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Introduction

A smooth sea never made a skilled sailor.

– Franklin D. Roosevelt

Many of us are familiar with the infamous Forrest Gump quote, “*Life is like a box of chocolates. You never know what you’re going to get.*” This quote is particularly accurate today. Since 2020, we’ve been living in a time of uncertainty and adversity. Who knows what tomorrow will bring? All we have endured nationally and globally over the past few years is a stark reminder that the only thing we can control is our behavior.

Each generation is shaped by the history of time, and at no other time has a young generation been exposed to so much adversity. This generation of young people has been exposed to pandemics, recessions, economic insecurities, racial and systemic injustices, mass shootings—some of those occurring in schools—and acts of terrorism. Is it any wonder mental health issues are soaring?

No child is left unscathed by the recent events in our world, and the impact of mental well-being cuts across gender, racial, and socio-economic lines. Anxiety and depression are at an all-time high. Suicide is the second leading cause of death in the United States in people ages 10-34. More than 46% of the 34 million children under age 18 have experienced at least one adverse childhood experience (ACE)—also known as childhood trauma—and more than 20% have had at least two.¹ This generation understands how their sense of safety and security can vanish instantaneously.

Despite all these obstacles, however, many young people will find healthy ways to cope, persevere, and rise to the top. Which leads to the question, “What makes some youth prevail and others struggle?” While there may be no clear-cut answer to this question, based on research and life experience, I believe the answer may lie within our ability to use our superpowers: growth mindset, resilience, and grit. In this book, I will share the transformational power of applying these crucial elements to our lives. This book is just as much about you, the educator, as it is about your students. When we learn to tap into our superpowers, we can teach others to tap into theirs, too. Our internal superpowers help us move forward in life and cope with adversity. Although the three superpowers are related, they also serve distinct, diverse purposes to help us prevail and thrive.

When I think about these superpowers, I am reminded of a fantastic news clip. It covered the story of a seven-year-old track star who demonstrated a growth mindset, resilience, and grit. The young runners were in position on the starting line. When the start of the race sounded, they all took off except for one, who lost her shoe. But that didn't stop her! She hastily pulled her shoe back on and sprinted after the others. Not only did she catch up, but she found her grit, sped ahead, and won the race!

Life is full of obstacles, both big and small. What matters most isn't what comes at us but how we cope and push through with tenacity. Perhaps you've witnessed firsthand how some of your students take every lemon life gives them and make lemonade, while other students feel defeated and depleted by their challenging moments. Thankfully, research shows that everyone can tap into their superpowers. So, guess what? We can teach kids—even the ones who have trouble digging deep—how to use their internal superpowers to be successful!

In this book, we'll set out to discover data-driven ways to help our students cultivate a growth mindset, nurture resilience, and build grit. There will be times you will be asked to reflect upon and connect with your own life experiences so you can explore the use of your internal superpowers. If we want to help our students learn to use their superpowers, we must know how we use ours.

As educators, we can profoundly impact our students' lives. We can teach them that although life isn't always smooth sailing, they don't always have to batten down the hatches when storms come. Instead, they can use the wind to their advantage, get on the right track, and sail into the sunset.

As Franklin D. Roosevelt said, "A smooth sea never made a skilled sailor." From one educator to another, I sincerely hope you will leave this book with ways to help your students build a growth mindset, resilience, and grit—and strengthen your superpowers while you're at it.

Sincerely Grateful,

Dr. Raychelle Cassada Lohmann

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Our Superpowers: Growth Mindset, Resilience, and Grit

Whether you think you can or think you can't – you're right.

– Henry Ford

If you ask a kid what superpowers they wish to have, they may share a desire to fly, be invisible, read minds, be gifted with Harry Potter's magical powers, or maybe they wish to run like a speedster. Think back to your childhood. What superpower did you always want?

Albeit fun to think about, we can no more run at lightning speed than we can spread our arms and soar above the stars. However, we do have the unique psychological power to supersede adversity. We have the mental agility, resilience, and perseverance to help us overcome even the most challenging obstacles. These special abilities are our internal superpowers: growth *mindset*, *resilience*, and *grit*. But what exactly are these superpowers, and why do they matter? Well, let's jump right in and find out.



What is a Growth Mindset?

Ever wondered why some people fail and others succeed? Does sheer luck and talent create success? Or is it motivation and drive? After you ponder these questions, read the following statements from Stanford Psychologist Carol Dweck's *Mindset Quiz*.² How much do you agree or disagree with each one?:

1. Your intelligence is something fundamental about you that you can't change much.
2. You can learn new things, but you can't change how intelligent you are.
3. No matter your intelligence, you can always change it quite a bit.
4. You can always substantially change how intelligent you are.

According to Carol Dweck in her book *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success*,² how you answer these questions shows whether you see things from a fixed or a growth mindset. Questions one and two are associated with a fixed mindset; questions three and four represent a growth mindset. If you have a fixed mindset, you believe intelligence can't be altered—you either have it or don't. A person with a fixed mindset may struggle with something and tell themselves it's no use trying because they're no good, resulting in feelings of defeat. By contrast, a growth mindset means you believe intelligence and talents can be learned and developed over time.

