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Changing Into The Extraordinary

“Trust yourself. Create the kind of self that you will be happy to live with all your life. Make the most of yourself by fanning the tiny inner sparks of possibility into flames of achievement” (Meir). This advice was given by Golda Meir, an intelligent, tenacious, dynamic woman. She was the world’s fourth and Israel’s first and only women to be elected Prime Minister. In this statement, Meir is hinting at the idea that it is in the individual’s control to take action and transform into the self that makes life most advantageous. Students reach this point by focusing on the person they strive to be in life; the center of this extensive change should take place throughout life and especially in college. But this is not the case because the overwhelming stress of transitioning into and through college takes precedence. The challenges students face include the struggle between fixed mindset and growth mindset, becoming independent, and dealing with work that goes against their morals and beliefs. These three struggles are only a small portion of many that influence the self during college. College is not an easy transition for many because there are so many external variables that cannot be controlled. However, the potentially stable, constant in all of this is the self, which is why it is critical to make sure each person is putting focus on the self to become the individual they want to be.

“You are not smart. You will never be something. You cannot do that.” Most students are told these statements so many times in life that it has gotten to the point where they are normal. It is unfortunate because everyone should be pushed to go after their dreams and goals in life, but

instead narrow-minded individuals with a fixed mindset damage any chance of a student obtaining what they want. It is not that people take away the dream or goal, it is intention of hurting that person and in turn having a negative effect on the individual's self. Dr. Carol Dweck, a leading psychologist, has researched the idea of fixed mindset versus growth mindset. The example above showcased what a fixed mindset can do to another person. Dweck explains the concept of fixed mindset, "A "fixed mindset" assumes that our character, intelligence, and creative ability are static givens which we can't change in any meaningful way..." (as cited in Popova). The idea of a fixed mindset limits the student to reaching their full potential because they are under the impression that they cannot change or improve upon their skills. Essentially, this means if a student believes they are "bad" at a subject then they cannot change it. This concept is the opposite of the growth mindset. Dweck describes, "A "growth mindset," on the other hand, thrives on challenge and sees failure not as evidence of unintelligence but as a heartening springboard for growth and for stretching our existing abilities..." (as cited in Popova). The growth mindset is what college students need to possess because it is how they develop their self. Muir would possibly perceive the growth mindset as a way to take advantage of the "flames of achievement" because students learn more about their self by taking various opportunities, though there may be the chance of disappointment. It is through these endeavors that people learn and grow. This idea is present throughout life, which is why there is always room for improvement. The obtainment of a growth mindset is imperative because it is what leads to a self that thrives on the idea of flourishing and learning.

There is a major difference between the two; a growth mindset encourages the self to grow, while a fixed mindset works against the growth of the self. The growth mindset realizes people are not perfect and it takes time to develop into the individual a person strives to be. But

this is not ingrained into students; they are typically given a title and it is what they are seen as, no matter what. The fixed mindset is prominent in society, which creates a challenge for the individual because they have to go against that mindset and transition through the changes within their self. The idea of transitions is where Dr. Arthur Chickering comes into play; he is a world renowned researcher in the student development theory. One of his focuses in his theory is establishing identity. In the process of establishing identity students need to accept every part of which they are, including the good and bad. This idea is exactly what the growth mindset is centered on; it is realizing life will not always go perfect, students are going to fail, but that is where the greatest learning happens. It is all their experiences and actions that develop an individual's identity. Chickering explains this development:

The “Establishing Identity” vector is dependent on the experience in the vectors that come before it—the competencies, emotions, confidence in one's independence, and relationships all factor into identity development. Simply, identity development is “like assembling a jigsaw puzzle or remodeling a house” (48) ...There are several characteristics of Establishing Identity, which include comfort with body and appearance, comfort with gender and sexual orientation, sense of self in social, historical, and cultural contexts, clarification of self-concept through roles and life-style, sense of self in response to feedback from valued others, self-acceptance and self-esteem, and personal stability and integration (183-208).

