



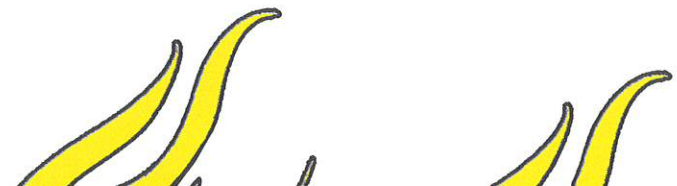
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Did you know that two-thirds of kids in school today will end up doing a job that hasn't even been invented yet? That is truly mind-boggling.

And do you know what else? On average, you'll probably have at least 17 different jobs in your lifetime (but don't worry, you won't have to do them all at the same time).

The world around us is changing so fast. It's no wonder that we sometimes feel **anxious** about how we fit into it. We question whether we are smart enough. We get a bit scared to have a go in case we look stupid. And sometimes it's tempting to quit before we've even tried having a go at something.

Lots of anxieties and worries can hold us back. So let's take a look and see how we can overcome them. Because it's good to be **READY. PREPPED. CONFIDENT. ON FIRE!** We need to find our confidence to deal with all the changes and challenges that life can bring.





BUT THE CHOICE IS YOURS

As well as standing on podiums, and having my picture in the newspapers, the journey I went on (and I don't mean the time I got on the wrong bus and ended up in **Bergen, Germany** rather than **Bergen, Norway** – more on that later) changed me in so many ways. Here are some of the things I learned along the way:

- No one is born with a table-tennis bat in their hand, a calculator in their head or Mandarin as their second language.
- Getting good at something takes time, it doesn't happen overnight. (In fact, especially not overnight – I'm usually asleep.)
- Becoming **awesome** at something takes time; becoming a world champion takes even longer.

○ Everyone that learns to become good at something has made loads (and I mean LOADS) of mistakes. Here's an example:

**'I'VE MISSED MORE THAN
9,000 SHOTS IN MY CAREER.
I'VE LOST ALMOST 300 GAMES.
26 TIMES I'VE BEEN TRUSTED
TO TAKE THE
GAME-WINNING
SHOT
AND I MISSED. I'VE FAILED
OVER AND
OVER AND
OVER
AGAIN IN MY LIFE ... AND THAT'S WHY
I SUCCEED'**

MICHAEL JORDAN, UBER-SUCCESSFUL FORMER BASKETBALL
PLAYER WHO IS NEVER PUT OFF BY FAILURE

**MAKES
YOU THINK,
DOESN'T IT?**

○ Anyway, back to our list, no one wants to admit how hard they practise, so don't believe anyone who tells you they are **effortlessly** brilliant or clever. They are very probably lying.

○ I don't instantly give up when things get hard. Just because something is difficult doesn't mean that I am rubbish and should stop trying. It often just means I haven't found the right strategy (the equivalent of Omega and Mr Charters) quite yet.

○ I can't be good at everything. I mean, there are definitely a lot of things I could be better at if I actually practised them (I tried to mend my skateboard once, I fixed the king pin but two wheels fell off. DIY skateboard mechanics are NOT recommended). But there are only 24 hours in a day.

Of course, I'm still as likely as the next person to sleepily put my pants on back to front first thing in the morning. I'm **only human**, after all, but I still find it amazing to think that small decisions we make about whether or not to give up on something difficult can have such a big impact on our lives. It would've been very easy in my case to have turned my back on table tennis because I was rubbish at it. And believe me I was bad! But I didn't. I set my mind to it, persevered, improved my skills and set off on my **journey** to become the very best I could be.

So, before we look at ways to take on our new challenges, let's look at what might be holding us back. What might make us give up when things get a bit hard? I can tell you from my experience that overcoming these obstacles can only make you stronger.

'NOPE. I'M NO GOOD AT THAT'

The world can be a big confusing place for sure. But our own minds and bodies are even more confusing. For a start, did you know that there are more lifeforms currently living on your skin than there are people on the planet? Supporting that eco-system is a challenge in itself. And that's before we've even begun to try and find our place in the world of **social media**, exams and friendship groups.

So starting something new or trying something hard can seem like a whole pile of extra effort. We've all been there. When faced with something tricky, it's just so easy to go 'nah' in order to avoid giving it a shot and risk the shame of failing badly. But you're never going to fulfil your potential if you're scared to even try. So, to understand why we do this, let's take a closer look inside the human brain.

