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Think Like a Matador

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Lupita López's great-grandfather, grandfather, father and brother were all bullfighters. But she has surpassed each of them: She's the only one who has attained full matador status.

Bullfighting is an unusual career choice for a woman in 2013, as it was in centuries past. López is one of just four active professional female bullfighters in the world. Now 34, López started waving her cape at bulls more than 20 years ago. She was a young girl of 11 in her native Yucatán when she faced her first bull.

"It was exciting to see the calf watching me," she reveals. It was thrilling *"to see it stir up dust and pebbles from the ground and hear it snort. I felt like my life had acquired meaning."*

"Meaning?" you might ask, with a quizzical look on your face. What kind of meaning can a person find in staring down a 1,000-pound bull, as López regularly does, since she was awarded the title of matador in 2011? Especially considering she's been gored three times. Still, matadors and spectators both agree that the great physical danger inherent in bullfighting is part of its allure.

Finding financial support is a grueling sport of its own, since there's no organized system of grants for young bullfighters in Mexico. Also, the barriers for entry for women are higher than the church steeple.

"Female matadors have experienced considerable resistance and public hostility from aficionados and other matadors, perhaps being seen as a less physically nimble gender than the established norm," reports Wikipedia. López adds: *"As women, we get treated better, but at the same time there is always someone who wants to take advantage of that situation, in all manners of speaking."*

All these reasons made López's attainment of matador status that much sweeter: *"I felt that if at that instant I would die, I would die feeling fulfilled,"* she said. *"This is no small task."*

How could a young girl whose aunts had wrung their hands in anguish when she entered the bullring realize such a momentous achievement?

OUR BELIEFS SHAPE OUR REALITY

According to personality and motivation researcher Dr. Carol Dweck, our beliefs shape *every* part of our lives. *"Whether we believe we can do it or not, we're right,"* said Henry Ford at the beginning of the 20th century. Dweck's research over the past 20 years confirms his perspective.

In her book, *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success*, Dweck describes two different kinds of beliefs that frame the inner voice that's constantly whispering in our ears.

FIXED MINDSET

Dweck calls one set of beliefs a *fixed mindset*, where being perfect is the definition of success. Thus we worry a great deal about failing because missteps demonstrate that we're not the person we believe we *should* be.



Source: freeclipartnow.com.

With a fixed mindset we believe our qualities are set in stone; whatever talents and intelligence we were born with is what we have for life. If something in our lives is flawed, it's because we're imperfect.

Fearing failure, a woman with a fixed mindset might say: *"Nah, I can't play that game. I've never been good at hitting a ball."* Or a man might concede, *"I can't deliver that speech. I'm not a good public speaker."* And Lupita López would have thrown in the towel after she was gored by the first bull. Or maybe she might never have walked into a bullring because she wasn't perfect.

GROWTH MINDSET

On the other hand, when we have a growth mindset we believe our qualities are malleable: we can change and grow to achieve our goals. If something in our lives is flawed, we consider what we can do to change the situation. Success is doing our best, learning and improving. Stumbling is a wake-up call to apply resources to get what we want.

Our inner voice frequently asks, *"What can I learn from this situation?"* and *"How can I improve?"* Instead of forgoing a golf game, we might sign up for lessons. Instead of declining the opportunity to deliver a presentation, we might decide to be coached or join Toastmasters, a public speaking club. Instead of seeing stumbles as a black mark, we see them as an opportunity to adopt different habits that will help us become more successful and happier.

HOW CAN WE CHANGE OUR MINDSET?

We can change our beliefs any time, Dweck claims. It's about flipping the switch, so we hear a different voice inside our heads.

The best way to hear new answers is to ask ourselves different questions. Instead of asking: *"How do I measure up?"* start posing questions like these:

- What are the opportunities for learning and growth today?
- When, where, and how will I embark on a plan to get what I want?
- What will I do to maintain and continue my growth?

EXAMINE YOUR BELIEFS

We learn by examining our personal beliefs, argues Dweck, and by choosing to take different actions, along with developing new habits that might better serve us. Hence, I invite you to consider:

- *In which parts of your life have you employed a fixed mindset, judging yourself for how you measure up?*
- *How has judging yourself impacted the results you've achieved, and how you felt?*
- *In which parts of your life have you employed a growth mindset, questioning how you can change and grow to attain the results you desire?*
- *In the past, how has considering ways to change and grow helped you achieve the results you wanted, and how you felt?*
- *In what part of your career might you consider applying a growth mindset? And in what part of your personal life?*

In closing, please remember that while neither you nor I might aspire to become a matador like Lupita López, adjusting our beliefs *can* help us to be more successful in the office and at home. And perhaps help us achieve our heart's desires. ●

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