

EMPLOYEE ADVISORY SERVICE NEWSLETTER

February

2022

The New Jersey Civil Service Commission's Employee Advisory Service (EAS) Newsletter contains useful articles and information for managing various well-being and work-life issues in order to create a healthier, happier, and more productive workplace. EAS is committed to improving the quality of life for all New Jersey Civil Service employees by encouraging a good work-life balance.

Upcoming Webinar:

The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Employees

About this webinar:

Successful employees share many common traits such as integrity, a positive attitude, good interpersonal skills, and a strong work ethic. This dynamic presentation will provide an overview of these and other characteristics important to career success and outline several strategies for integrating these traits into our own lives.

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Date: February 17, 2022 Time: 10:00-11:00 AM

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Change Your Mindset and Grow

When psychologist Carol Dweck was studying how children respond to new challenges, she noticed something interesting. Some hung back or gave up easily while others appeared to enjoy the experience, persisting even after repeated failures. She and her research colleagues came up with a model to explain the differences they were observing: fixed and growth mindsets.

Dweck's mindset model has proved to be a valuable tool for understanding adult behavior, too. You can use it in your own life to learn, stretch your abilities, and grow for greater success.

What is a fixed mindset?

A fixed mindset is the belief that your intelligence, abilities, and other qualities are set, or have limits that can't be overcome, even with effort. A fixed mindset can be reinforced in school or through life experiences when someone tells you that you're either good at or not good at something. That might be math, writing, singing, sports, social relationships, or anything else.

When you have a fixed mindset and are faced with a new task, you have a tendency to either prove that you can do it well—demonstrating your ability—or avoid it—to hide a possible weakness. When you try and fail, you're not likely to persist. Your inner voice tells you that this is one of those things you're just not good at and are unlikely to master no matter how hard you try. With a fixed mindset, it's more comfortable to give up in the face of failure than to keep trying.

With a fixed mindset, your goal is to show off your natural strengths and hide your natural deficiencies. That can limit you and keep you from trying new things, learning, and growing. It can be a real obstacle when you're faced with a significant change.

What is a growth mindset?

A growth mindset is the belief that you can hone your intelligence, abilities, and other qualities with practice, training, and help from others. With a growth mindset, you understand that people have different talents and strengths, but that these are just the starting point and can be built on and improved. They are the floor rather than the ceiling.

When you have a growth mindset, you welcome new challenges as opportunities to learn and grow. Trying and failing is not discouraging enough to stop you. Rather, each attempt is a learning experience, informing your next effort. When you can't overcome a problem, you don't hide your failure. Instead, you examine what went wrong and try again with a different approach. You might ask for help and guidance from someone with more experience or expertise.



With a growth mindset, you're less concerned with what others might think of your failed attempts than with what you can learn from those failures as you try again.

Everyone moves between fixed and growth mindsets.

A key to benefiting from the concept of fixed and growth mindsets is to understand that people are not all one or the other. As Dweck explained in a 2016 interview in The Atlantic, "...nobody has a growth mindset in everything all the time."1

You may have a growth mindset when engaged in some activities, but a fixed mindset in others. You might have a growth mindset when you're calm and well rested, and a fixed mindset when you're tense or exhausted. Think how you might behave under extreme time pressure compared to when you're working with more time. Think, too, about how you might approach different activities, such as public speaking, playing a musical instrument, solving a business problem using higher levels of math, or looking at the programming code behind a website. In some activities and at some times, your curiosity and drive to learn might have the upper hand—a growth mindset. In other situations, your fixed mindset might take charge.

How Adopting a Growth Mindset Can Help You Succeed

Adopting a growth mindset in more areas of your life—whether it's work, relationships, creative endeavors, or anything else—can lead you to new knowledge and new skills while deepening your understanding of who you are and all you can be. Recognizing the situations and triggers that tend to push you into a fixed mindset can help you be more self-aware and better able to consciously change for the better.

The more you approach life with a growth mindset, the better you'll be at overcoming obstacles, navigating change, and seizing new opportunities. In short, cultivating a growth mindset can help you thrive in all aspects of your life, especially when faced with new challenges.

