

Essay: The secret source to champion Indomitable Spirit by Andy Wong

Introduction

Courtesy (Ye Ui), Integrity (Yom Chi), Perseverance (In Nae), Self-Control (Guk Gi), and Indomitable Spirit (Baekjul Boolgool), are the five tenets of the Korean form self-defence martial arts – Taekwon-Do.

These are the fundamental principles that serve as a guide for all students of the art.

At a high level, Courtesy means being polite and showing respect for other people. Integrity means being honest and having strong morals to define right and wrong. Perseverance means being patient, continuing to try despite difficulties. Self-Control means having the ability to control or restrain one's actions or feelings. Indomitable Spirit means not giving up or admitting defeat.

In this essay, I will focus on understanding what the indomitable spirit really means to us in the modern age, why should we care about championing it, and how to begin to champion the indomitable spirit.

I will also share what I believe is the right mindset people should develop to champion the indomitable spirit, and what I believe indomitable spirit is when used with the right mindset.

What is Indomitable Spirit?

According to the Collins Dictionary, indomitable spirit is an adjective term to describe someone who never gives up or admits that they have been defeated.

It is one of the five tenets of Taekwon-Do, and all students of Taekwon-Do are taught to practice indomitable spirit as a way of life to “pursue one's own goal”. (The Condensed Encyclopedia of Taekwon-Do 1999, p. 14)

In the International Taekwon-Do techniques handbook, Red Stripe (3rd gup) techniques syllabus (2017), it defines Indomitable Spirit as “is shown when a courageous person and their principles are pitted against overwhelming odds. A serious student of Taekwon-Do will at all times be modest and honest. If confronted with injustice, he/she will deal with the belligerent without any fear or hesitation at all, with indomitable spirit, regardless of whosoever and however many are number.” (The International Taekwon-Do techniques handbook 2017, p. 15)

Essentially, indomitable spirit is about having such a strong belief in achieving something that a person should never give up on achieving it, no matter how difficult it is or how many times they fail.

Why do we want to champion Indomitable Spirit?

To pursue one's own goal, one must understand that failure is part of the journey to success. Therefore, having the mental strength to endure such a journey is what we call the indomitable spirit. That is the key ingredient to help us develop confidence and resilience to move through failures to achieve our goals.

As the founder of Jeet Kune Do and a revered martial arts legend, Bruce Lee, famously quoted: "Do not pray for an easy life, pray for the strength to endure a difficult one". This is a fine illustration of the indomitable spirit, which states that one should never concede defeat in a challenging situation but instead muster the will to overcome it.

To be a true Taekwon-Do practitioner, our way of life (the "Do") inspires us to continuously improve ourselves both physically and mentally. Therefore, we must look beyond the fear of failure, pain, or embarrassment to eliminate those negative mindset such as, "I cannot..." or "it is too hard!" to give up easily. Instead, we need that "never give up" attitude to pick ourselves up no matter how many times we get knocked down. That is the indomitable spirit we want to champion, so that we can develop ourselves to be better human beings than we are, determined to grow and improve ourselves with everything we do in life.

The Condensed Encyclopedia of Taekwon-Do (1999) points out General Choi Hong Hi's way of approaching life: "Even though I am only five feet tall, I pride myself on having lived in strict accordance with my moral convictions. I have tried to fight on the side of justice without fear of any kind. I believe that this was possible for me only because of the formidable power and indomitable spirit instilled by Taekwon-Do." (The Condensed Encyclopedia of Taekwon-Do, p. 24)

How to champion Indomitable Spirit?

The way to champion indomitable spirit is to never give up and be persistent in trying until we succeed.

As quoted by Michael Jordan, former USA professional basketball player and one of the greatest of all time: "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 missed. I've failed over and over and over again in my life. And that is why I succeeded". Jordan's quote has proven the importance of indomitable spirit, which led him to greatness.

In Taekwon-Do context, an example of championing indomitable spirit could be a student's training journey to his or her black belt grading. It is a tangible goal that most Taekwon-Do students would thrive to achieve. However, it takes years of training, perseverance throughout the ranks, improving fitness and body conditioning, numerous recoveries from injuries, and enduring the additional black belt grading specific practices and theory study lessons, etc. to endure the gruelling two-day grading. Every black belt Taekwon-Do practitioner has truly earned their black belt through plenty of hard work, blood, tears, sweat, and indomitable spirit throughout their journey.

In the school context, the amount of mental stress involved in achieving good school grades can be extortionate. A school student who champions indomitable spirit would fulfil a high percentage of yearlong school attendance, carefully balancing the workload of different school subjects, submitting

school assignments on-time, doing extra studies outside class, and passing all tests and exams to achieve the desired grades without any thoughts of admitting they are not smart enough and giving up school.