Imagine if you could actually do that? Imagine if you could really look inside the slimy, **jelly-like** mind of your friends (I dread to think what you'd see there ...).

Physically, the human brain is extremely fragile. It weighs the same as a large cantaloupe melon and has the texture of squishy minced beef (I'm thinking you might not want spaghetti bolognaise or melon for dinner after this ...). But from an emotional perspective our brains can be pretty fragile too – and sometimes it's our thoughts and worries that can **sabotage** us and hold us back.

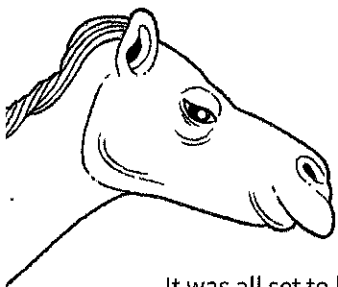
So what runs through your mind when you think about trying something new, something you know might push you out of your **comfort zone** and be 'a bit hard'?

1 FEAR OF LOOKING FOOLISH

A good friend of mine used to tell me that she wanted to be famous. She wanted to be in films. *Star Wars* in particular. I didn't think that was a bad shout. She was dangerously capable with a toy lightsabre, so I was pretty sure that if the part of Princess Leia's sister ever came up, she'd get it.

But she knew that breaking into a major Hollywood movie from her bungalow in Reading wasn't going to be easy. So she decided to start the process with a part in the school Christmas nativity.

I admired her. I was too **nervous** even to go to the audition. So I didn't and ended up in the audience instead. And I was quite jealous when her name appeared in the programme on the big opening night ...



EMMA SMITH - 2ND CAMEL

It was all set to be a great night. Her dad had borrowed the costume from a friend at work (two humps, since you ask) and her parents, my parents and I sat together in the front row. Emma was playing Second Camel. She had five lines. Two of them had to be sung. There were four camels in total. **Camel 1** was the main camel. She had eight lines. **Camel 3** and **Camel 4** didn't have any lines. I wasn't really sure what the point of them was, to be honest.

Halfway through the show, the moment arrived. The music built, **Camel 1** sang her lines at perfect pitch and then it was Emma's turn. But she looked at me just as she was about to open her mouth and I could tell that something was seriously wrong. I could see the terror in her eyes and I just knew she couldn't remember the words. Like a maniac I started furiously mouthing them back at her. I was **word perfect** because we'd been practising in between breaks at Omega for the last three months.

But the lights were dazzling her eyes and she couldn't see my frantic offer of help. So she froze. Standing completely still in front of 200 people, three other camels, Joseph and Mary ... the works. The music teacher played the tune again, to give her another chance. But Emma had lost her nerve. She was overcome with fear.

Camel 1 came to her rescue and belted out the lines and then the song moved on. Most of the audience hardly noticed. But Emma was so upset. The dream of Hollywood stardom was looking a lot less likely now. And at the end of the scene she raced off stage so fast she crashed into the lighting tower and crushed her second hump. Her dad was not popular at work when he had to give the costume back. All in all, it wasn't a great night for her.

Emma really took it to heart. She felt like a fool. A failure. It was a whole month before she could even bring herself to look **Camel 1** in the eye. **Camel 4** couldn't stop himself from telling her that he would have done a much better job. In fact, that was almost Emma's last foray into show business. She found it really hard to think about ever getting up on stage again, let alone dressing up.

But she was determined that wouldn't be the end of it. The following year, the school production was *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat*, so Emma put her fears to one side and went to the audition. She wanted **the big part**, the one with the fancy coat, but annoyingly **Camel 4** got that. She got back out there, though, and faced her fears. And this time, she nailed it.

I suspect that on some level everyone can relate to this story. Putting yourself out there, **taking a risk** is a scary business. Have you ever decided not to put your hand up in case your question is a stupid one? Or perhaps you've always been told that you're a super-talented runner. But one sports day you're on the start line for the 100m and the opposition seems a little tough. Like they've been training with Usain Bolt. You'd rather not break your winning streak so you decide to stage a tummy ache. This has to be better than the humiliation of coming last, surely? Much better to blend in with everyone else than to risk people laughing. It is entirely natural to want to fit in.

So, the moral of this is, never borrow a camel costume. And ...

