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The Four Faces of the Fixed Mindset

Barriers to Change in Teaching

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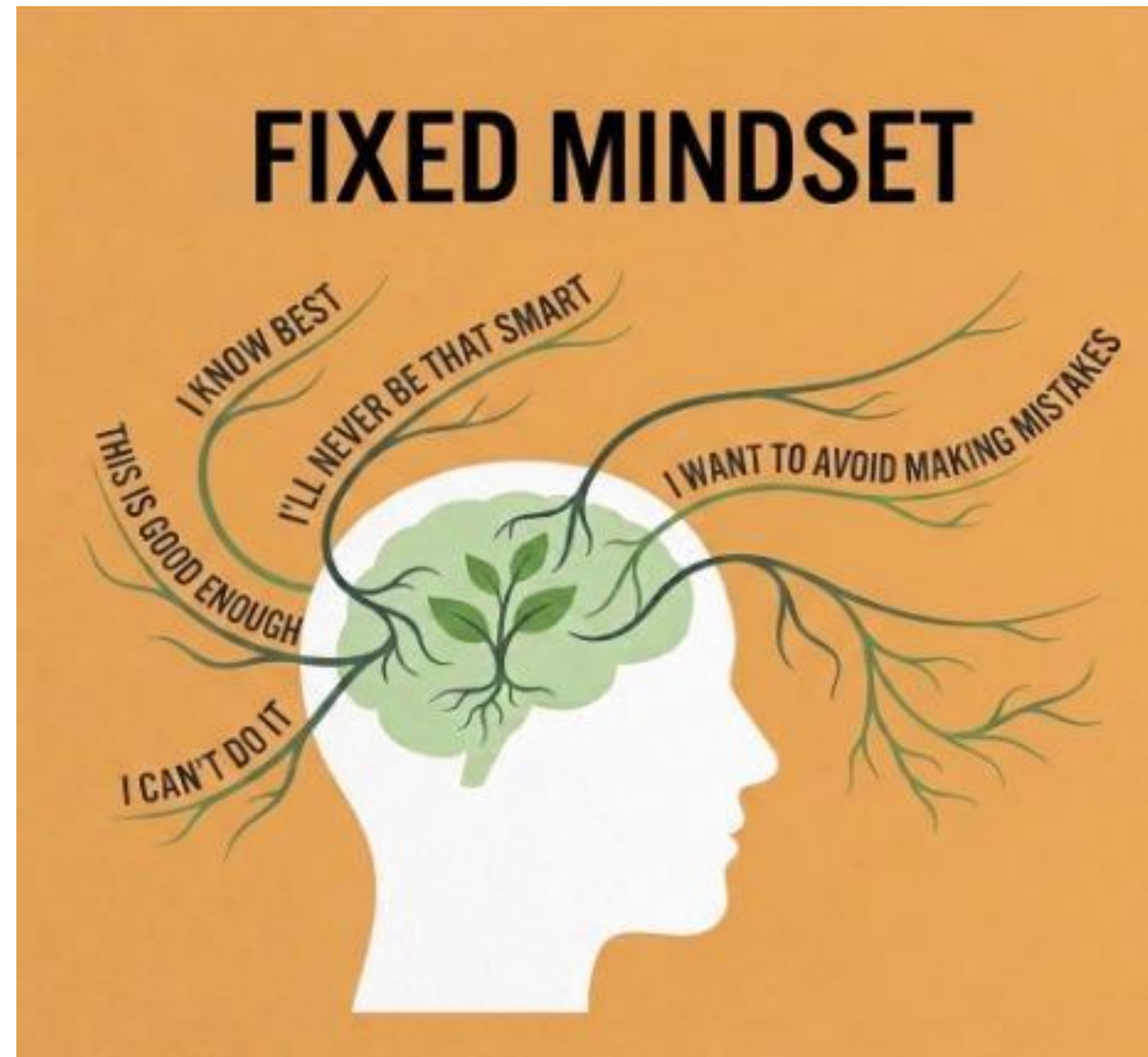
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GROWTH MINDSET



Belief that one's abilities can be developed over time through practice and effort

Belief that one's abilities are innate and fixed and cannot be improved through practice and effort



Four fixed mindset responses block teacher growth.

1. "You're Right, I Suck"

Over-identification with failure

2. "You're Wrong, I Rule"

Defiance / Image protection

3. "Blame it on the Rain"

Externalizing blame

4. "Optimist Without a Cause"