In the workplace, championing indomitable spirit could be demonstrated by gracefully accepting customer and manager feedback, owning the mistakes that were made, and resolving them in a timely manner without the thought of blaming others, being demotivated to complete the job at high quality, or quitting the job.

However, indomitable spirit does not come by default, and it must be developed through the right mindset. Our modern-day society is filled with alternatives and varieties, where the indomitable spirit is not something people have prioritised to inculcate. Admitting something “I am not good at...” or “I am not made for this...” has become a tempting norm to simply give up and try something different to comfort our feelings, limiting ourselves from being challenged, not showing signs of weakness, looking stupid, or not exhausting our efforts, etc. That is a poor mindset to champion indomitable spirit in life.

To champion indomitable spirit in modern-day society, I highly recommend developing a growth mindset and combining it with indomitable spirit to help us pursue our own goals.

An example of indomitable spirit with a growth mindset would mean “Failure is only the opportunity to begin again, this time more intelligently.” – Henry Ford, American industrialist and the founder of the Ford Motor Company.

What is the Growth Mindset?

Having a growth mindset is what I believe the secret source to champion indomitable spirit in the present day, where we are spoiled with choices to switch to an alternative whenever we feel challenged.

It would be difficult, if not impossible, to become better if we admit defeat easily and give up on improving ourselves. “Our greatest weakness lies in giving up. I haven’t failed. I’ve just found ten thousand ways that won’t work.” – Thomas Edison, one of the most well-known and prolific inventors, who invented the lightbulb and a variety of other electric-powered devices.

Edison’s growth mindset enabled him to view failure as a learning opportunity, and he combined his growth mindset and indomitable spirit to not give up in the face of failures that had changed his life and all of our lives.

According to Amanda Morin from the Understood website, the growth mindset describes a way of viewing challenges and setbacks in which people who have such a mindset believe that even if they struggle with certain skills, their abilities are not set in stone. They think that with work, their skills can improve over time.

In other words, a growth mindset is a mental attitude in which people believe that their talents can be developed through dedication, hard work, good strategies, and input from others, such as feedback, coaching, and mentoring.

The growth mindset reveals that people who have a growth mindset lead to a desire to learn and therefore a tendency to embrace challenges, persist in the face of setbacks, see effort as the path to mastery, learn from criticism, and find lessons and inspiration in the success of others. As a result, they reach ever higher levels of achievement (Dweck, 2016).

An example of the growth mindset is well displayed as follows: “I never lose, I either win or learn.” – Former South African President Nelson Mandela.

What is not the Growth Mindset?

The Harvard Business Review (2016) identified the opposite of a growth mindset is a fixed mindset, those who believe their talents are innate gifts. People with a fixed mindset worry less about learning and put more energy into looking smart.

“...if your claim to fame is not having any deficiencies – if you’re considered a genius, a talent, or a natural – then you have a lot to lose. Effort can reduce you.” (Dweck, 2016).

For those who disapprove of the growth mindset, they would find it comforting to live in a fixed mindset. People who have a fixed mindset typically avoid being challenged; they get upset when they are criticised. They would make excuses for why things did not go as planned and would blame others for the outcome. They would expend every effort to appear smarter than most, or simply give up trying to avoid appearing unsmart. These people often plateau early and struggle to reach their full potential. Therefore, there is very little indomitable spirit one can achieve with a fixed mindset.

“In a fixed mindset, people believe their basic qualities, like their intelligence or talent, are simply fixed traits. They spend their time documenting their intelligence or talent instead of developing them. They also believe that talent alone creates success – without effort.” (Dweck, 2015).

