



EMPath

Economic Mobility Pathways



Harnessing the Power of High Expectations:

USING BRAIN SCIENCE TO COACH
FOR BREAKTHROUGH OUTCOMES

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Executive Summary

In the face of increasingly intractable poverty and a widening gap between the rich and poor, government and nonprofit programs are searching for new ways to make their interventions more effective. Many organizations are turning to emerging evidence, from the social and biological sciences, showing the clear impacts of poverty, trauma, and oppression on the ways people develop, think, and behave. They are taking this science and designing new interventions, such as goals-based coaching. The early results are in: some of these coaching interventions are producing highly promising outcomes.

Coaching, however, doesn't take place in a vacuum. It takes place within a larger societal context, which includes public narratives and stereotypes about people: their abilities, motivations, and likelihood of success. Both mentors¹ and participants² bring with them pre-conceived mindsets and expectations about the likelihood of success. Research shows that such mindsets and expectations have a significant impact on the outcomes of the coaching process. The impact of mindset and expectations is so great, in fact, that it can be the single most significant factor for successful coaching. In other words, we can train mentors all we like about the coaching process, but unless they start off with the right mindsets and high expectations for their participants'

Coaching is a self-fulfilling prophecy.

success, no matter how well the staff are trained or how good the tools they use, they and their participants are far less likely to succeed.

The research is clear. Coaching is a self-fulfilling prophecy. Participants are usually only as successful as their mentors believe they can be.

Unfortunately, it is often not easy for mentors to have high expectations for their participants, especially when their participants face significant life challenges. For mentors to have high expectations and hold onto them over time, their organizations must provide meaningful ongoing support.

This brief describes what science has to say about the ways in which people are influenced by prevailing stereotypes and the importance of high expectations in overcoming such biases. It will show the reasons why it is hard for many staff and participants to have high expectations and to achieve meaningful goals. Most importantly, it will describe the organizational practices that evidence and actual experience suggest can help mentors and participants maintain high expectations and thereby achieve more powerful outcomes.

1 Throughout this brief, for ease of convenience, the term "mentor" will be used to encompass those individuals who exercise most influence over our personal development, such as parents, caregivers, teachers, coaches, professional advisors, and managers.

2 As this brief is primarily discussing high expectations within the context of human services—and to avoid confusion in terminology—those who are being mentored will be referred to as "participants" rather than "mentees." However, it is important to note that the dynamics surrounding high expectations discussed in this paper are thought to apply generally across numerous settings, including education, health care, and employment.

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Cite as: Babcock, Elisabeth (2018).
Harnessing the Power of High Expectations: Using Brain Science to Coach for Breakthrough Outcomes.
Boston: Economic Mobility Pathways.

"The greatest good you can do for another is not just to share your riches but to reveal to him his own."
—Benjamin Disraeli

Introduction

There are more than 353,936 nonprofit human service delivery organizations in the United Statesⁱ serving more than 129 million people trapped in poverty.ⁱⁱ In almost every case, these are deeply caring professional organizations, delivering services designed to help hardworking people improve their conditions and make better lives for themselves and their families. And yet, in too many cases, both the people and the organizations that serve them fail to achieve the outcomes they dreamed of—leaving their reservoir of hopes diminished and their poverty as intractable as ever.

Why does this happen? Why do programs often fail to fully engage participants and help them achieve their goals? Why do participants often fail to follow through and succeed in the things they so desperately want to achieve?

It is well known that living in poverty is extremely challenging and stressful. It is also known that such stresses often make it harder for people to optimize the decision-making and behavior-management skills most needed to fully engage and persist in programs that might help them.ⁱⁱⁱ In fact, many organizations are now using what brain science³ tells us about the ways poverty impacts our thoughts and behavior to strengthen program design and achieve better outcomes.^{iv} They are increasingly incorporating evidence-based approaches—such as motivational interviewing, cognitive behavioral therapy, and trauma-informed care—and goals-based coaching into their work.^v

Science also suggests that there may be more holding people back than just the impact of poverty-related stress. It shows that environment plays a powerful role in shaping our fundamental sense of self—who we are, where we belong in society, and what we can expect to achieve. Science shows that people are highly influenced by environmental cues. When those cues suggest that they are unlikely to succeed, their outcomes are not as strong as those with more positive external reinforcement.

