



September 2007

# Masterful Mentoring

## TIP

### Tip of the Month

Don't get discouraged if you find yourself stuck in a counterproductive mindset. Continuous learning and growth are the important factors.

## ENCOURAGING A PRODUCTIVE MINDSET

When it comes to getting the most out of life, there is a lot of truth in the saying "You get what you allow." Your mindset can have a huge impact on your ability to be productive. If you want to get the most out of mentorship, you will want to ensure that you remain in a productive mindset. In this article we will explore various mindsets and how to leverage mentorship to encourage a productive mindset.

### Understanding Mindsets

A mindset is a fixed mental attitude or disposition that strongly influences responses to and interpretations of situations. Counterproductive mindsets hinder the ability to learn from life experiences, while a productive mindset greatly enhances your ability to learn from both success and failure.

What distinguishes a productive mindset from a counterproductive one? Envision a continuum that goes from very negative to very positive. At both ends of the continuum are counterproductive mindsets: very negative (Diehard Pessimist) and very positive (Blind Optimist). In the middle region is where the productive mindset (Active Experimenter) exists. Most of us will identify with one of the two counterproductive mindsets and have tendencies to view life experiences from that perspective.



Diehard  
Pessimist

Active  
Experimenter

Blind  
Optimist

## MINDSET

- Counterproductive
- Productive



## ENCOURAGING A PRODUCTIVE MINDSET (cont.)

Each of the three mindsets identified on the continuum has distinct attributes that affect our approach to new experiences.

	Diehard Pessimist	Active Experimenter	Blind Optimist
Risk-Taking	Low	Moderate	High
Time Orientation	Past	In the Now/Present	Future
Successes	Denies	Learns from	Accepts
Failures	Accepts	Learns from	Denies
Thrives on	Defensive Reasoning	Iterative Development	Positive Affirmation

### RESOURCES

Triple Creek offers many free resources on our web site, including booklets, research papers, and an archive of past newsletters.

Visit [www.3creek.com](http://www.3creek.com) for access to these additional mentoring resources.

#### *Diehard Pessimist*

The very negative end of the continuum is the domain of the diehard pessimist. This mindset is typically very conservative and reluctant to take risks. Its focus is on the misgivings and difficulties of the past and a desire not to repeat these experiences. It views every new opportunity as a threat full of unpleasant possible outcomes. This leads to cynicism and skepticism. When new actions or activities are undertaken, this mindset has strong tendencies toward denying achievements and success, preferring instead to focus on reaffirming all the negative projections and suspicions that they experienced. If you want to know everything that could possibly go wrong in a given situation, this mindset will gladly list them. This mindset thrives on defensive reasoning that keeps them from willfully taking on new learning challenges. You will often hear this person refer to themselves as just being realistic, waiting for evidence to prove them wrong, or just telling it like it is.

#### *Blind Optimist*

The very positive end of the continuum is the domain of the blind optimist. This mindset is typically very transitory (rapidly moving from one thing to the next) and seeking to avoid routine or monotony. It focuses on the promise of a brighter future and restlessly seeks to enter into that promise. It views every new opportunity as a gateway into realizing their dream. This leads to unrealistic goals and expected outcomes. When new actions and activities are undertaken, this mindset has strong tendencies toward denying failures and shortcomings, preferring instead to accentuate the positive gains that they experienced. This mindset rarely acknowledges difficulties and finds it hard to understand how anything could possibly go wrong. This mindset thrives off of positive affirmations that keep them from learning from missteps, miscues and mistakes. They have no problem willfully taking on new learning challenges, but can only learn from those things that went right. You often hear this person refer to themselves as enlightened and insightful leaders, unconventional, and visionary.



## QUOTE

Mistakes are a fact of life. It is the response to error that counts.

- Nikki Giovanni

## ENCOURAGING A PRODUCTIVE MINDSET (cont.)

### *Active Experimenter*

In the middle region of the continuum is the domain of the active experimenter. This mindset is typically curious and eager to take on new learning experiences. It focuses on the present and the need to learn from both the successes and failures that come from trying new things. It views every new opportunity as a chance to practice and discover new ways of getting things done. This leads to continuous iteration and improvement. When new actions or activities are undertaken, this mindset has strong tendencies toward remaining goal-focused and intent on discovering ways to leverage what they are learning to achieve their objectives. This mindset is able to remain objective and open about what is working and what is not. It does not personalize success or failure but rather embraces the knowledge that comes from both. This mindset thrives on exploration and discovery, and is able to acquire new understandings and abilities as new experiences are processed. You often hear this person refer to themselves as lucky or fortunate, reflective and contemplative, and a collaborative team player.

### **Finding the Productive Mindset**

Since most of us look at the glass as being half full or half empty, it takes some effort to be in the active experimenter space. We all tend to prefer viewing the world from one of the counterproductive mindsets. If you have tendencies toward one of the counterproductive mindsets, you may want to consider how you can alter your mindset to enable you to learn more from every new action or activity that you engage in. Changing your mindset will take effort and time and should be viewed as a gradual progression toward the ideal rather than a switch that can easily be made. Here are some suggestions to help you modify your mindset.

- *Diehard Pessimist Tendencies*

You will need to allow yourself to take larger learning risks. These can be calculated risks that cause you to stretch beyond your comfort zone. When your self-talk turns negative and defensive, it is probably a good indication that you have the opportunity to drop your critical attitude and become more positive. You can practice optimism by elevating your expectations and goals beyond what you feel comfortable with. Adopt the understanding that it is okay to underdeliver in a learning situation. Focus your attention on those things that are going right or above expectations. Above all, resist the urge to criticize, demean or make progress look small and insignificant.

- *Blind Optimist Tendencies*

You will need to allow yourself to recognize the learning power of failure. When you feel that you have a fail-safe action to take with little or no perceived downside, this is probably an indication that you have a learning opportunity to challenge your mindset. Before you act, take some time to explore the probable difficulties that you may face and to create some contingency plans. When you experience a difficulty or failure and you feel the impulse to quickly move on, pause and dig



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## ENCOURAGING A PRODUCTIVE MINDSET (cont.)

deeper into what went wrong or the unintended consequences. Adopt the attitude that failure does not equate to weakness but rather contributes to your experiential understanding of what works and what doesn't. Above all, resist the urge to exude too much optimism, downplay potential setbacks, and quickly dismiss opposition to your plans.

Mentorship is the ideal type of developmental relationship to practice adopting the active experimenter mindset. Not only is the prime focus of mentorship learning how to take on new understandings and behaviors, but your mentoring partner can provide you with invaluable insight into your demonstrated behavioral tendencies and blind spots. Being able to adopt a productive mindset will enable you to make the most of every learning opportunity.

### Practice Exercise

The following exercise can help you discuss with your mentoring partner how take on a more productive mindset.

1. Assess the type of counterproductive mindset (Diehard Pessimist or Blind Optimist) that you are predisposed to operate from. Determine your orientation by answering the following:
  - When I read over the descriptions, I identified more strongly with Diehard Pessimist or Blind Optimist.
  - Significant others in my life would describe me as being more of a pessimist or optimist.
2. Discuss the conclusions of your assessment with your mentoring partner and ask them for their perspective of your mindset.
3. Discuss some strategies that you could apply for adopting a more productive mindset.
4. Set up a future date to discuss your progress with your mentoring partner.