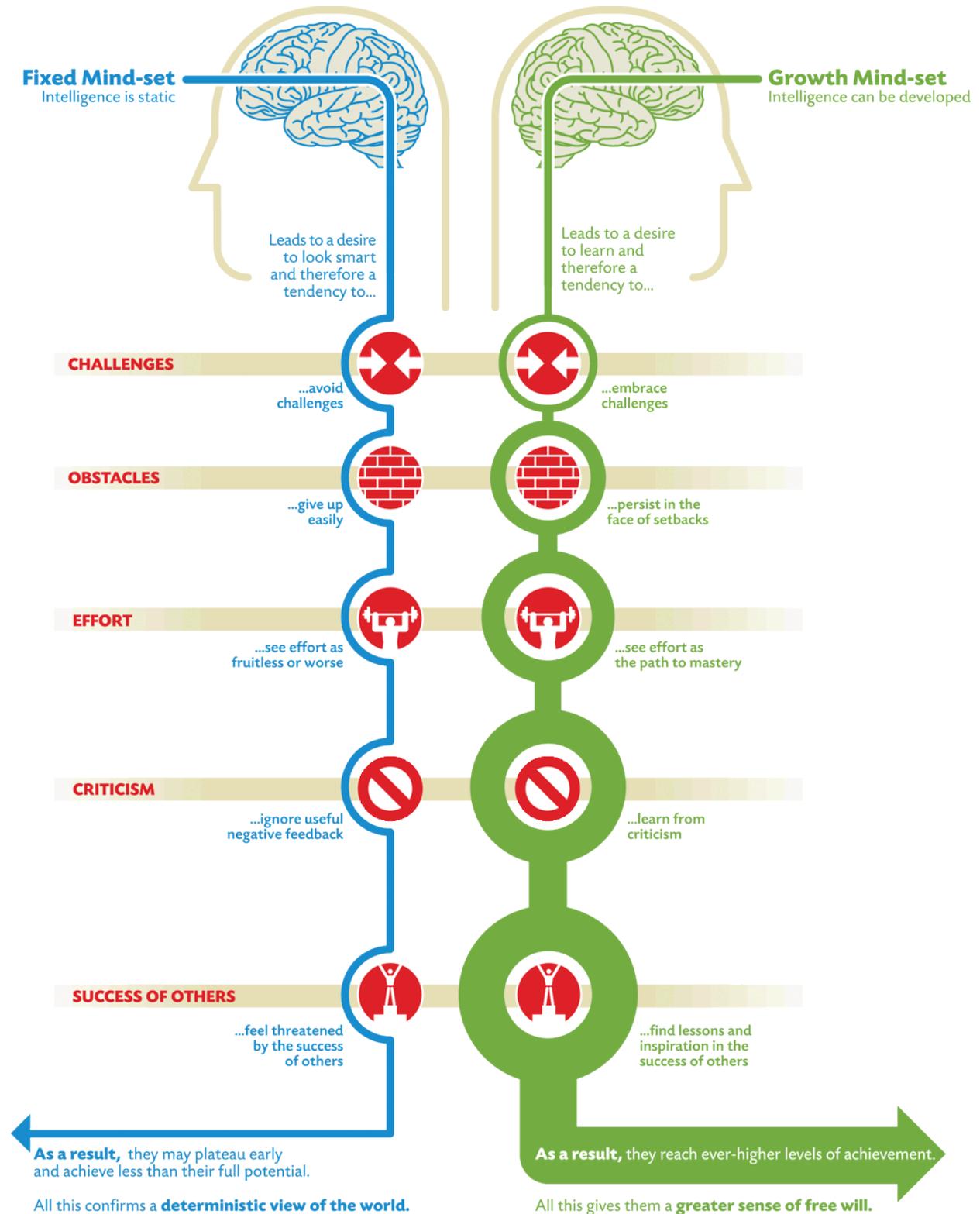


Figure 1 - Fixed Mindset vs Growth Mindset (Dweck, 2016)

Why is it important to develop the Growth Mindset to champion Indomitable Spirit?

In my opinion, indomitable spirit is inextricably intertwined with growth mindset. Both the growth mindset and the indomitable spirit empower us to embrace challenges and not give up easily. The growth mindset urges us to utilise criticism and setbacks as opportunities to learn, to be motivated by others' achievements, and to push ourselves to become better versions of ourselves. The indomitable spirit instils in us the desire to not give up when we fail, and we use this mentality to pursue and achieve our goals.

"I am always doing that which I cannot do, in order that I may learn how to do it." – Pablo Picasso, famous Spanish artist. Picasso's growth mindset played an important part in helping him become one of the most influential artists of the 20th century, despite early criticism from many about his artworks being too abstract.

As a Taekwon-Do practitioner, how we respond to setbacks and our capacity to draw indomitable spirit through developing a growth mindset can positively affect our ability to become better. For example, having a growth mindset developed in our mental attitude would make a noticeable difference between giving up on a flying overhead kick because "I am not flexible and I cannot jump high" and a productive struggle to stretch regularly to improve one's flexibility and seek advice from seniors and the instructor to learn about the jumping technique.

However, a growth mindset is not just about effort. In Dweck's words, "In the fixed mindset, everything is about the outcome. If you fail or if you are not the best, it's all been wasted. The growth mindset allows people to value what they're doing regardless of the outcome. They're tackling problems, charting new courses, working on important issues. Maybe they haven't found the cure for cancer, but the search was deeply meaningful." (Dweck, 2015).

