

The Power of Yet for Alex Danson

Inspiration comes in various forms. I am finding it difficult to identify my favourite moment of success from the Rio Olympics for Team GB this summer with so many examples of inspiring performances. The strengths displayed by the track cyclists, swimmers, gymnasts and hockey players, to name but a few, had me bursting with pride and eager to go out and do my best cycling on the roads of Hampshire. It is clear where each athlete's strength lies.

How do we develop our strengths? A young Glenn Whitman was standing in his driveway in the US, trying to perfect his slapshot, one of the hardest shots to perform in ice hockey. Whitman spent hours practising the skill, but no matter how hard he tried, he failed to see any improvement. Annoyed by his apparent lack of progress, Whitman sought comfort from his mother.

"I can't improve my snapshot!" he proclaimed, "I can't juggle a soccer ball 100 times and I can't improve my snapshot!"

His mother responded in a manner familiar to Glenn:

"You can't do it, yet".

In her online presentation, "The Power of Believing You Can Improve", Dr Carol Dweck explains the power of "Yet":

"If you get a failing grade, you think, I'm nothing, I'm nowhere. But if you get the grade "Not Yet" you understand that you're on a learning curve. It gives you a path into the future."

Dweck, a prominent psychologist at Stanford University, is famous for her pioneering research on motivation and personality. In one piece of research, Dweck wanted to see how children coped with challenge and difficulty by giving 10-year-olds problems that were slightly too hard for them.

"Some of them reacted in a shockingly positive way", explains Dweck. "They said things like, 'I love a challenge,' or, 'You know, I was hoping this would be informative'". These children had what Dweck calls a "growth mindset". They understood that their abilities could be developed. They did not run from failure or error; they engaged with it. Other pupils felt it was tragic and catastrophic. They felt their intelligence had been up for judgment and they failed. These children had a "fixed mindset" in Dweck's view. They believed their qualities were carved in stone. In follow-up studies, Dweck learned the children with a fixed mindset were more likely to cheat and look for someone who did worse than they did so they could feel better about themselves. The children with a fixed mindset were operating from the "now", whereas the children with a growth mindset were operating from the "Not Yet".

Unlike Glenn Whitman, few of us aspire to play for the National Hockey League, but we do have areas in which we want to improve. We want to build self-discipline, stick to a change we are making, complete more in a given timescale, be a better parent, friend or sibling. The problem, however, is that sometimes we do not believe that we can actually improve.

Sometimes we believe we are not attractive, rich, old or young enough or we lack the time, energy or support. These are stories we tell ourselves and it is a consequence of a fixed mindset. We believe we cannot improve or persist in the face of obstacles or learn from criticism. However the good news is we can improve, given the right approach, with a growth mindset where opportunities are seized.

In assembly today Keith Murrall spoke to the children about doors in our lives and how it is important to venture through new doors of opportunity in order to grow strengths. He cited Alex Danson as somebody who had grabbed an opportunity to play hockey at school and had, over the years since, demonstrated huge amounts of perseverance and dedication to achieve the ultimate success of a gold medal in Rio. As you may know, Alex was a pupil at Yateley Manor and recently thanked staff for giving her the opportunities and helping her develop in the early years of her career.



Alex understands that success comes not only from hard work but also from accepting that learning is a journey, packed with ups and downs, and that a positive mindset where you appreciate learning has not been mastered “yet” is a huge advantage. Congratulations to Alex and the rest of the Team GB hockey team - we are very proud of and inspired by you - and good luck this year to every child with the doors of opportunity they have yet to open.

Robert Upton

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