

Benefit
Mindset

Schools
Guide



SHIFTING MINDSETS

“School is about producing leaders. It doesn’t mean bosses; it means people who can genuinely make a profound transformative contribution to their society as a part of how they live their lives” – Peter Senge

We live in extraordinary times where everyone is facing complex challenges they haven’t faced before. From coronavirus to climate change, mental health to extreme inequality, what’s clear is that no individual or school can solve these challenges on their own. Our ability to respond – and break through to a world that works for all life – requires something more than everyone’s best personal efforts. Bringing about meaningful change requires us to build a sense of a “we,” that we are all in this together, as one human family who cares deeply for the wellbeing of all. And our ability to actualise this possibility requires a profound shift in mindset: towards what we call a *benefit mindset*.

In this guide, we evolve Carol Dweck’s research on growth mindset to introduce benefit mindset, to support learning communities who want to live into this possibility.



WHAT IS A BENEFIT MINDSET?

A benefit mindset builds on a growth mindset, where we not only seek to fulfil our potential, but choose to do it in a way that serves the wellbeing of all.

We believe in creating the conditions for a good society and healthy ecosystems through our everyday interactions. We are compassionate presences, trustworthy companions and courageous contributors. We are the open-minded and open-hearted ones that show up, see what is needed and take wise action.

Developed by Ash Buchanan in collaboration with a global community of contributors, benefit mindset is grounded in the understanding that fulfilling our potential is about more than how smart, driven or growth oriented we are. More completely, it's about how well we are able to work together with everyone around us and become partners in each other's wellbeing. While a growth mindset has many advantages over a fixed mindset, what truly makes us thrive is our capacity to realise our potential in a way that nurtures our uniqueness and serves the wellbeing, not only of humans, but the entire community of life.

Table one highlights several of the distinctions we can make about how a benefit mindset builds on a fixed and growth mindset, so you get the advantages of a growth mindset and more.

Fixed

MINDSET

Growth

MINDSET

Benefit

MINDSET

Presence

Everyday Knower

Shows up habitually to preserve appearances.

Everyday Learner

Shows up with an open mind. Is ready to learn.

Everyday Leader

Shows up with an open heart. Is ready to lead.

Development

Entity

Believes intelligences and abilities can't be developed.

Incremental

Believes intelligences and abilities can be developed.

Participatory

Creates the conditions for everyone's development.

Focus

What

Focuses on replicating what's familiar.

How

Uses processes, strategies and effort to fulfil potential.

Who & Why

Become ourselves in a way that serves the wellbeing of all.

Effort

Pointless

Sees effort as pointless or as a weakness.

Perseverance

Sees effort as necessary for learning and mastery.

Flow

Align ourselves with the natural flow of life.

Relationships

Habitual

Hold set expectations about our relationships.

Adaptable

A practice of learning and growing together.

Emergent

A practice of flowing together in deep resonance.

Challenges

Avoids

Gives up when challenged. Failure as proof of inability.

Embraces

Persists when challenged. Failure as opportunity to learn.

Transforms

Uses learnings to transform view of self and world.

Feedback

Confirming

Values feedback consistent with our perspective.

Constructive

Seeks out feedback that differs from our perspective.

Dialogical

Values collective inquiry in an ecology of deep reflection.

Others' success

Insecure

Likely to feel threatened by others' successes.

Inspiring

Likely to feel inspired by the success of others.

Partners

Engages as a partner in everyone's flourishing.

Maturity

Dependence

Dependant on what we believe to be our talents.

Independence

Walking our path. Choosing our adventure.

Interdependence

Playing my song as part of a larger song.

Culture

Expert

A culture of authorities and gurus.

Learning System

A culture of growth and learning opportunities.

Collective Leadership

A purpose driven innovation ecosystem.



Realising your potential starts with helping others realise theirs

In a benefit mindset, we understand we are not separate individuals going it alone. We are interdependent beings who belong to a massive global ecosystem – the community of life – and everyone has a unique and valuable role to play in creating healthy life conditions on the planet. Therefore, more than believing we can develop, we take responsibility for realising our potential in a way that affirms life and supports others with doing the same.