In this way, environmental cues become a self-fulfilling prophecy. People become what the world suggests they should and can be. And if what people are hearing and seeing is not encouraging, they are less likely to get ahead.

Science shows that people are highly influenced by environmental cues.

3 The term "brain science" is used in this paper as an umbrella term capturing research from the behavioral, social, and biological sciences on the ways in which brain-based human behavior, cognition, and development are impacted by environmental factors.

Environment Influences Expectations

ENVIRONMENTAL CUES

We now know that human beings are much more influenced by environmental cues than past generations ever realized. The work of behavioral scientists such as Daniel Kahneman (Nobel Prize in Economics) and Amos Tversky, demonstrates the often surprising, and in many cases unconscious, ways our thinking and behavior can be affected by what happens around us.

For example, in one study, Kahneman and Tversky looked at German judges with an average of more than fifteen years' experience on the bench. These judges were asked to read a narrative describing the circumstances of a woman who had been caught shoplifting. The judges were then asked to roll a pair of dice that were loaded so that each roll would show either a total of three or nine. Finally, they were asked to make a recommendation on how many months the woman should spend in prison. Those judges who rolled the nine recommended an average sentence of eight months; judges who rolled a three recommended an average sentence of five months. In other words, simply by introducing an irrelevant roll of the dice, the sentences given by seasoned judges were impacted by more than 50 percent.^{vi}



Another foundational study was done by psychologist John Bargh of New York University. Bargh asked students to write several short sentences using a set of five words. One group of students was given five words associated with the elderly (e.g. "Florida," "forgetful," "bald," "gray," or "wrinkled"), and the other group of students was given words that had no association with old age. After the students had completed their writing assignments, they were sent out to do another task down the hall, while researchers measured the time it took both groups of students to reach their next location. Researchers found that students who had composed sentences using words associated with old age walked significantly slower than the other students. Again, simply by introducing a short writing exercise that surfaced thoughts of aging, researchers were able to alter the walking patterns of the students, and the changes were completely unconscious.^{vii}

Both of these studies are cornerstone examples of a now well-established behavioral phenomenon known as "**priming.**" Priming shows how significantly environmental cues unconsciously affect our thinking and behavior. We tend to think of ourselves as rational beings making conscious decisions about almost all our actions, but research on priming shows that our actions are often influenced, sometimes in important ways, by environmental factors beyond our awareness.

When environmental cues reinforce stereotypes about categories of people and their potential (so-called "**stereotype priming**"), they can dramatically impact people's chances of success.

STEREOTYPE PRIMING

One example of stereotype priming and its impact can be found in research on gender and race and their effect on mathematical performance. In 1999, in a very creatively designed study, Harvard Professor Margaret Shih and colleagues examined how the prevailing American stereotypes that women are **worse** at math than men, and Asians are **better** at math than other racial groups, impact math performance. In the study, researchers asked college students to complete information about themselves prior to taking a math test. In one group, the students were asked to give information about their gender; in another group, students were asked to give information about their race; in the final group, the students were not asked to give information about their gender or race.

The results showed that Asian women who took the math tests did significantly **worse** than the control group when they had provided information that reminded them of their gender. Asian women did significantly **better** than the control group when they had provided information about their Asian origin. In other words, the priming of the gender and racial stereotypes directly influenced their outcomes, sometimes for better and sometimes for worse.^{viii}

This original research has been widely replicated, and in an even more interesting twist, additional research has shown that highlighting a person's racial identity alone can have both positive and negative priming effects. In 2005, Shih and her colleagues replicated their original study and expanded it, this time by studying how prevailing assumptions about Asian students would impact their performance on mathematics and verbal tests. (A common American stereotype is that Asians are weaker in verbal ability than mathematics).

