

How positive thinking boosts performance

Developing an open mindset can be one of the most useful tools in the office, writes organisational psychologist **RACHEL SETTI**.

Our attitude to challenges plays a dramatic role in our success in just about any endeavour we undertake. Otherwise known as ‘mindset’, a term coined by psychologist Carol Dweck, attitude can have a remarkable influence on outcomes, mental wellbeing, and a sense of control over one’s life.

A closed mindset encompasses the belief that our traits are fixed and sedimented, that our strengths and weaknesses are permanent and rigid, and that nothing will ever change. Conversely, an open mindset takes a fluid approach, recognising that progress is always possible and that we possess the inner resources to overcome adversity. In other words, it believes in a sense of agency and capacity to continuously grow and improve.

The mindset we choose can have a significant impact on achieving goals. If we believe that our ability is changeable over time, we are better equipped to harness our full potential.

A complicating factor is that the evidence points to the fact that lawyers, as a cohort, have a particularly strong propensity towards pessimistic thinking. Positive psychology proponent Martin Seligman states that, whereas pessimism is considered maladaptive in most professions, law is one profession where pessimism supports success. So, while a pessimistic outlook may be one of the very factors that helps lawyers thrive professionally, it also means they naturally focus on the negatives, and attribute adverse events to stable, unmovable causes – much like a closed mindset. What a conundrum.

Perhaps the solution is to be selective in how you apply your mindset by recognising

that some professional endeavours require a hard-line, no compromise, rigid approach. Conversely, in many instances an open mindset is going to help you weave your way through a multitude of challenges and help you reach your goals.

So how does one consciously achieve an open mindset? By recognising and accepting your imperfections, valuing the learning opportunities they provide, and using them to enhance future capacity.

HOW TO DEVELOP AN OPEN MINDSET

- 1 Identify your goals**
- 2 Consider your barriers to success**
What are your relative weaknesses in respect of your goals? What hurdles will you need to overcome? How will you react when things get tough?
- 3 Decide in advance what your mantra will be in the face of adversity**
Instead of self-limiting beliefs such as, “I’ll never succeed”, “I can’t ever get this right” or “I always fail to last the distance”, employ open mindset thoughts such as, “Today was hard, tomorrow I’ll try a different approach”, “I will find a way to get this right” and “Mistakes are a great way to learn”.
- 4 Notice when you have closed-mindset thoughts and consciously shift them in a positive direction**
Above all, remember that your mindset is your choice and the choice you make can significantly impact your success. With this in mind, perhaps the most effective resolution for the new year is to focus on developing a more self-compassionate, open mindset and let the rest fall into place. **LSJ**



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She will present a CPD session at the Law Society called Achieving Goals through a Winning Mindset on 13 March from 8.45am-noon. Book at lawinform.com.au