This interdependent view of our potential represents an evolution beyond a fixed mindset where we hold an “entity theory” of development. We believe our intelligence and abilities can’t be developed. It also represents an evolution beyond a growth mindset where we hold an “incremental theory” of development. We believe our intelligence and abilities can be developed by forming new neural connections in our heads (i.e. brain neurons wiring and firing). In a benefit mindset we hold a “participatory theory” of development. We see the inseparable nature of everything and recognise no bodies life is just their life. Our lives are inextricably linked

with others, nature and future generations, and interdependency is built into the fabric of who we are. In this view, more than forming new neural connections in our heads (i.e. brain neurons wiring and firing), we strengthen relational bonds through our hearts (i.e. hearts interconnecting and coalescing). This distinction is important because when we only think about development in terms of brain activity, we reinforce a view of human beings as separate individuals. Whereas when we include the heart, and its boundless capacity for connection, care and community, we get a more complete view of just how inseparable our potential and wellbeing really is.

ROLE MODELS

Greta Thunberg

Greta Thunberg is a Swedish climate activist. She became a prominent figure for initiating the school strike for climate movement. She is known for her frank speeches, speaking hard truths and having the guts to say things which others are afraid to. In Greta's words: "Some say we [students] should not engage in activism. Instead we should leave everything to our politicians and just vote for a change instead. But what do we do when there is no political will? What do we do when the politics needed are nowhere in sight?" Greta was nominated for a Nobel Peace prize in 2019.

Jane Goodall

Jane Goodall is one of the most recognized and respected scientists in the Western world. She became famous because of her ability to observe and connect with wild chimpanzees. Nowadays, Jane is a writer, speaker and UN Messenger of Peace, hosting global conversations about the power of kindness and compassion to transform our lives and the world. She invites all people to recognize their personal power and responsibility to effect positive change. "Every individual counts. Every individual has a role to play."

Student Activity

What role models embrace a benefit mindset in your community?



Serving the wellbeing of all

More than the drive to learn and achieve, our turbulent times challenge us to widen our circle of compassion and engage in actions that care for people and planet as an undivided whole.

This means serving the wellbeing of the whole person, what some might call our physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual health. This includes our thoughts and our feelings, our strengths and our shadows, what we find meaningful and being true to our uniqueness. It also means serving the wellbeing of the whole of humanity, which includes our social, economic and political systems. This includes our schools and our organisations, our communities and our cities, our states and our nations. It also means serving the wellbeing of the planet as a whole, what we call the community of life. This includes the birds and the bees, the rivers and the trees, the climate and all the other species we share this amazing planet with. And it includes the understanding that in this very moment, each of us has billions of years of life creation acting through us, and how we choose to use the gifts of this life creation has profound implications for the wellbeing of future generations.

What is important to say here is that as soon as we attempt to describe the wellbeing of all in words, it might seem this diverse ecology of concerns are a collection of separate issues. But when we hold them with an undivided view, it can be seen that all of these concerns cannot be separated. They inter-are. They co-arise and flow together as part of an interdependent process of becoming.

This means, every moment of our life, we are intimately participating in the wellbeing and unfolding of all life. Where everything we do impacts the wellbeing of everything else. In this undivided view, we realise that being well is more completely understood as interbeing well. Where more than being interconnected, our wellbeing co-arises with the wellbeing of others and the wellbeing of the oceans, the forests, the birds, the bees and the climate. We are all in this together, and how we participate in our interdependent becoming impacts the wellbeing of everything else.

Personal Wellbeing

PHYSICAL
EMOTIONAL
MENTAL
SPIRITUAL

Societal Wellbeing

SOCIAL
ECONOMIC
POLITICAL

Ecological Wellbeing

SPECIES
AIR
WATER
SOIL
CLIMATE



**Billions of
years of
life creation**



**Wellbeing
of future
generations**

Donating to Charities

Buying a tin from my mum
Friends at the canteen
Pole the

Some way to help
someone in what
your way to help

giving up my
I stay on the
pregnant lady
I give a

Sponsoring a child in need

helping my siblings with their homework

My sister always makes time for me.

giving clothes to those in need
or those who are homeless

Carrying the Groceries

Sticking up for someone when they get in trouble for something they didn't do.