BE BRAVE!

You don't get good at stuff if you are so worried about looking foolish that you don't go to the audition, or you never ask a question. You don't improve if you pull out of the race when you see the competition. You'll never learn anything new that way.



2 EVERYONE IS WAY BETTER THAN ME

Everyone loves a success story. When people win talent shows on television, we rate them for the skill they've shown on stage. Whether they're singing, dancing or making things vanish into thin air, we see a faultless performance ... and refuse to believe that we could ever do the same thing.

Why is this? What is it about everyone from top sports men and women to pop stars that makes us think we couldn't hope to be anything like them? The answer is very simple, because the fact is when we see them perform we're only looking at the end result of a huge amount of hard work. We're watching them with '**success**

goggles on. Whether it's learning the violin, swimming, schoolwork or BMXing, we don't see how much time and dedication they've put into becoming really good at it. Nor do we see all the mistakes they've made along the way. Instead, we focus on the finished product, assume it must be down to some natural-born talent or gift, and write off our chances of following in their footsteps without even trying.

What's more, when people achieve something big they tend to bask in the glory of the moment. Often, they're reluctant to admit just **HOW MUCH** work they have put into getting there. It can take away from the fairy-tale ending, after all, but sadly it masks the reality: that amazing feats of awesomeness take masses of practice to perfect.



3 HARD WORK IS FOR OTHER PEOPLE

When it comes to being lazy, young people can get a tough time. You can't lie in for more than half an hour without someone making jokes about whether you're going to get up in time for dinner. But, at the same time, it's fair to say that the most attractive path for some is

often the one that requires the least amount of effort. There is another danger out there, though. A proper great white shark in the water. What happens when everyone around you is telling you '**you're a genius at maths**' or '**you've got reaction speeds at the outer limits of human possibility**' (someone actually wrote this about me once – I had it above my bed for about six years)? Can you see the problem? You start believing the hype! You begin drafting your Oscar acceptance speech! You plan your post-exam celebrations! All before you've actually made the grade or arrived on the winners' podium.

When people think they are already super-talented, they can sometimes get a bit lazy. 'Hard work is for people without my genius', they might think. So they take their foot off the gas, stop trying as hard. And end up being overtaken by those who didn't opt for the sofa after their first taste of success.



**'I HAVEN'T FAILED
I'VE JUST FOUND
10,000 WAYS
THAT DON'T WORK.'**

THOMAS EDISON, THE INVENTOR OF THE
LIGHTBULB AND ONE AWESOME SCIENTIST
WHO DIDN'T GIVE UP, LIKE, EVER.

It's tempting to see successful people through your own 'success goggles', but let's smash them into oblivion by looking at a ...

FAMOUS FAILURE

STEVE JOBS

TECH VISIONARY?



FOUNDER OF APPLE?



FAILURE? REALLY?



Yep. Really. Steve Jobs has gone down in history as the man who gifted the world the iPhone, the iPad and the iMac computer. If it's on your Christmas list, and it has an apple on it, chances are it's down to the genius of Mr Jobs.

HE DOESN'T SOUND LIKE MUCH OF A FLOP ...

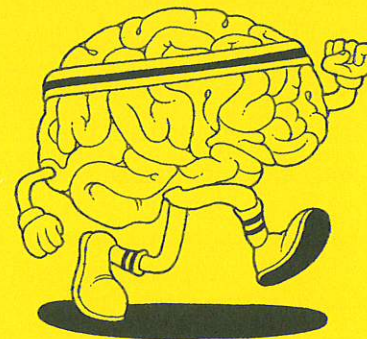
Well. Even though Steve Jobs founded Apple, after nine years building up the company, he was forced to leave after a disagreement with the people he had brought in to help run it. Ouch. Imagine having to say goodbye to nine whole years of hard work, not to mention seeing other

people take over YOUR company. It would've been only too easy for Steve to quit the tech world altogether. But he didn't.

Instead he focussed all his energy on other projects, including Pixar – the animation company that went on to produce *Monsters Inc*, *Cars* and *Finding Nemo*. So far, so awesome. But there was more. He also founded a new tech company called NeXT which, after 10 years, was bought by ... Apple! And 12 years after he had left, Steve Jobs became the boss of Apple once more!

