational development consulting firm. Today, he spends much of his time researching best practices to support leadership development needs in this new decade and working with C-level executives to craft customized, long-term, and innovative leadership and culture development programs.

Steve enjoys spending his spare time with his wife and three adult kids traveling internationally, hiking, and doing yoga.

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Terri is passionate about helping others become more confident and effective on the job by creating learning solutions that are compelling, engaging, and on target. Earlier in her career, she worked in reference publishing for more than two decades, during which she honed her research, documentation, and analytical skills as an editor and project manager and created a training function supporting the work of hundreds of editorial professionals.

At Dion Leadership, she works with clients from a range of industries to develop large-scale group development programs that utilize various modes of learning. In addition to crafting these programs, Terri also supports Dion Leadership facilitators and clients as they prepare for and deliver high-quality learning solutions. She and her team are committed to making a positive difference in the professional lives of every learner who attends a Dion Leadership event.

When she is not working, Terri enjoys spending time with her family and her dog, watching baseball games, and going to Springsteen concerts.

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