Charles Kettering, one of the most successful inventors of all time (his 186 patents include the electric starter for cars, an incubator for premature infants, and ways to harness solar energy), wrote this: "Every great improvement has come after repeated failures. Virtually nothing comes out right the first time. One fails forward toward success."²

Ways to Get Into a Growth Mindset

Accepting that you operate in both fixed and growth mindsets is the first step in using this concept to your advantage. The next is to notice when you shift between the two mindsets. Even if you are a person who is naturally curious, open to new experiences, and driven to learn, you're bound to face situations or have times when you feel insecure and defensive. Those might include criticism, conflict, or failed efforts. These are the triggers that push you into a fixed mindset. Pay attention to your fixed-mindset triggers. When you catch yourself giving up too easily or trying too hard to show off known abilities, make a conscious effort to get yourself into a growth mindset—experimenting, taking risks, and learning from your attempts and failures.

Moving to a growth mindset is a journey that takes time and requires self-examination. Here are some ways to help yourself along that path:



- When faced with an obstacle or a setback, pause and consider the opportunities it might present.
- When you try something and it doesn't work out as expected, examine what went wrong. Adjust your approach and try again.
- When you find yourself focusing narrowly on the negatives of a situation, expand your view to look at other possibilities. Is this a roadblock, or just new information that gives you a clearer picture of reality? How might you respond creatively to make progress?
- When fear of failure keeps you from trying something new, consider how you may benefit from learning a new skill. Think, too, about the worst outcome, should you try and fail. It's usually not such a big deal, even if it takes a few failed attempts to make progress.
- If everything you do comes easily, you're probably avoiding important challenges and opportunities. Seek out assignments and activities that stretch you and make you a bit uncomfortable.
- Commit yourself to lifelong learning. Learning doesn't stop when you leave school. Cultivate your curiosity, too. Learning can be fun.
- If you're stuck, ask for help. It's not an admission of failure. It's a sign that you're committed to succeeding.
- Be tenacious. The important successes in life take hard work. They often require that you overcome obstacles and make many failed attempts, sometimes a great many, before you succeed.

For More Information

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Break the Rumination Cycle

Do you ever find yourself stewing over work, past events, or worries when you'd like to be relaxing, paying attention to your partner or child, or sleeping? This repetitive return to unhappy or disturbing thoughts without productive resolution is called rumination, and it can be damaging to your health, your relationships, and your ability to move forward in life.

You might ruminate over:

- A frustrating or worrisome situation at work
- A conflict with your partner, a friend, your boss, or a coworker
- Criticism you've received
- Financial pressure

Why Rumination Is a Problem

If rumination led to solutions and improvements in your life, it might be a good thing. Too often, however, rumination simply adds to your stress and undermines your wellbeing.

Rumination revives the negative emotions that are associated with an unhappy or disturbing event. Instead of processing those emotions and moving on, rumination causes your brain to stir them up over and over again.

A habit of rumination prevents you from relaxing, restoring your mental energy, and enjoying the moment you are in. It can muddle your thinking and damage relationships, fueling a destructive cycle that can intensify self-critical thoughts and feelings of isolation.

Rumination can interfere with your sleep, and poor sleep quality can negatively affect your thinking, your ability to manage your moods, and your health. It is also associated with depression. A habit of rumination can prolong an episode of depression, while interfering with efforts to get needed social support.

How to Break the Rumination Cycle

When you get stuck in a cycle of rumination, it can be hard to get out of it. The recurring thoughts can harden into a habit with similarities to unhealthy lifestyle habits like smoking or drinking (but fortunately without the addictive biochemistry). To avoid this, it's best to address rumination quickly, before it becomes an established thought pattern.

Here are some tips for when you find yourself ruminating:

• Make productive efforts to find a solution. Instead of simply reliving your unhappy experience, look for a solution. Think about what you can do to improve the situation, keep it from happening again, or move on from it on a positive forward path. Break down the steps you need to take to move forward, and plan in your mind how you'll take them. Become a problem solver.