**'I'M CONVINCED THAT
ABOUT HALF OF WHAT
SEPARATES SUCCESSFUL
ENTREPRENEURS
FROM THE
NON-SUCCESSFUL
ONES IS PURE
PERSEVERANCE.'**

STEVE JOBS



4 CONFIDENCE CRISES

I used to be pretty low in the confidence department. Sometimes my mum and dad would have their friends round to our house. And before the boring adult chat had started my dad would make a point of getting my brother and me to introduce ourselves.

All he wanted was a **'Hi, I'm Matthew'** from me. Pretty simple he thought – and you can't really blame him. But I used to quake at the thought of it. The whole idea of having to speak, in front of other people, to someone I hardly knew, made me want to hide under the nearest duvet for a week.

**MY
CONFIDENCE
WAS ROCK
BOTTOM.**

But something changed.

And now, these days, people ask me to give speeches. Maybe to a whole school or a business. I suspect they ask me because I am much cheaper and easier to get hold of than Neymar but (so they tell me) they also want to hear my ideas about how to get good at stuff.

After I give my speeches (sometimes to hundreds of people) it is often the case that someone in the audience comes up and tells me that I am brilliant at **public speaking**. And (almost always) that they are 'hopeless' at it. They talk as if I was actually born on stage, my first words being 'Ladies and Gentlemen' rather than the usual babbles of ordinary babies.

If only they had seen me at 14 years old.

Unable to say

**'HI, I'M
MATTHEW'**

to my parents' friends Mandy and Tim, who had popped in for a sherry at Christmas.

So what changed?

I'm going to tell you a secret. I practised for years in how to speak confidently in public. I went to a debate club called Toastmasters. They don't teach you how to make really tasty bread-based snacks (although that would also be a winner), no, they are the Omega club for public speaking rather than table tennis. And at this debate club you have to **get up and speak** about topics you might not be familiar with. In front of actual people you've never met before.

It is pretty scary the first time you go. But the more you do it, the more they help you, and the more you watch other people in the same situation (terrified) as you – the easier it becomes.

Once I'd delivered some rubbish speeches at the debate club, I knew how to handle it. I knew how to make the next speech just that bit better. I wasn't frightened of a room full of people I didn't know. I wasn't worried they'd laugh and I knew what to do if they did.

Practice built my confidence. I wasn't born with it.

5 WHO EVEN AM I?

In some ways, life would be so much easier if we all shared the same outlook as our friends. If we all had the same fears and ambitions, then there'd be no chance of having a go at something different and failing. But how dull would that be? The fact is that every single one of us is unique. We look different (apart from the time I thought it was a great idea to buy the same Shrek-green – yes, green – cardigan from Marks and Spencer that my best friend had). We think and behave like nobody else, and we all have the potential for **awesomeness**.

But doing our own thing and dealing with the attention that brings takes confidence, which ultimately has to come from feeling

HAPPY IN OUR OWN SKIN.

When we consider everything that can hold us back, it's a miracle that we get out of bed in the mornings. Then again, every second of each day someone in the world pushes themselves out of their comfort zone to achieve great things.

Somehow, *they*ve looked inside their brains and found a way to tackle all the doubts, insecurities and temptations that might have otherwise stopped them from pursuing their **ambitions**. And if they can, then you can too.



So, how do we make sure the things that hold us back, well, don't?

YOUR MISSION IS TO THINK ABOUT MINDSET

Our **mindset** can be described as the way we look at the world and our place in it. And it turns out that this mindset (if we don't get it right) can seriously hold us back.

Carol Dweck is a psychologist who has done oodles of research into the mindsets of young people. Her work is amazing (she's a professor who studies everything about mindset) and she has shown that it really can either hold you back or help you get good at stuff. She's tested it. She has 'experimented' on actual people (don't worry, no one was harmed in the process) to look at what holds us back or sets us free to pursue our ambitions. It is science. And there is lots of research and evidence to back it up.

And guess what Professor Dweck has found? There are two types of mindset: one is pretty fantastic in helping us to become good at stuff; the other not so much.

OK, so let's start with the problem one. The **FIXED** Mindset. This is where people think that you can **only** be good at something if you are born 'gifted' or 'talented'. That you pop into the world already hard-wired to be:

**GOOD AT MATHS,
BRILLIANT AT TENNIS**

ABLE TO
**SING LIKE AN
OPERA DIVA**
OR
**NAIL THE
DRAGON FLIP**
ON A SKATEBOARD ON THE FIRST GO.