Cleaning the bathrooms

giving someone my lunch when they have nothing to eat

Helping my mum with the house work when she was busy.

holding the door open for people.

Giving money to the homeless

Giving tips to restaurants

Sponsoring Animals & Children in 3rd World Countries

PRACTICAL STRATEGY 1

Everyday leadership

“In the present circumstances, no one can afford to assume that someone else will solve their problems. Each one of us has a responsibility to help guide our global family in the right direction. Good wishes are not sufficient; we must become actively engaged.” – Dalai lama

First and foremost, benefit mindset is a life practice. It's a way of being that challenges us to show up, not only as learners, but also as leaders in everyday life. We understand leadership isn't a job title or something reserved for a special few people. Leadership is something we make possible through bold and courageous actions.

In our challenging times, this might mean reaching out to tell a friend or teacher how much you appreciate them. It might mean checking in on your neighbours and the elderly, and sending love to front line workers and those directly impacted by coronavirus. It also might mean taking bold action towards the UN Global Goals, initiating reconciliation with First Nations people or starting a permaculture garden. Our world is full of opportunities for bold action. It's through acts of everyday leadership, that we cross a threshold, and become more fully ourselves in a way that benefits the world around us.

PRACTICE: 21 DAY CHALLENGE

One of our most popular initiatives for creating cultures of everyday leadership is the 21-day challenge. This challenge invites an entire school community to practice a courageous act of everyday leadership, every day, for 21 days.

USEFUL REFERENCES

- Creating ecosystems of kindness and wellbeing by Ash Buchanan
- How to host a 21-day benefit mindset challenge by Ash Buchanan

PRACTICAL STRATEGY 2

An education of the heart

“When educating the minds of our youth, we must not forget to educate their hearts.”- Dalai Lama

Uncertain times bring with them a mix of complex and challenging emotions. Grief, despair, sadness, anxiety, denial, fear and paralysis have all become poignant experiences which are arising for many on a regular basis. What feels especially important at this time is the willingness to honour the intelligence of these emotions, and rather than shutting them down or pushing them away, we meet them with mindfulness and compassion. Because what we really need right now are people who can remain calm and centred as they role model mutual care in our local communities.

One way we can strengthen our ability to remain calm and centred is by developing our capacity for social, emotional and systems awareness – or what the Dalai Lama calls an “education of the heart.” Such an education builds on a traditional knowledge curriculum, to also include the basics of how the mind and heart work; cultivating a sense of oneness with humanity; developing the capacity to live by compassionate values and be with our experiences as they are.

The point here is while it’s important that we care for those around us, what’s also important is that we contribute from a place of presence and deep acceptance of what is. When we do, it not only strengthens our own resilience, but the calmness of our presence ripples out, showing the way for everyone else.

PRACTICE: MINDFULNESS AND YOGA

Mindfulness meditation is a practice which helps us drop into a state of presence, in the here and now. Yoga is another foundational practice that helps us train our nervous systems to rest in a state of presence.

USEFUL REFERENCES

- The Triple Focus by Daniel Goleman and Peter Senge
- SEE learning by Emory University
- Breathing Buddies by Daniel Goleman

PRACTICAL STRATEGY 3

Building a sense of “we-ness”

“At the end of the day, relation is really what nourishes us on a human level the most. And I think if we can manage within a crisis to create meaningful relational networks, where we are supportive of each other... we can find a way to navigate through the more difficult times.” – Thomas Hübl

In times of crisis, it's vitally important we turn towards one another and work together to bring out the best in our humanity. We create this possibility when we, as education communities, hold space for one another and build a sense of a “we,” that while we might be socially distancing and self-isolating, we are not alone: we are all in this together. We can build the social fabric and be a source of healing and wellbeing for one another despite facing a global pandemic.

You can see this quality of space holding arising in the rapid mobilisation of online circle gatherings, where school communities are coming together to build a strong container for everyone to feel seen, heard and felt in what they are going through. The key point here is that these spaces are not about teaching curriculum or implementing strategies and interventions. It's about coming together and asking questions, listening deeply, accepting what is and responding with kindness and compassion. It's about creating spaces where school communities can connect and co-regulate, and become self-determining around who they choose to be in response.