This book focuses on helping our students develop a growth mindset, which studies indicate positively affects student motivation and academic performance.³ Dweck's decades of research show that mindset predicts achievement. People who consistently develop and maintain a growth mindset share the following characteristics:²

- They embrace challenges.
- They persevere in adversity.
- They believe effort leads to mastery.
- They learn from criticism.
- They learn from and become inspired by the success of others.

When we teach our students they can improve on even the most challenging tasks; we teach them how to use their growth mindset superpower. Steve Jobs captures this superpower best with this quote:

Life can be much broader once you discover one simple fact: Everything around you that you call life was made up by people that were no smarter than you. And you can change it; you can influence it... Once you learn that, you'll never be the same again.

What is Resilience?

In *Man's Search for Meaning*, Victor Frankl (1959)⁴ proposes that we human beings have a fundamental need to make meaning of our lives, and when we find meaning, we can better cope with challenges. For decades, we have sought to understand and explain how individuals cope with hardships and heal from traumatic experiences. The answer seems to lie within a dynamic process known as resilience. Over half a century of research shows resilient people possess the ability to bounce back, bounce forward, and steer through difficult times.

...resilience is our ability to recover from life's challenges. Although definitions of resilience differ slightly, the commonalities include an individual's ability to rebound from adverse circumstances, flexibility and adaptability to adversity, and the capability to persevere through hard times. So, resilience is our ability to recover from life's challenges. It is a true superpower, and just like a muscle, we can build it, strengthen it, and flex it during life's most challenging moments when we need it most.

What is Grit?

How gritty are you? Not in the dirty sense, but rather your passion and perseverance toward long-term and meaningful goals. The term *grit* was made famous by Angela Duckworth,⁵ a psychologist and researcher whose studies show grit is associated with high-achieving people. Think about a personal goal you recently attained. Now, think about what it took to reach that goal. Your grit pushes you through when you set your mind to something and go for it.

As educators, we need to help our students get gritty by supporting them to persevere and find true passion in what they do. Growing up, I remember being told the phrase coined by sports columnist Paul William Bryant, “*When the going gets tough, the tough get going.*”

As educators, we can cultivate an environment that rewards hard work and promotes success...

His words are the essence of grit. And just like a growth mindset and resilience, grit can be developed and strengthened. As educators, we can cultivate an environment that rewards hard work and promotes success, allowing our students to tap into their third unique superpower: grit.

Our Amazing Superpowers

People often ask me if grit is the same as resilience or if resilience is the same as mindset. While I can see where the confusion occurs because they blend nicely, each serves a different purpose. **Grit** is **our drive** (passion, work ethic, and perseverance) to accomplish our goals. **Mindset** is our **beliefs** (cognitions) surrounding achieving a goal, and **resilience** is the **momentum** (energy) we use to pick ourselves back up when we get knocked down. Together, this power of three is a force to be reckoned with because it allows us to accomplish internal and external things we never dreamed possible.

A Student’s Story

I first met Aleigha during her senior year of high school. A new student, she sat in my office to hear her senior class schedule while her sister, who was Aleigha’s appointed guardian, sat beside her. I asked what brought her to our high school, and that’s when Aleigha shared a small part of her story. Her father died when she was young, and her mother died of cancer a few years back. Aleigha’s aunt and uncle, who lived in another state, agreed for her to live with them until she completed high school. Her sister was finishing up her college degree.

Unfortunately, life presented another turn of events, and Aleigha’s uncle became ill and needed constant medical care. At that time, the family

decided to move and live with her sister. “*Wow, that’s a lot,*” I remember thinking.

As I continued to review Aleigha’s paperwork—fortunately, her transcript courses lined up with our graduation requirements—Aleigha looked at me, smiled, and said, “I don’t know anything about colleges here.”

She said it felt like she was starting over. However, almost as soon as she said it, she smiled again, looked at me, and said, “I guess I’ll have to learn about them quickly.”

By the end of our meeting, this strong, resilient young person whose life had been laden with hardships mustered up her strength and told me it would be a good year. Amazing! And it was.

Aleigha had a contagious personality and quickly made friends, worked hard, and made good grades. She was accepted to a couple of excellent colleges, and by the end of her senior year, Aleigha had secured a position in a nursing program at a top school. She reached out to me during her first year at college and told me she was doing well. I never doubted she would.

Aleigha was one of those brave students who taught me a personal lesson about a growth mindset, resilience, and grit. When we meet people with characteristics like Aleigha, we can learn a lot from them. Which one of your students has taught you an invaluable life lesson?

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**QUESTIONS
to
CONSIDER** ???

1. What are the differences between growth mindset, resilience, and grit?

2. Of these three superpowers, which one do you believe is the strongest within yourself? Why did you choose this superpower as your super strength?

3. Of these three superpowers, which one is a challenge? What makes it a challenge for you?

4. Think of a time when you overcame a life obstacle. What helped you get through?

**KEY
POINTS**

- Growth mindset, resilience, and grit are the three superpowers that make up our ability to believe, persevere, and bounce back from life's setbacks.
- Mindsets are made of the beliefs we hold about ourselves and others.
 - Fixed mindset is a belief that our intelligence and talents are fixed based on inherent abilities.
 - Growth mindset is a belief that our talents, intellect, and abilities can be developed through hard work.
- Resilience is our ability to bounce back, bounce forward, and steer through difficult times.
- Grit is our passion and perseverance toward long-term and meaningful goals.
- All three internal superpowers can be built and strengthened.