In a Fixed Mindset you believe you've either got a talent for something or (more disappointingly) that you haven't. And there is not very much you can do to change that, no matter how hard you might try. But can you see the problem? If you believe that people are either born great at things or they're not, then where does that leave practice or trying hard to improve? Right at the bottom of a totally pointless list of totally **pointless things**. You just wouldn't bother. It wouldn't be worth the effort. You'd be better off spending your time digging a hole to Australia in your back garden. Which I did with my brother once. We got quite far (like, about two metres). We even convinced the local vicar to help us (not quite sure how, he really must have had better things to do). Any way you look at it, it was a pretty pointless exercise.

Remember **Kid Average**? He was in a Fixed Mindset. He didn't see the point of trying to improve his table-tennis skills and just walked away. **Kid Awesome** stuck at it. He wasn't born with a table-tennis bat in his hand. He just believed that he could improve. Just **thinking** that meant it was worth a shot. He wasn't in a Fixed Mindset, and over time he changed his ability from average to awesome with practice, the table in the garage and that competitive brother available 24/7.

Now this is a problem because Professor Carol Dweck thinks that more than **40 per cent** of us might be in a Fixed Mindset.



That's a lot of people. In fact, that means there could be as many as 2,960,000,000 people in the world with a Fixed Mindset. That's more than the population of Europe and North America combined. Wow. You can see the issue.

THIS IS MASSIVE.

TOP 10 FIXED MINDSET THOUGHTS

It's normal to doubt your abilities sometimes, but your thoughts can become a pattern that can hold you back. Do any of these phrases sound familiar?

*WE'RE ALL HOPELESS
AT MATHS IN OUR
FAMILY.*

*I'm not REALLY
VERY GOOD
at anything.*

**My memory's
rubbish, my
French vocab
just won't go in.**

**I often START
things but never
FINISH them.**

*I'd rather DIE
than stand up
and SPEAK in
front of people.*

**I DON'T HAVE THE
CO-ORDINATION
FOR TENNIS.**

**EVERYONE is
way better than
me at science - I
just don't get it.**

*My sister's the
CLEVER ONE in
our family.*

DRAWING!
*You're kidding.
I can't even
draw a stick man!*

**Hard work
is for other
people. I'm
a natural.**

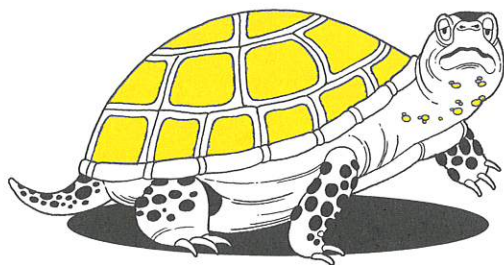
I'll hazard a guess that you've heard lots of these before. You might have even have said some of them yourself. Fixed Mindsets are everywhere, and they hold people back every single day, so why not try to ditch them from your language right now?

HOW FIXED MINDSETS HAPPEN

As we found out earlier, Fixed Mindsets are super-common, but did you realise that people can fall into them when they are really quite young? A friend of mine told me a story the other day about why she had always thought she wasn't very clever. When she was at primary school, there were two groups for reading: the Rockets and the Turtles. She was a Turtle. Can you see the association? Rockets zoom and turtles plod along slowly. You get the picture. The Turtle group was not seen as 'talented' at reading. And as a consequence, the Turtles didn't really try. My friend has thought of herself as a Turtle, rather than a Rocket, for almost 40 years (which is actually pretty young in turtle years, but that is not the point I am making).

It's possible that small things people say or do can drive us into a Fixed Mindset. And we can end up being Turtles rather than Rockets forever if we are not careful. Not practising. Not improving.

But people who *do* try and who *do* get good at stuff are in what's called a **GROWTH Mindset**. Top footballers, Oscar-winning actors, the best in the class at maths. Anyone who is any good at anything is probably in a Growth Mindset. A Growth Mindset is one of the biggest secrets to success.



Say hello to the **GROWTH MINDSET**



CHECK YOUR MINDSET

Here are some common attitudes that can help you figure out if you are in a GROWTH or FIXED Mindset. You may not sit easily in one mindset or the other, or you might be in a Growth Mindset about some things and a Fixed Mindset about others.