- **Consciously, mindfully shift from work to home life.** A commute can do this. So can a walk around the block, a change of clothes, turning on some relaxing music, or anticipating a happy conversation unrelated to work.
- **Distract yourself from the ruminating thoughts.** Do something that makes it difficult or impossible to think about your repetitive thoughts:
 - Call a friend or family member (and don't even think about mentioning your ruminating worry)
 - Read a book or listen to a podcast
 - Play a game or do a challenging puzzle
 - Watch a movie
 - Listen to music that absorbs your attention
 - Exercise
 - Go for a walk around your neighborhood or in nature
 - Engage in a hobby or passion (drawing, woodworking, music, knitting, etc.)
- **Challenge your thinking.** Is this a real problem, or could you be blowing it out of proportion? Might there be another explanation for what you think happened? Might someone else see the situation differently? If you're imagining worst-case outcomes, ask yourself how realistic those are? What's a more likely outcome? Talking to a friend may help you put things in perspective and get a more realistic assessment. (Beware of using a friend to help fan the flames of your rumination.)
- Avoid overthinking mistakes. Everyone makes mistakes. It's how people learn and grow. Making a mistake does not make you a less worthy person. If you've made a mistake, think about what you can learn from it and do differently next time. Forgive and be kind to yourself.
- **Try mindfulness and meditation.** In the practice of mindfulness, you focus on the present moment, your experience right now. What happened yesterday or earlier today is not relevant. When engaging in mindfulness you also accept and embrace your current experience, including its joy and pain. You let go of judgment. Clearing your mind in meditation can have a similar effect in breaking the cycle of ruminating thoughts. Both practices shift your attention, make you aware of your thoughts and feelings, and help you move toward acceptance—all while helping you calm your body and your mind.

When You're Stuck in Rumination

When you're stuck in an enduring cycle of rumination and one-time measures aren't enough, it can help to deal with the problem as an unhealthy habit. Habits are triggered by cues in your environment, emotions, or thinking. When you experience a trigger, your habitual behavior or thinking follows a set pattern.

Here are some tips to break a rumination habit:

- Identify the cues that trigger your ruminating thoughts. When do you tend to ruminate? In the evening? At night when you're trying to sleep? After a particular type of event? When you're alone? When you're sad? In certain places? You might keep a log for a week or so to note the patterns of your ruminating thoughts. Recognizing the situations in which you have ruminating thoughts can help you identify the cues that trigger them.
- Where you can, avoid or change the cues that trigger your rumination. You might do this by changing your routine. If you tend to ruminate when you first get home from work and try to relax, do something else when you first get home. Call someone. Go for a walk. Read a chapter of a book. If watching or listening to the news lowers your mood and invites rumination, watch or listen to something uplifting. Shaking up your routine can help you disrupt your ruminating habit.
- Find alternative responses to your rumination cues, and practice them. Once you've identified the cues that trigger your rumination, come up with alternative responses to them. Take a different action when you experience those cues. If feeling sad is your trigger, pay attention to your emotions, and immediately do something different when you start to feel sad. Find a distracting activity that keeps your mind off your rumination. Over time, and with lots of practice, this new response will start to override your old ruminating habit.

How Therapy Can Help

Rumination habits can become so deeply ingrained that you may have trouble breaking the cycle by yourself.

The practice of mindfulness can be helpful for many people and can be more helpful under the guidance of an expert.

Working with a professional therapist, especially one with expertise in cognitive-behavioral therapy, can help you change unproductive thought patterns, including persistent rumination. There's even a specialty for helping people with rumination habits: rumination-focused cognitive-behavioral therapy.

Because rumination can be associated with depression and other mental health problems, if your rumination problem is persistent and keeping you from living to your full potential, and especially if you have symptoms of another mental health problem, you should make an appointment with a mental health therapist.

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"The Seven Hidden Dangers of Brooding and Ruminating," Psychology Today (By G. Winch, June 13, 2013. https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/the-squeaky-wheel/201306/the-seven-hidden-dangers-brooding-andruminating

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"Never underestimate the difference you can make in the lives of others. Step forward, reach out and help. This week reach out to someone that might need a lift."

EAS is here to help you!



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American Heart Month February 2022 Healthy Body, Happy Heart

Improve your heart health.

Every moment of the day, your heart is pumping blood throughout your body. In silent moments, you can hear the thump-thump-thump of its demanding work. Do you take your heart for granted? Most people will have heart trouble at some point in their lives. Heart disease is the number one killer of women and men in the United States—but you can take steps now to lower your risk.



"About 1 out of 3 people in America will die of heart disease," says U.S. National Institutes of Health (NIH) heart disease expert Dr. David C. Goff Jr. "And about 6 out of every 10 of us will have a major heart disease event before we die."

Heart disease develops when the blood vessels supplying the heart become clogged with fatty deposits, or plaque. After the blood vessels narrow, blood flow to the heart is reduced. That means oxygen and nutrients can't get to the heart as easily.

