



PRAISING WITH PURPOSE

With so many studies and experts providing us with diverse ideas about the best ways to praise youth, figuring out how to do it right can be difficult and confusing. As mentors we want to support and encourage our mentees towards success. How and why we praise matters.

Effort over achievement?

Leading researcher Carol Dweck introduced us to the idea of Growth Mindset, the idea that if you believe that you can keep learning you can get better at whatever you do. Sometimes we, or our mentees, are tempted to believe that we are as smart or as skilled as we will ever be, or as Dweck phrased it, we have a fixed mindset. She suggested the way to encourage growth mindset is to praise effort rather than ability. Saying, “Wow you did so well on that test, you really worked hard, preparing for it” is better than saying “Wow, you did so well on that test; you are so smart.”

An Opposing Viewpoint?

The idea of Growth Mindset resonated with a lot of people. However, the question was then posed regarding whether praising effort towards an unnecessary or seemingly pointless task would really encourage growth mindset. Also, studies show that too much praising can be seen as judgment or as attempt to control. It may result in discouraging continued effort and might block future opportunities for learning.

So how can we best help our mentee towards a growth mindset in a supportive and encouraging way that doesn't discourage them from continued efforts?

The Best of Both Worlds?

Be thoughtful about your own motivations for praising. Avoid praising as a way of influencing or guiding your mentee towards a goal set by you or someone else. Praise the efforts exerted in pursuit of their own goals. Help them recognize, through success or failure, where they have learned something and the value of those lessons.