FIXED MINDSET

ABILITY

Ability is fixed and pre-determined from birth. People are born with certain gifts, talents or skills.

EFFORT

What's the point in trying? My abilities were given to me at birth and I can't change them.

MISTAKES

Let's not admit we make them. Let's carry on exactly as before. And let's definitely not ask anyone for help. Super-talented people don't need help!

FEEDBACK

I don't need it, it makes me uncomfortable. So I usually just ignore it.

CHALLENGES

I don't like challenges and usually avoid them at all costs. I don't want to look stupid, so what happens if I try something and get it wrong? What if I lose? I'm better off just not taking part at all.

OTHER PEOPLE'S SUCCESSES

I get jealous of other people's achievements. And I also get a bit defensive as I assume I'm not as good as them

Result KID AVERAGE

Maybe I'll dig a hole to Australia from suburban Reading for the rest of my life.

GROWTH MINDSET

ABILITY

Ability can be changed with practice. Talents, gifts and skills can be developed.

EFFORT

It makes sense to have a go at anything. Putting effort in is the only way to get better at stuff.

MISTAKES

Mistakes happen. They are nothing to be ashamed of and they show me exactly what I don't know so that I can work on improving my skills.

FEEDBACK

I appreciate feedback. Unless I know where I'm going wrong, I'll never be able to improve!

CHALLENGES

I welcome a challenge. Bring it on! Trying new things is the only way to learn. I don't mind if I don't get it right first time. That's fine. I'll get it next time, or the time after that.

OTHER PEOPLE'S SUCCESSES

I always try to find out how others achieved their goals. What did they do? How can I do the same as them to achieve success?

Result KID AWESOME

Look out world, I'm coming! And I'm going to work as hard as I can to be the best me I can be!

WHAT IS A GROWTH MINDSET? AND CAN I BUY ONE ONLINE?

The bad news is you can't order a Growth Mindset online to be delivered with an order of garlic bread on the side. The good news is you can **train yourself** to have one.

A Growth Mindset is the belief that your ability is not fixed. You are not handed out a fixed pot of brilliance at birth (that might only be half-full in some cases). Instead you can grow and change your ability with practice. With **determination**. With **effort**.

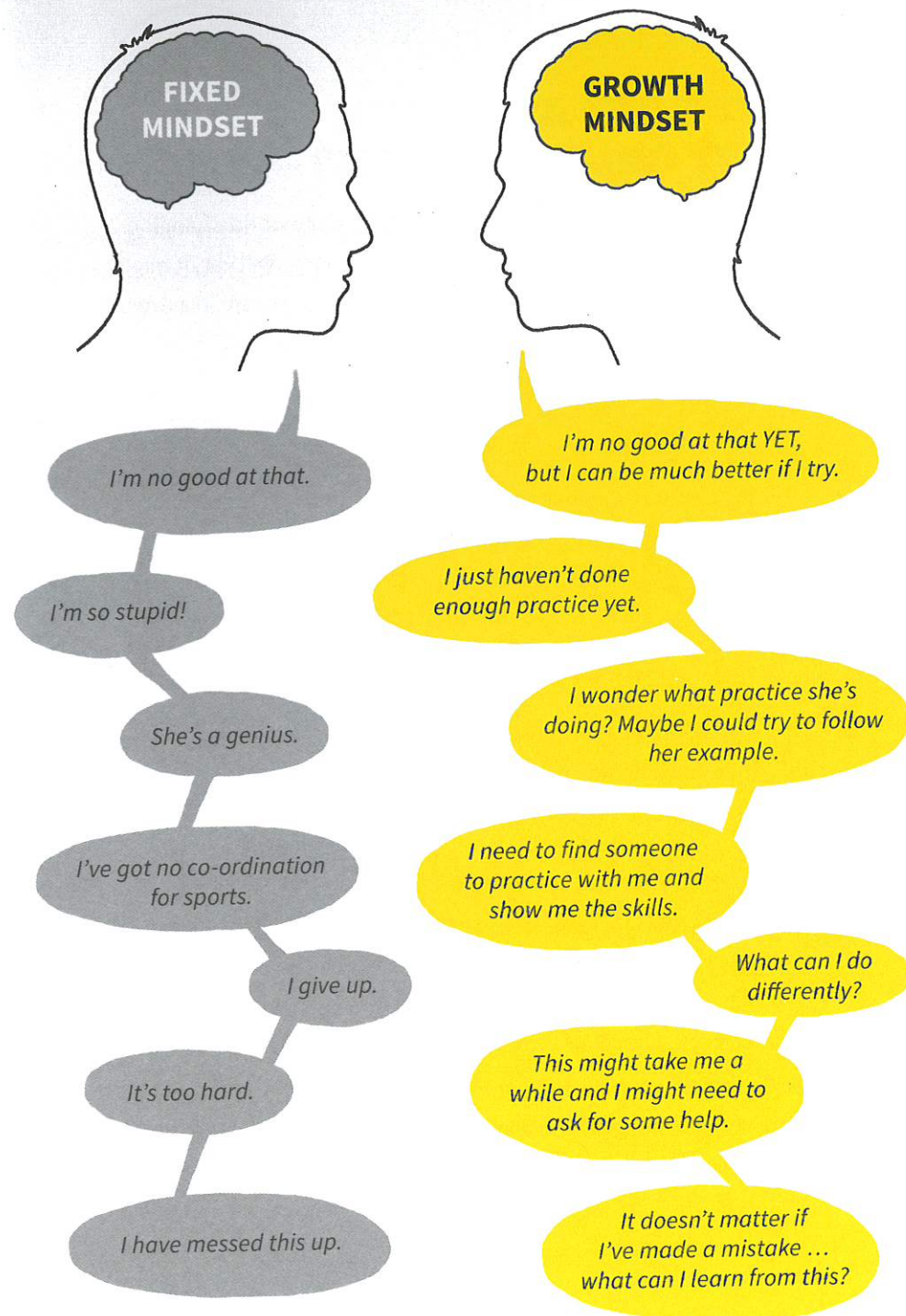
Once you believe that opportunity (remember that table in my garage?), and dedicated practice (remember I wanted to smash my brother?) are the foundations of getting good, well it makes sense to have a go. After all, these are things I can control.