Eventually, an area of plaque can break open. This may cause a blood clot to form on the plaque's surface. A blood clot can block blood flowing to the heart. That can cause a heart attack. A heart attack happens when a vessel supplying the heart is blocked and the heart can't get enough oxygen, which leads to death of heart muscle.

The three major risk factors for heart disease have been known since the 1960s: smoking, high blood pressure, and high cholesterol levels. These were identified in NIH's Framingham Heart Study, a long-term study of people in Framingham, Massachusetts.1 "If we could eliminate cigarette smoking, elevated blood pressure, and elevated cholesterol levels, we could eradicate about 9 out of 10 heart attacks in our country," says Dr. Daniel Levy, a heart specialist at NIH who oversees the Framingham Heart Study currently.

The study has also uncovered other risk factors, including diabetes, obesity, and physical inactivity. Levy's research team is now hunting for genes that may be risk factors for heart disease. By understanding the factors that play a role in heart disease, scientists hope to find new ways to prevent and treat it.

Make healthy choices.

Talk with your doctor about your risk of heart disease and what you can do to keep your heart healthy. "The most important things for everyone to do to keep their heart healthy—to keep their entire body healthy—is to eat a healthy diet, get plenty of physical activity, maintain a lean body weight, and avoid smoking and exposure to secondhand smoke," Goff says.

Following a heart-healthy eating plan is important for everyone. "When someone puts food on their plate, about half of the plate should be fruits and vegetables. About a quarter of the plate should be whole grain. About a quarter should be lean protein, like lean meat or seafood," says Goff.

If you have high blood pressure, you may want to follow the DASH (Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension) diet. This diet emphasizes fruits, vegetables, whole-grain foods, and low-fat dairy products. To learn more about the diet, see https://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health-topics/dash-eating-plan.

Goff also advises, "Avoid foods that have a lot of salt in them. Salt is a major contributor to high blood pressure and risk of heart disease."

Prevent diabetes.

Diabetes increases your chances of high blood pressure and high cholesterol. You're also more likely to develop heart disease and have a heart attack.

"Having diabetes is almost like already having heart disease," says Dr. Larissa Avilés-Santa, a diabetes and heart health expert at NIH. She oversees a large NIH study of heart disease risk factors among more than 16,000 Hispanic/Latino adults.2,3

Avilés-Santa says that sometimes people think that they will develop diabetes and heart disease no matter what they do, but that's not true. Even if you have a family history of these diseases, you can be the messenger of good health for your family, she says. You can help your family by inspiring healthy habits.

The best way to prevent diabetes is through diet and physical activity. "The evidence is outstanding that very modest changes in lifestyle could reduce the risk of developing diabetes much greater than medication," Avilés-Santa says.

Get help.

For some people, having a heart attack is the first sign of heart disease. Pain or discomfort in your chest or upper body, a cold sweat, or shortness of breath are all signs of a heart attack. If you feel any of these signs, get medical help right away. Acting fast can save your life and prevent permanent damage.

Heart disease and heart attacks are major risk factors for cardiac arrest, which is when the heart suddenly stops beating. Blood stops flowing to the brain and other parts of the body. If not treated within minutes, cardiac arrest can lead to death.

Heart disease and heart attacks can also make it harder for your heart's electrical system to work. As a result, an irregular heartbeat, or arrhythmia, can occur. Your heart may beat too fast, too slow, or with an uneven rhythm. A dangerous arrhythmia can lead to cardiac arrest.

Regular checkups help ensure that a doctor will check your heart for problems. Heart disease and arrhythmias can be treated to lower the risk of cardiac arrest.

Be good to your heart. Don't take it for granted. Get tested for heart disease, and follow your doctor's suggestions. See below for questions you may want to ask your doctor.

Ask your doctor: Am I at risk for heart disease? If not, what should I do? Is my weight okay?

What tests do I need? Is my cholesterol level okay? How much exercise do I need? How can you help me quit smoking?

Is my blood pressure okay? If not, what should I do? Am I at risk for diabetes?

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Be Prepared to Stay Safe and Healthy in Winter

Winter storms and cold temperatures can be hazardous. Stay safe and healthy by planning ahead. Prepare your home and cars. Prepare for power outages and outdoor activity. Check on older adults.

Although winter comes as no surprise, many people are not ready for its arrival. If you are prepared for the hazards of winter, you will be more likely to stay safe and healthy when temperatures start to fall.

Take these steps for your home.