PRACTICE: MORNING CIRCLE

Morning circle is a well-established practice that can be used online or in person for building a sense of a “we,” where each student is given the opportunity to “check in” by sharing their feelings and strengthen connections before engaging in learning.

USEFUL REFERENCES

- Circle Solutions by Sue Roffey
- Interpersonal Connection by Daniel Siegel
- Hosting online circles by The Circle Way

PRACTICAL STRATEGY 4

Evolving the purpose of education

“Everyone deserves an education that is about their own development as a human being. The purpose of education – is for me to become me – in the context of the society that I live, so I can truly contribute to my society.” – Peter Senge

While it's important we facilitate shifts in mindset on a personal level, it's just as important our schools shift mindsets at a collective level too, by evolving the purpose – or paradigm – of education. This represents a shift beyond the fixed mindset paradigm, where schools tend to be talent centred, and there is a focus on outcomes. It also represents a shift beyond the growth mindset paradigm, where schools make an important step forward, from outcomes to engaging in a process of learning. Benefit mindset schools build on the strengths of fixed and growth mindsets, to create cultures of collective learning and leadership. This enables them to act more like purpose driven innovation ecosystems, where the purpose of education is for everyone to more fully become themselves in a way that serves.

A central feature of the benefit mindset paradigm is how it empowers young people to identify meaningful innovation opportunities within their lives and their local community. Then, the challenges present in their lives and their communities are put at the centre of their learning and leadership. In this way, their learning and leadership is participatory and is not separated from their authentic passions and the real needs of the world. This puts young people in the driver's seat of their own development, and creates the conditions for them to become mindful global citizens, in a way that really nurtures their uniqueness.

PRACTICE: REIMAGINE EVERYTHING

Consider how a benefit mindset lens transforms everything about the way you learn. For example, what might a benefit mindset mean for the purpose of a class assignment? How might it change what your school celebrates as a success?

USEFUL REFERENCES

- The Essentials of Theory U by Otto Scharmer
- Educational Ecosystems for Societal Transformation by Education Futures

PRACTICAL STRATEGY 5

Participating in civilization renewal

“What if we used this disruption as an opportunity to let go of everything that isn’t essential in our life, in our work, and in our institutional routines? How might we reimagine how we live and work together? How might we reimagine the basic structures of our civilization? ... That’s the conversation we need to have now. With our circles of friends. With our families. With our organizations and communities.” – Otto Scharmer

Awareness of our interdependency awakens us into a caring relationship with the living Earth community. It also awakens us to the realisation that many of the things we consider to be normal and healthy in today society are actually destructive and unhealthy, causing deep harms for ourselves and the world. Thus, rather than seeing today's disruption as a time to bunker down only to return to the same old ways of living and working, we can use this time to reflect on who we are and who we want to be as a society, and choose to transform ourselves and the world by living into the possibility of profound civilization renewal.

A way education communities can facilitate this is by participating in an innovation lab or a collective leadership program. Spaces where we can be a true global witness, transform how we see the world and our place in it, and actively respond.

PRACTICE: JOIN AN INNOVATION LAB

Consider how your school can participate in a global innovation lab, or a local or international equivalent, which facilitates the transformation of self and society as an undivided whole.

USEFUL REFERENCES

- GAIA: Global Activation of Intention and Action by The Presencing Institute
- The weaving lab: Weaving systemic change for universal wellbeing
- Global Social Witnessing Lab

A time of profound awakening


“When in history has humanity had such a shared sense of purpose? And when have we been so aware of our fundamental interconnectedness at every level? This is a moment not to be wasted by any of us.” — Paul Atkins

The point here is that our ability to respond to the great challenges of our day is unlikely to be found in cultures which are rooted in a mindset of growth. Rather, it's going to take the coordinated efforts of millions, if not billions of people who share a deep sense of how they belong to a “global we”: to a collective movement of engaged citizens who care deeply for the wellbeing of all. In such a collective movement, everyone isn't operating as a collection of separate individuals. They are operating as a coherent whole: like a murmuration of starlings who are flying together in a state of group flow.