Chickering points out there are multiple things that influence the self and it is all about growing, which means accepting who a person is and realizing there is no way to be a perfect person. And this idea can be related to Dweck's because both of them believe having a prosperous self results

from taking charge in life and becoming the person he/she wants to be. It is important to realize Dweck does not think people have one of the mindsets throughout life. This can be seen here, “Out of these two mindsets, which we manifest from a very early age, springs a great deal of our behavior, our relationship with success and failure in both professional and personal contexts, and ultimately our capacity for happiness” (as cited in Popova). The point Dweck is trying to get across is that both mindsets will always be present in a person’s life, which is why they have such an impact on the self. Chickering appears more interested in the idea of the vectors, but the important aspect behind them is the process of learning. The vectors are just overall characteristics, but the main goal is to grow. Chickering and Dweck both acknowledge the way an individual handles situations is differently; this in turn affects whether he/she will complete a vector or gain a growth mindset. How different instances are handled by students is important because their decisions reflect back on whether their self will develop. There is not a right or wrong way when it comes to overcoming the vectors; the critical aspect is that the individual is growing, which is where Dweck’s idea of the growth mindset would come in. It does not matter if students make the “wrong” decisions, as long as they are learning from them and growing into a better version of who they are then that is all that matters. The self is influenced by so many factors, but the most influential period is college, which is it is crucial for students to take the time to transition to a greater self.

A major influence on the path of creating the self is greatly determined by mistakes and failure. As brought up by Dweck when discussing the growth mindset, “they don’t actually see themselves as failing in those situations — they see themselves as learning” (as cited in Popova). It is vital for students to maintain a growth mindset because this is how they reach their full potential. Trying to improve a skill or situation, though failure has occurred, is the best route to

go because in the process they learn more about who they are and what they are capable of. In addition, Chickering would likely recognize the impact of failure because of his idea on time: “movement along any one [vector] can occur at different rates and can interact with movement along the others” (34). It can be presumed Chickering understood not every student will be able to transition among the vectors in the same because the harsh reality is no one is perfect and mistakes are bound to happen for most. But if these failures are seen as a way for improvement then that is how students will find success in the vectors and in the process they will find themselves with a growth mindset. There are many elements to consider when it comes to the development of the self, but failure should never be viewed as a deficient.

Young people tend to think that the day they turn eighteen is the moment they become an adult, but really it is the moment the individual enters college or the workforce that they begin the road to independence. Eighteen is just another birthday; it is the actions a person takes that truly makes them an adult: the act of entering college, getting a job, paying the bills, and realizing what is truly important. There are so many steps students have to take before they become independent and they will come to situations through this transition that will change who they are. They will go through times of failure, which for some people can become too much and they give up. This should not be what students resort to; they should learn from that mistake to improve for next time. Dweck would look at failure as a reason to start the path of progression; she does not see failure as a negative because it allows people to realize they are better and they have time to make up for the mistake he/she may have made. It is through the process of improving critical characteristics that make a person independent. And the acquisition of the growth mindset makes the process of developing the self easier. The characteristics students need to work on have been established by Chickering. He believes there are seven vectors, which

serve as determinants of development. The vectors are developing competence, managing emotions, moving through autonomy toward interdependence, developing mature interpersonal relationships, establishing identity, and developing purpose, and developing integrity (p. 34). Chickering concludes through various studies these were the most important areas in which students and universities needed to put priority on throughout their education to reach their full potential. It should be acknowledged that the seven vectors interact with each other and there is no set time frame for attaining them. As put by Chickering, "Each vector builds on the previous one and consists of different characteristics and feelings, emotions, and tasks that represent increased development along the continuum." (34). In college it is typical for students to put more of a focus on academics, but to be an accomplished independent person they need to remember to give attention to their self or else they run the risk of never reaching their full potential.

