

[TRANSCRIPT: New Student Special Episode 3: Let's Talk About...Growing your confidence]

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[INTRO]

Hello. Welcome to UWE Bristol's Let's Talk Now *New Student Special*. As I'm sure you already know, life is full of challenges. And in a new environment, with a new city to explore, new people to meet and new and more difficult subjects to study, these challenges may feel like more than you can overcome. But we promise you, you can.

We've put together this series of podcasts to give you just that little bit of insider information into what we think you need in order to be successful, not only while you're here at UWE Bristol, but later on in your life and your career.

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[MILES THOMPSON, LECTURER, DEPARTMENT OF PSYCHOLOGY]: So if we start with 'grow' and 'growth' and what that means to you about Dweck...

[MUBARAK MOHAMUD (MO), LECTURER, BRISTOL BUSINESS SCHOOL]: This is all about the Growth Mindset stuff. This is the belief, I think, what was her name?

[MILES]: ...Carol Dweck...

[MO]: ...Miles, this is actually your topic...

[MILES]: [LAUGHTER] It's your topic!

[MO]: It's really important for me to hear from the professional...

[MILES]: No! It's funny, because when Simon first introduced me to you, we hadn't met, Simon said '*oh, there's this guy called Mo and he's doing all this amazing stuff, all these amazing podcasts and videos and stuff around Growth Mindset*' and I thought, I want to see these. What do you do in those?

[MO]: So here's the thing, Carol Dweck, to my understanding...you can correct me. There's two types of mindsets that she says. One is the Fixed Mindset, the other is the Growth Mindset. The Fixed Mindset is the belief that either you're intelligent and that you know it, or you don't. But Carol Dweck...her thesis is about that you can actually grow...and people can become more intelligent and they can actually learn. And I think that there's loads of research over the last ten, twenty years and the idea is about it really does depend on how you focus on a task. And if you honestly believe that you can grow and learn something and that by doing it and actually sucking at it to begin with and try to hone your craft, you can actually become better and better and better at it. But it does require you to acknowledge that you screwed up in this task and you can't just say *'I'm rubbish at maths'* just because you never had a go. You know what I mean?

[MO]: It's not because you're unable...and I think that in the workshops and stuff that I do, I try to sell the belief that it's possible for them. So I actually try to break down those beliefs that are limiting. Any student that says to you *'I can't do this'*. That's something really hardcore. They've said it to themselves so many times, to the point that they actually believe they're rubbish at maths, for example. And actually, it's just that they've not tried.

[MO]: Everybody sucks at everything when they first start. And it's just the case of people having the persistence and tenacity to keep sucking at it, for a little while longer, until slowly but surely they get better and they change and they learn and they learn from each small failure until it becomes something that is refined. And they actually become an expert in that eventually. So I think that this psychology or this way of thinking is really... Particularly when people have been in this mindset for a very long time and they're introduced to this idea, it's so revolutionary. It opens their minds up, it makes them think differently, it makes them think *'it's actually ok to get this horrible grade, but what I'm gonna do about this horrible grade is I'm gonna find out why I got this wrong and how I can improve this particular skill'*. And because I also talk about how students attribute a grade to who they are...and Carol Dweck says it's about the skill at hand, it's not about the person as an individual. It's the skill that we're trying to learn, whatever that may be. So in any given assignment, the mark is on the assignment, not on you, but students automatically make the link...*'oh, I got a 55, therefore I am worth a 55, therefore my university degree is gonna be a 55'*. And

what we're trying to do is...it's just a skill and you're just gonna have to hone it...can you elaborate on what I'm saying?

[MILES]: ...no! There's not a huge amount to elaborate on, just because what you say is so spot on. But you're exactly right. That's exactly what Dweck talks about. This difference between Growth Mindset and Fixed Mindset. And one of the things that she's started talking about, slightly more recently, is she has this phrase *'the power of yet'*. And what she means by *'the power of yet'* is that when people get a grade back and it's not a grade they're happy with – and for some people that'll be a 70, for some people it'd be a 60, for some people a 55, a 50, a 45...different people's levels are different.

[MILES]: And as you say, at that point what they often say is *'oh, I can't do this, I can't do this topic, I can't do this degree, I can't...'* and the *'I'* is important in that - they take it on themselves. And one of the ways that Dweck likes to break that is...*'well, you can't do it yet, but that doesn't mean that you're not gonna be able to do it in the future'*. But the trouble with the Fixed Mindset is that there's this absolute notion of *'I can't do these things'* and that's the trap of the Fixed Mindset.

[MILES]: What Dweck talks about is that people think they just have a finite amount of talent, a finite amount of ability and they can't grow that, they can't get beyond that, they can't expand that and again. People often don't realise they fall into this trap. It's not an assumption that they've deliberately taken upon themselves and so there they are, in their own minds, going *'I can't do this, this is embarrassing, this is worrying'*. And so they just isolate more and stop engaging and that's where the revolution of the Growth Mindset is.

[MILES]: If your head is like that and your mind is telling you that, then let's show you some evidence, let's show you what can happen. Let's show you data about what happens if you practice, what happens if you go, as you rightly say, *'this is just an assignment...this isn't me...this is just the assignment.'* *'If I put more work in, if I put more effort in, then these skills can improve, they can move forward'*. And as you rightly say, we all suck at everything to begin with...

