



# CAPSafety Beacon

August 2021

*The Safety Beacon is for informational purposes. Unit Safety Officers are encouraged to use the articles in the Beacon as topics for their monthly safety briefings and discussions. Members may go to [eservices Learning Management System](#), click on “Go to AXIS,” search for this month’s Safety Beacon, take the quiz, and receive safety education credit.*

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## Mindsets and Safety

Mindset is defined by Merriam-Webster as, “a mental attitude or inclination” or “a fixed state of mind.” Gary Klein, Ph.D., writing for *Psychology Today*, says that “mindset is a belief that orients the way we handle situations – the way we sort out what is going on and what we should do.”

The way we handle situations and interact with people is, in part, the result of mindsets that have been incorporated into the brain’s “pattern recognition system”, which is a combination of the things we value and the assumptions that lead us to act. Some examples of mindsets and their relationship to safety are described below.

**Bottom line:** Some mindsets are more compatible with effective safety practices than others.

### Fixed VS. Growth Mindset

Fixed mindset focuses on predetermined innate ability. People with a fixed mindset see failure as an inherent flaw in character or competence and have difficulty believing people can improve.

Growth mindset focuses on learning and improvement. Failure is an opportunity for reflection and trying a new approach. People operating with a growth mindset see barriers as a chance to improve and grow.

Operating from a fixed mindset may lead to accepting that errors and mistakes are inevitable and believing that people are incapable of learning to do better. This may

lead to avoiding giving or receiving valuable feedback that could mean the difference between a safe outcome and an unsafe one.

When offering feedback to someone with a fixed mindset, you might see them get defensive because any perceived focus on their flaws is difficult to accept. People with a growth mindset tend to welcome feedback that can help them improve.

## **Scarcity vs. Abundance Mindset**

Those living by a scarcity mindset view things as being finite, that there's never going to be enough. This mindset can also be referred to as "zero-sum," where one person's gain is another person's loss. Whether referring to wealth or information or one's place in line, scarcity mindset is driven by limitations and fear of not getting one's due portion.

In contrast, people with an abundance mindset see opportunities and possibilities rather than barriers or limitations. This mindset focuses on operating from the belief that there's plenty for everyone, that potential and creativity are the means to greater achievement.

One of the ways scarcity mindset can show up in safety is in the attitude that says, "There's nothing we can do to prevent this." Those with an abundance mindset are more likely to ask, "What can we learn from this so we're continuously improving?" An abundance mindset also looks for win-win solutions to safety problems, choosing to work with others and involve them and their perspectives.

## **Avoid vs. Approach Mindset**

When we set goals intended to avoid outcomes we don't want, we're using an avoid mindset. We may acquire a job that has a good retirement plan or health benefits so we can avoid not having enough to live comfortably when we're older.

Goals set with an approach mindset are designed to acquire something we didn't have before. We might pursue a post-graduate degree so we can get a higher-paying job or to improve our skills in our current job.

There are good reasons for both mindsets and, where safety is concerned, balancing them is important. We practice risk management so we can avoid harm or loss. But we also want to improve our risk management proficiency, so we maintain high reliability and public trust.

## **No "One Size Fits All" Mindset**

There's no one mindset that is better than another in all situations. These mindsets represent viable strategies for managing our lives. However, like most things, there can be "too much of a good thing." The one thing we must all learn and practice is flexibility. When faced with frustrating challenges, there could be an opportunity to look at things through a new lens.

Our [CAP Core Values](#) and our [CAP Safety Principles](#) serve as the foundation on which our collective safety mindset and resulting behaviors should build. From there, we work

toward consistently applying the values and principles so they show up as integral to who we are.