Now it's up to all of us – schools, businesses, governments and the general public – to build the global we-ness necessary to respond as one humanity. This is not a task for hero leaders, or a few enlightened ones. It's a responsibility for every human being. Every one of us has a role to play. If we have an entire planet of people who are committed to showing up together, everyone is more likely to be fully received, realises they belong to the whole, and this improves the likelihood we will bring out the very best in our collective potential.





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“The benefit mindset challenge has had such a discernibly positive impact on so many individuals in our community, it genuinely went beyond my expectations. Students who participated in the challenge found that this was one of the most meaningful service learning experience they had undertaken, many noting that the nature of daily reflections and an increased awareness of everyday acts of service and leadership played a significant role in shifting their mindsets. Though they found it much more challenging than expected, it ultimately led to a meaningful and memorable experience.” - **Amanda Stefancic, Creativity, Activity, Service Coordinator, Wesley College, Victoria**




“My coach championed my mindset as a contributor towards our success and expressed how she wished everyone in the squad had the same attitude. I was completely baffled by this news as I did not realise how much impact my actions had towards those around me...” - **21 day challenge participant**




“At a time when it is easy for people to look inward, the Benefit Mindset has helped us to stay connected, to stay grateful and to keep our heads up and our eyes open for each other.” - **Michelle Pereira, Assistant Principal Wellbeing, St Francis Xavier College, Victoria**




“The Provincial Direction of Educational Planning and Evaluation of Buenos Aires is promoting growth and benefit mindsets in 2000 public schools through communities of practice. Their province wide initiative focusses on school climate and the development of an emotional education curriculum.” - **Delfina Terrado, Education and Regenerative Development Leader**




“It was lovely to see the growth of the students throughout the process, where the acts of kindness began as small, to more thoughtful, where students began to make a conscious effort to go out of their way for others. For example, Aimee began her challenge by smiling at people throughout the day and ended up extending her kindness beyond school, returning a phone to a lady at the shops who had left it on the bench accidentally and walked away. We had students bringing their actions home and extending their kindness to their families, many helping more with daily chores but some students, like Trinity, who said she made a conscious effort to tell her brothers that she loved them. Each Care Group put their own spin on the challenge” for example “Mr Cookson’s care Group who set upon, what they called Mr Cookson’s Quest to make the world a better place. I truly believe the challenge has had a positive impact on the students in my house as well as the rest of our school.” - **Nadia Liu, Head of House, St Francis Xavier College, Victoria**




“I really feel like I have made a difference over the last few days. I feel humbled and grateful for helping people, going out of my way to support them.” - **21 day challenge participant**



“By exploring the Benefit Mindset in the early stages of our Program, we are able to challenge our participants to become everyday leaders, help them find the ‘why’ in their work, whilst contributing to the impact that Pollinate generates in over 1200 communities.” - **Luke Barbagallo, Program Manager, Pollinate Energy**



“I have been so thankful to be a part of the benefit mindset program as it helps me to centre myself every day and think about even the smallest things which make me happy and positive.” - **21 day challenge participant**



“Buchanan’s insights have significant implications for the way schools integrate teaching around fixed and growth mindset... I am excited about the Benefit Mindset and how it can strengthen the application of positive education more broadly in schools.” - **Matthew White, Associate Professor, Melbourne Graduate School of Education**

Who do we choose to be?

“It is time to face the truth of our situation. We are all in this together. Let’s figure out how to engage the hearts and minds of everyone, and get on with the work to do it.” – **Margaret Wheatley and Deborah Frieze**

These are challenging times, yet they can also be times that awaken us to who we really are and who we want to be as a society.

Today’s disruption presents us with an unprecedented opportunity to come together and be of benefit like never before. Let’s use this opportunity to embody our best human qualities and contribute as awake, engaged and responsible members of the living Earth community.

Fulfilling our potential in ways that serve the wellbeing of all.

If you would like to follow up on any of the content presented, or discuss opportunities to bring benefit mindset to your school, please get in touch:

Website: benefitmindset.com

Email: hello@benefitmindset.com

Our team is located in Melbourne, Australia. We offer a range of local and international options for working together.

On our website, you will also find a variety of free resources, including images, videos, slides and case studies to curate your own learning activities.