Many people prefer to remain indoors in the winter, but staying inside is no guarantee of safety. Take these steps to keep your home safe and warm during the winter months:

Winterize your home:

- Install weather stripping, insulation, and storm windows.
- Insulate water lines that run along exterior walls.
- Clean out gutters, and repair roof leaks.

Check your heating sources:

- Have your heating system serviced professionally to make sure that it is clean, working properly, and ventilated to the outside.
- Inspect and clean fireplaces and chimneys.
- Install a smoke detector. Test batteries monthly.
- Have a safe alternate heating source and alternate fuels available.
- Prevent carbon monoxide (CO) emergencies:
- Install a CO detector to alert you of the presence of the deadly, odorless, colorless gas. Check batteries when you change your clocks in the fall and spring.
- Learn symptoms of CO poisoning: headache, dizziness, weakness, upset stomach, vomiting, chest pain, and confusion.

Don't forget to prepare your car.

Get your car ready for cold weather use before winter arrives:

- Service the radiator and maintain the antifreeze level; check tire treads, or if necessary, replace tires with all-weather or snow tires.
- Keep gas tank full to avoid ice in the tank and fuel lines.
- Use a wintertime formula in your windshield washer.
- Prepare a winter emergency kit to keep in your car in case you become stranded. The kit should include:
 - Mobile phone, portable charger, and extra batteries
 - Blankets
 - Food and water
 - Booster cables, flares, tire pump, and a bag of sand or cat litter (for traction)
 - Compass and maps
 - Flashlight, battery-powered radio, and extra batteries
 - First-aid kit
 - Plastic bags (for sanitation)

Equip in advance for emergencies.

Be prepared for weather-related emergencies, including power outages:

- Stock food that needs no cooking or refrigeration, and store water in clean containers.
- Ensure that your mobile phone is fully charged.

- Keep an up-to-date emergency kit, including:
 - Battery-operated devices, such as a flashlight, a National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA weather radio, and lamps
 - Extra batteries
 - First-aid kit and extra medicine
 - Baby items
 - Cat litter or sand for icy walkways
- Protect your family from carbon monoxide:
 - Keep grills, camp stoves, and generators out of the house, basement, and garage.
 - Locate generators at least 20 feet from the house.
 - Leave your home immediately if the CO detector sounds, and call 911.

Take these precautions outdoors.

Many people spend time outdoors in the winter working, traveling, or enjoying winter sports. Outdoor activities can expose you to several safety hazards, but you can take these steps to prepare for them:

- Wear appropriate outdoor clothing: a tightly woven, preferably wind-resistant coat or jacket; inner layers of light, warm clothing; mittens; hats; scarves; and waterproof boots.
- Sprinkle cat litter or sand on icy patches.
- Learn safety precautions to follow when outdoors:
 - Be aware of the wind chill factor.
 - Work slowly when doing outside chores.
 - Take a buddy and an emergency kit when you are participating in outdoor recreation.
 - Carry a mobile phone.

Do this when you plan to travel.

When planning travel, be aware of current and forecast weather conditions:

- Avoid traveling when the weather service has issued advisories.
- If you must travel, inform a friend or relative of your proposed route and expected time of arrival.
- Follow these safety rules if you become stranded in your car:
 - Make your car visible to rescuers. Tie a brightly colored cloth on the antenna, raise the hood of the car (if it is not snowing), and turn on the inside overhead lights (when your engine is running).
 - Move anything you need from the trunk into the passenger area. Stay with your car unless safety is no more than 100 yards away.
 - Keep your body warm. Wrap your entire body, including your head, in extra clothing, blankets, or newspapers. Huddle with other people if you can.
 - Stay awake and stay moving. You will be less vulnerable to cold-related health problems. As you sit, keep moving your arms and legs to improve circulation and stay warmer.
 - Run the motor (and heater) for about 10 minutes per hour, opening one window slightly to let air in. Make sure that snow is not blocking the exhaust pipe—this will reduce the risk of carbon monoxide poisoning.

Check on family and neighbors who are especially at risk from cold weather hazards: young children, older adults, and the chronically ill. If you have pets, bring them inside. If you cannot bring them inside, provide adequate, warm shelter and unfrozen water to drink.

No one can stop the onset of winter. However, if you follow these suggestions, you will be ready for it when it comes.

Source: U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), National Center for Environmental Health. (Updated 2019, February 4). Be prepared to stay safe and healthy in winter. Retrieved November 13, 2019, from https://www.cdc.gov