FIXED MINDSET VS GROWTH MINDSET

If you're in a **FIXED** Mindset, but keen to be in a **GROWTH** Mindset, check out how to overcome some common doubts that might otherwise hold you back.

**'GROWTH
MINDSET'**
is based on the belief that your
basic qualities are things you can
cultivate through your efforts.'

PROFESSOR CAROL DWECK

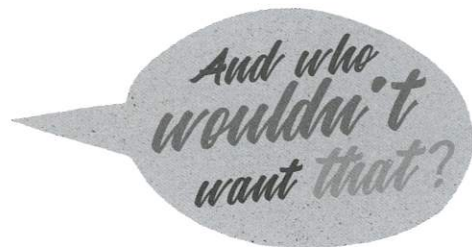


LET'S GET A BIT REAL (BUT ONLY A TINY BIT)

Growth Mindset is a big deal. Massive. Potentially world-changing. Will it stop global warming? Could it cure cancer? (Well yes, it might if the scientists working on global warming or cancer are in a Growth Mindset and don't give up until they find a solution!).

What we do know for sure, though, is that you definitely won't reach your potential if you don't even try. And even if you are not the Olympic champion at the end of all this (I wasn't; it turns out most of the population of China also had a table-tennis table in their garage and hadn't wasted quite as much time as I had on the hole to Australia) you'll be far, far better than when you started. The best you could possibly be.

You'll probably be more **confident**, more willing to try new things and less frightened of looking stupid.



So, I think we're ready. No, not for the story about the bus to **Bergen, Germany** not **Bergen, Norway** (they are 1,268 km apart according to Google and Interpol, who had to come looking for me, but more on this later).



I think we're ready for the next phase of our 'awesome' mission. Stage 2.

Let's get on with it. How do we actually get a Growth Mindset and change those Fixed Mindset voices we hear in our heads ...?

OVER TO YOU:

.....

THE WORRY JAR



What are the things you tend to worry about which might stop you from trying something new or hard? Can you write them down on some slips of paper?

Then put the slips in a worry jar – any jam jar or pot will do. In a week's time (or even 2 weeks) look at the slips of paper again (maybe together with your mum or dad or friend) and see whether those worries still apply? Throw away any that don't.

Then take a look at the ones that are still worrying you. Is there someone you can talk to about these?