

Mind Makeover: Cultivating a Growth Mindset

Exercise - Moving From Praise to Growth

Praising intelligence, excellence, strength, or being the best promotes a “fixed” mindset. Researchers have demonstrated that when students are praised for their intelligence they selected easier tasks when given a choice and exaggerated their outcomes to appear smarter. Praise in and of itself is not bad. Praise can be used to promote a “growth” mindset. What should be praised instead is: effort, struggle, applying different strategies when one is “stuck,” selecting difficult tasks, learning, improvement, persistence in the face of setbacks, tenacity, viewing failures as an opportunity for growth, etc.

Below are examples of “praise” from evaluations of trainees. Transform 2-3 of these “fixed” mindset phrases to “praise” growth instead of intelligence, excellence, strength, etc. As you did not work with these particular learners, you will need to be creative and reflect on the characteristics you have learned that demonstrate a growth mindset.

(Example: “One of the best residents with whom I have worked.” Transformed to: “Dr. Y was one of the strongest residents with whom I have worked. She never gave up even in the face of difficult situations. In fact, it was during the most difficult times that she put even more effort towards the task at hand.”

1. Was an asset to the team and will make a great Cardiologist.
2. Very bright resident who cares for his patients in exceptional manner. Keep up the great work!
3. Took care of some complicated patients on the rotation and was a pleasure to work with.
4. Is a strong resident who has an even and excellent performance.
5. Intelligent
6. “X” was judged to be an excellent resident by all reviewers.
7. Good manners, puts families at ease.

Examples of praise focused on a growth mindset:

1. Was an asset to the team and will make a great Cardiologist. ***Was an asset to the team based on his hard work and the amount of effort he put in daily to improve as a physician.***
2. Very bright resident who cares for his patients in exceptional manner. Keep up the great work! ***Cares for his patients in an exceptional manner due to his commitment to reading about conditions. Despite the fact that he worked a 10-hour shift and was tired, he made the effort to read at least 15 minutes each night when he got home.***
3. Took care of some complicated patients on the rotation and was a pleasure to work with. ***Was a pleasure to work with because he stepped out of his comfort zone and chose to volunteer to take care of some of the most complicated patients on the team.***
4. Is a strong resident who has an even and excellent performance. ***Is a strong resident who has an even and excellent performance because she committed to asking either myself or the supervising resident what she could do better related to her performance. She set weekly performance goals that “stretched” her as a physician and she made sure and asked me each week how she did on achieving these goals. Most notably the week that I gave her feedback that she did not reach her goal, she told me, “Dr. T, I didn’t reach my goal yet.” Sure enough she doubled her effort and the next week she not only reached her goal but exceeded it.***
5. Intelligent. ***Dr X was noted to be “Intelligent” by one of the faculty attendings on service. This has nothing to do with how smart she is; it has to do with how much effort she put in throughout the rotation to provide the highest quality of care to her patients by reflecting on her knowledge gaps, reading to fill those gaps, voicing a management plan even when she was not certain and asking questions for understanding when her plan was different than the attendings.***
6. “X” was judged to be an excellent resident by all reviewers. ***“X” was judged to be an excellent resident by all reviewers by systematically and deliberately addressing his weaknesses. He reflected on these weaknesses with me weekly, created a learning plan and applied these strategies to help him improve. What I was most impressed with was how he handled a situation in which the patient “fired” him as her physician. Two days following the incident he went back to talk to the patient to ask her “what he could do the next time to be a better physician.” He never let what other people would consider a “failure” set him back.***
7. Good manners, puts families at ease. ***Dr. Y was noted to have good manners and that she put families at ease. She accomplished this feat by asking her patients, nurses, and faculty supervisors “what behaviors were helpful and what she could do differently the next time in her patient encounters. She put in effort daily to apply what she had learned from this feedback to the next patient encounter.***