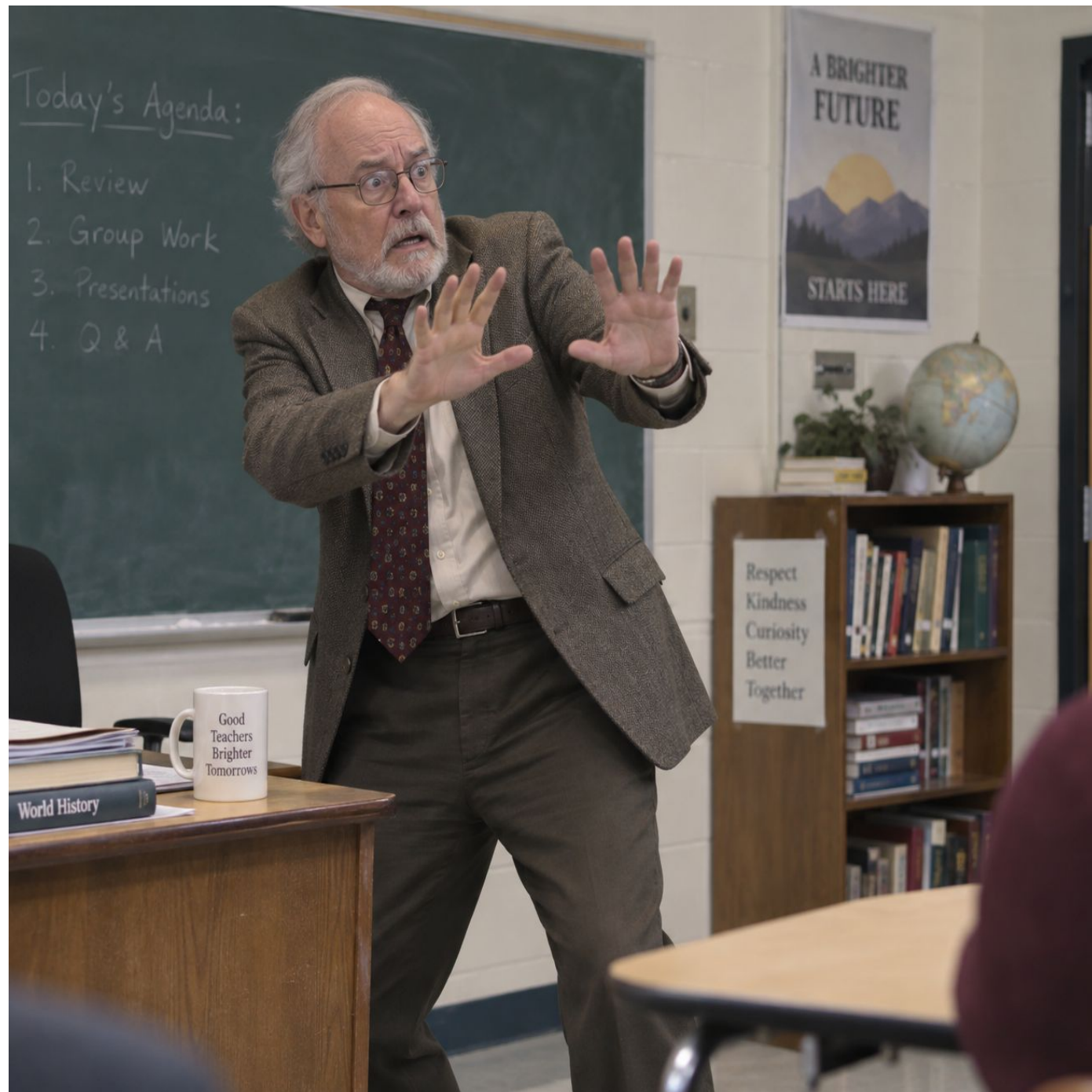
Superficial positivity

Adapted from Match
Education

1. “You’re Right. I suck.”

Over-identifying with failure blocks progress

- Teachers beat themselves up over setbacks rather than analyzing root causes.
- Critical feedback is taken as personal commentary rather than actionable coaching.



Feedback often triggers fixed mindset reactions instead of growth

- Constructive criticism frequently stings.
- Feedback targets teaching performance.
- Fixed mindset reactions turn feedback into a commentary on self-worth.

Self-deprecation is a subtle form of hiding from growth

- Declaring incapability avoids addressing the actual challenge.
- Hardens an untrue narrative of being "bad."
- Blinds teachers to existing positive growth.



2. “You’re Wrong. I Rule.”

Defensiveness protects self-image from perceived threats.

- Disputing feedback as inaccurate.
- Becoming defensive and defiant.
- Insisting on a separate, protective narrative.



Defiance dodges healthy, necessary reflection

- *What can I learn from this feedback?*
- *Why did this failure happen?*
- *How might I improve?*

3. “Blame it on the Rain”

Externalizing blame prevents engaging with self-threats.

- "Kids were weird today,"
- "Fractions are boring."
- Absolves responsibility by pretending a lack of personal agency.



Blaming the system surrenders personal agency.

Fixating on the Rain (No Agency)

- Persists because many external factors **are** real and valid obstacles.
- Focuses energy outward, leaving individuals feeling powerless to create meaningful change.

Growth Shift

- Stop fixating on "the rain" and shift focus to what you can control.
- Identify immediate, manageable bits of personal agency.
- Acknowledge their role and take concrete steps toward professional growth.

4. “Optimist without a Cause”

Superficial positivity ignore meaningful change.



- Letting feedback bounce off without truly listening.
- Superficially acknowledging difficulty.
- Imagining issues will resolve without personal effort.

Surface optimism lacks actionable strategy

- Masquerades as a growth mindset
- Shields teacher from urgency and complexity

Positivity must be paired with actionable strategy to drive growth.



How to Work with the 4 Fixed-Mindsets

For People who say, “You’re Right I Suck” and
“You’re Wrong I Rule” feedback is

- . Personal
- . Pervasive
- . Permanent

They Give Data Too Much Power

For People who say, “Blame it on the Rain” and
“Optimists without a Cause,”

- Feedback is minimized
- They give data too little power

Naming these coaching behaviors drains their power

- Explicitly name these four reactions when they occur.
- Transforms defensive reactions into recognizable, common behaviors.
- Reduces the stigma of struggling with feedback.



A shared vocabulary disarms defensiveness

Creates Shared Vocabulary

Creates a common language across teaching staff and coaches.

Facilitates Tough Conversations

Opens dialogue

Adds Humorous Self-Awareness

Leverages humor and self-awareness to support self-directed change.



Empathetic Coaching

Building psychological safety to transform defensive reactions into breakthrough moments.

Conclusion & Key Takeaways

Guide teachers from avoidance to structured growth.

1

Recognize and Name

Recognize and name the 4 Horsemen responses when they emerge in feedback conversations.

2

Navigate Mindset Shifts

Help teachers navigate away from fixed mindset protection and defensive habits.

3

Drive Personal Agency

Move toward personal agency, structured growth, and actionable strategy.