Practicing the growth mindset would strengthen our mental capacity to take setbacks more positively, which would reduce our temptation to give up easily and find inspiration to become better and embrace the challenges.

How to champion the Indomitable Spirit through practicing the Growth Mindset?

Championing the indomitable spirit can be simply put as observing, "Our greatest glory is not in never falling, but in rising every time we fall." – Confucius, Chinese philosopher.

As its name implies, a fixed mindset increases the limitations we have in our lives. On the other hand, developing a growth mindset stems from our own set of beliefs that we adopt for ourselves and profoundly affects the way we lead our lives. It can determine whether we become the person we want to be and whether we accomplish the things we value. (Dweck, 2016).

We can champion the indomitable spirit if we develop our growth mindset and practice it in our everyday lives. Here are some of the recommended strategies I have gathered from referencing *Angelina Zimmerman* (n.d.) and *What is a growth mindset? 8 steps to develop one* (2019):

1. Skyrocket your self-awareness

Be acutely aware of your key strengths and weaknesses. Ask for feedback from different people as they can offer you slightly different perspectives and give you an overall view of what areas you can improve on.

2. Replace the work “failing” with “learning”

Failing is just another way of learning. Stop being so afraid of it and embrace failure as an opportunity to learn and grow.

3. Become a curious learner

Begin by asking more questions and being more curious about other people’s journeys that can teach you, live in wonderment, and discover the beauty of life.

4. Challenges are your new best friend

Welcome challenges as the fuel that inevitably helps you rise to the next-level and become indestructible in body and mind. It is all about learning and taking positive action time and time again. No matter how far you fall, you continue to get back up to begin playing the game once more.

5. Practice

Inject yourself into situations that are challenging to help you practice your growth mindset and indomitable spirit. Your Taekwon-Do dojang (Korean for training hall) would be the best place for you to start practicing. With new challenges in every belt ranking across different disciplines, there are many opportunities to thrive from setbacks and trials.

6. Find outside help

Cultivating a growth mindset to champion indomitable spirit is not something that can be easily done alone. You will need outside help to offer encouragement, feedback, and advice. Your Taekwon-Do instructor(s) and senior members of your Taekwon-Do club may be the ideal people to assist you. You will develop such skills from your instructors and seniors that you will be able to start helping others too.

7. Massively inspired by others

With a growth mindset, you will see others’ success add more fuel to your blazing fire as it liberates your soul to recognise the possibilities of life. Your genuine happiness and excitement for others will unwittingly motivate you.

8. Take growth mindset action

You need to follow through on the actions your growth mindset tells you to. You will not always succeed, but as you practice the growth mindset, you will become better at it, and it will empower you to champion the indomitable spirit you desire over time.

As per the mediaeval French phrase, “Rome ne fut pas faite toute en un jour” (Rome was not built in a day). Therefore, to champion the indomitable spirit, it must take time to develop a growth mindset, based on your willingness and commitment; with a good sense of self-awareness, welcome challenges, take failure as an opportunity to learn, be curious and be inspired, seek help from others, and practice continuously.

What is Indomitable Spirit through a Growth Mindset?

The Indomitable Spirit is the liveliness and energy that a person should show in what they can achieve. No matter how challenging the situation, they never give up or concede defeat.

An indomitable spirit is a powerful vitality and energy that follows one's own goals by not just never giving up or accepting loss, but by perceiving every challenge and setback met along the path as an opportunity to learn, grow, and better through the learned skills and knowledge.

Having a growth mindset fosters this kind of spirit. They are highly self-aware of their strengths as well as weaknesses, and they tirelessly seek feedback and find help to further develop themselves continuously. Their courage and tightness are not always measured by their title, rank, or medals of victory. They are measured by the obstacles they have overcome, both mentally and physically.

Those with a strong indomitable spirit through growth mindset are not the ones who always win; they are the people who do not give up, take defeats as part of their learning journey, and come back a stronger person.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the secret source to champion indomitable spirit is to develop a growth mindset. The growth mindset teaches us to view failure positively and use such an experience as an opportunity to learn and improve ourselves.

We will never champion indomitable spirit if we treat failure as a sign of weakness, avoid challenges, ignore criticism, and give up easily.

With a growth mindset, we become more aware of our own strengths and weaknesses, welcome challenges, and seek ways to develop ourselves to overcome the fear of setbacks. Consequently, the growth mindset and the indomitable spirit are inextricably intertwined, making it a powerful approach to help us champion a “never give up” mentality in our lives.

Reference

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