[MO]: [laughter]...my whole life story, Miles, is that. I went to college the first time round and I just sucked at everything. And it was like: *'I'm not good at this, I'm not good at this, I'm not good at this'*. And it took other people to say: *'why do*

*you keep saying that? You've tried this thing like once and you did terribly, like what's going on?'. Until somebody dared me and said: 'you fail this 100 times and I'll give you x amount'. And I tried it and I got it right the fourth or fifth time. And I was like: 'OK! So this is what it's all about! OK! I've actually got to do this several times over'. And I think people, it's not in people's repertoire to be thinking 'you know what, I need to do this a number of times over to actually hone and refine this skill'.*

[MILES]: People have these funny ideas about talent and sometimes they pick up these messages from society that talent is born and it's fixed and it's in-built and it can't be touched...

[MO]: ...you have it or you don't...

[MILES]: ...you have it or you don't. *'I'm good at this or I'm not'*. And it's just not true, every skill that we end up being good at, we are awful at to begin with and we just gradually get better. There's great data that supports this as well. There's a famous study which looked at concert violinists. It was kind of going what separates concert violinists, the people who are in the best orchestras in the world, who are soloists, from people who were in those orchestras but weren't soloists, from people who went to music college but for whatever reason aren't in those national or international orchestras.. What separates them? What's the difference? Is it because they had a different number of teachers, is it that their parents pushed them in a different way, is it because they played a number of different instruments? Is there talent somehow in-built? And when they looked at all the different factors, the thing they found was just that the international soloists had practiced more. It was just more hours practiced. And weirdly, you might have heard this, that any skill you're gonna be at international level, you have to put in 10,000 hours of practice - and that's where that number comes from...these violinists. So violinists, by the time they got to be international soloists, they'd put in 10,000 hours of practice, whereas the people who were in the orchestras but weren't soloists, 8,000 hours, and the people who because music teachers...

[MO]: ...it was a clear correlation between the two...

[MILES]: ...yes. It's just the amount of time and effort you put in. The amount of times you fail, you fall down, you pick yourself up and you keep going. And it's such an important skill for students. And weirdly, one of the reasons it can be

really important at university is quite often students might have had a decent run through their GCSEs, a decent run through their A-levels. They might have hit a ceiling, they might not have started getting back marks...

[MO]: ...that make them feel a little bit insecure...and this is probably the first time that they get...what to them...feels like a kick in the teeth.

[MILES]: ...exactly. Because so far they've been going *'I'm great, I'm brilliant, I'm good at this, this is going well'* and then suddenly it's like *'wow, maybe I'm not so good, maybe I'm not so brilliant'*.

[MO]: ...and this is why I love this video because it does show that, in their past, they have sucked at something, they were nervous at something, they were hesitant at something. They were in a scenario where it was really uncomfortable. But here's the thing - university demands that of you daily. In order for you to really grow and evolve and shed the skin of your previous self, you do really need to be feeling...I wouldn't say totally uncomfortable...but I would say that you need to accept that you need to grow.

[MILES]: Completely. The university journey has to be about going *'here's my comfort zone...oh, this is tricky...and now here's me moving beyond it'*. And as you say, like shedding your skin and trying it out. There are gonna be things you're good at, and bad at and that's part of the journey.

[MO]: Oh yeah, we've both seen students go from year 1 to year 3 and they're just so different when they're leaving. I mean, the first year they come in, they're nervous...malnourished, dare I say it, don't really know what's going on and all that sort of stuff. And then they finish their university degree and they're young men and women, grown exponentially. And speaking and thinking more mature. And you do see some students that don't really engage as much and it's a tell-tale sign....they've decided to not risk, not give out their whole self...

[MILES]: And this is one of the funny things about what Dweck says. If you are of a Fixed Mindset kind of persuasion, then the risk is that you really do believe that your talent and your skills and your creativity is limited and it reflects on you. And then what you often do is you try and hide that from the world, from other people and even from yourself. So then you don't put yourself in a situation where you might be exposed. You don't put yourself in a situation

where you may get a low mark, where you may fail, or you may trip up, or you may stumble. And so you end up limiting yourself. Whereas actually, what Dweck says, and what we've been talking about before is...put yourself in those positions...allow yourself to trip...allow yourself to get the feedback about how you do things differently next time. Fail better...

[MO]: Absolutely, it's testament to a students' resilience. ...In the first two or three weeks, they are so hesitant and reserved and I deliberately pick on the most shy person...*so-and-so, can you stand up and tell me about what I just said* and it's really difficult and they're really anxious and nervous. But two or three weeks in, suddenly they're like *'right, I'm gonna tell him'*. By the end of the course, they haven't only developed a whole new set of concepts because of what I teach...but also, they're just different people. It does sometimes take a poke from somebody to get it out of them. And I think that's also quite helpful sometimes... But, if students could do that on their own volition, from Day One....because they come to me at third year and they're still a little bit behind the desk. And I think, if only they just imagined what type of student they'd be if they just decided: *I'm gonna throw myself in this. I don't mind making myself a little bit of a fool, I don't mind actually failing, I'm gonna roll with this and see how I can develop and evolve as a person...*

[MILES]: ...and that's what these podcasts are about really. It's about us trying to give students the permission and responsibility and just the idea that actually, so much of this is in their control, so much of this is up to them, if they can just give themselves permission to just expand, and to try and to experiment and to trip up and fail, but then to fail better the next time and get better going forward, then their university journey's gonna be so much richer and broader and more important to them.

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