Conflict is a part of life. Challenge is a part of life. Overcoming is a part of life. Conflict, challenge, and overcoming are three aspects that explain what it feels like to find and fight for a person's beliefs and morals. In grade school there is not an overwhelming amount of arguments when it comes to beliefs and morals, but when students enter college the situation completely changes. There are not really any barriers that can keep professors and students from voicing what they believe in or value. It is a great that people are not being silenced, but it is a hard experience for those who are sensitive when it becomes to their beliefs and morals. These people may not want to hear what others have to say or they are afraid there are other possibilities besides the ones they have put trust in. There are a various stories that illustrate these types of struggles. Mike Rose, a recognized education scholar, documented the battles students encountered at University of California Los Angeles (UCLA). One of the subjects was Lucia, a

twenty-eight year old, single, working mother. Lucia's major was planning to be in psychology and she was doing well, until she was required to read *The Myth of Mental Illness* by Thomas Szasz in her abnormal psychology class (34). This book disparages any previous notion of on the traditional psychology study of abnormal behavior. Lucia did not agree with the basis of the book because she had grown up with a brother troubled by a mental illness (35). Rose describes what the feelings on this book were for Lucia:

She had lived with mental illness, had seen that look in her brother's eyes, felt drawn to help people whose mind had betrayed them. The assertion that there was no such thing as mental illness, that it was a myth, seemed incomprehensible to her. She had trouble even entertaining it as a hypothesis, and thus couldn't play out its resonances and implications in the pages that followed. Szasz's bold claim was a bone sticking in her assumptive craw (35).

Lucia made an assumption about the works of Szasz because of her experience with her brother. The writings by Szasz went against her beliefs and it was not easy for her to understand why he could be so against the studies of abnormal psychology. It affected her (and her faith in her sense of self) because she felt very strongly about her belief, but this hurt her and it led to a decrease in her ability to complete her work for the course. But with time and help, she overcame this problem. This experience greatly helped Lucia and who she was as a person because she had to take a step back from her views and realize there are going to be so many more times where people will have differing opinions. The situation only benefitted her in the long run and prepared her for future instances. Chickering would likely observe Lucia's problem and conclude she was moving through the vectors of managing emotions and developing integrity. By the end of the course Lucia was able to handle her emotions effectively and she got to the point where

she could handle and understand the idea that people are not always going to agree with her beliefs/moral. She will continue to improve throughout her life, but she made exceptional improvements in these two vectors and her overall self by continuing on with the course. Lucia did not fail by going through this conflict; instead she grew and took charge in the situation by getting help from the counselor. Dweck and Prime Minister Meir would applaud Lucia for not giving up and finding the strength to continue to hold strong in her beliefs and accept the idea of other prospects. It is evident that in the beginning Lucia held a fixed mindset because she was not willing to accept the opinions of Szasz, which in turn kept her from advancing her abilities and enhancing her intelligence, but working with Rose made her realize not everything in life will agree with her beliefs. She slowly was able to transition into a growth mindset by realizing it was in her best interests to try to understand Szasz's point of view; this was not easy for her, but it was a challenge that only helped her for later on in life. In addition, Meir would see Lucia's determination to pass the class as her taking action to better herself. She was not going to give up, so she used her resources, Rose, to overcome her situation. Lucia is an accurate example of the influence college has on the belief and morals of students. The end result is always changes in the self, but to go in an excelling direction then the person need to be open to other perceptions and if there comes to be a conflict in a course then seek help. Students should not feel looked down upon or ashamed of their beliefs and morals; it is an essential part of what makes the self and should be brought to attention when an issue arises.

In college, students are training for their profession and setting the basis for a promising future. They are exposed to many new ideas and in the process it is hard to not lose oneself or become lost. It is through these times that people grow into life they will love. It is through these times they develop into the person they hope to be. It is in through these times that the self

changes and becomes something extraordinary. But this can only happen if students are given the time and desire to realize the factors of life that are affecting them and what they can do to make sure they are creating a strong self. As stated by Meir: “I must govern the clock, not be governed by it” (Meir). Students should think of the clock as the self because it is and always will be in a person’s power to decide who they will be.

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