When Asian students were asked their race prior to taking **mathematics tests**, they performed significantly **better** than Asian students who had not been asked their race. However, when the students were asked their race prior to taking **verbal skills tests**, they performed significantly **worse** than those Asian students who had not been asked to identify their race. By priming Asian students with prevailing stereotypes, the researchers directly influenced performance both positively (on math tests) and negatively (on verbal tests).^{ix}

Other studies have similarly demonstrated that stereotype priming can affect more than just performance on tests: they also have been proven to influence learning, self-control, aggressive behavior, decision-making, and even gender diversity in STEM fields.^x

We are still learning the reasons stereotypes exert such control over us, but much of the current research suggests that it relates to the stresses that they either alleviate or create.

It appears that when we think about a negative stereotype that may pertain to us (a so-called "stereotype threat"), it creates stress. And when we are subjected to stereotype stress, it creates a bandwidth tax that decreases our working memory, analytic abilities, and personal control.^{xixii} Much has been written on the ways that "toxic" levels of stress affect human development, health, thinking, and behavior, but research on stereotype threat shows that even small doses of stress—so small that we may not be aware of them—are significant enough to create measureable impacts on our performance and life outcomes.^{xiii}

As eminent social psychologist and former Provost of Columbia University Claude M. Steele states:

[a] strong working consensus as to how stereotype threat affects us is emerging. It's this: stereotype and identity threats—these contingencies of identity—increase vigilance toward possible threat and bad consequences in the social environment, which diverts attention and mental capacity away from the task at hand, which worsens performance and general functioning, all of which further exacerbates anxiety, which further intensifies the vigilance for threat and the diversion of attention. A full-scale vicious cycle ensues, with great cost to performance and general functioning.^{xiv}

EFFECTS OF MENTOR EXPECTATIONS

Often our most important environmental cues come from people we trust, admire, and respect: mentors such as our parents, caregivers, teachers, coaches, managers, and professional advisors. Their expectations of us, studies show, can be singularly impactful. When mentors believe in us, we rise to their expectations; when they do not, we struggle to reach our full potential.

In the mid-1960s, Professor Robert Rosenthal of Harvard University conducted an experiment that laid the foundation for all subsequent research on the power of mentor expectations—a phenomenon now referred to as **"The Rosenthal Effect"** or "The Pygmalion Effect." In the study, Rosenthal partnered with the South San Francisco School District to look at the impact of teacher expectations on student performance. He told teachers that children sometimes experience a process of "blooming," in which they undergo a leap of intellectual growth within a short period of time. He told the teachers he planned to study blooming by administering intelligence tests to their students at the beginning and end of the school year. The test at the beginning of the year would predict which students were most likely to "bloom" and at the end of the year, the tests would measure the intellectual growth of all their students and validate the degree to which the "bloomers" had shown stronger than average gains.

In the fall, all students took the TOGA (Test of General Ability) standardized intelligence test and afterwards the teachers were given the names of their students who were likely to bloom during the year. At the end of the school year, the TOGA was again administered and the students who were predicted to bloom showed significantly higher gains on the TOGA than the other students.

But there was a catch: Rosenthal had rigged the study. The TOGA could not predict blooming, and the 20 percent of students labeled as bloomers at the beginning of the year had been selected entirely at random. By telling the teachers the names of the students, researchers had raised teachers' expectations about the randomly selected students' performance, and because the teachers expected the bloomers to be particularly successful, they were.^{xv}

This study spurred widespread investigation into the impact of teacher expectations on student outcomes, which Rosenthal later synthesized in a meta-analysis of 464 of the most rigorous studies. What he found was that on average across all the studies, when all other factors were controlled for, **teacher expectations accounted for 30 percent of the changes (positive or negative) in student performance.** In other words, teachers held personal beliefs about the

ability of their students, and these beliefs helped or hindered student performance by an average of 30 percent.^{xvi}

The meta-analysis also showed that teachers' expectations influenced their own behavior in four key ways (ranked by order of impact on student performance):

1. Climate: Teachers created warmer socio-emotional climate for their "special" students (students for whom they had high expectations), through both verbal and non-verbal cues.^{xvii}
2. Input: Teachers taught more material and more difficult material to their "special" students.
3. Output: Teachers encouraged "special" students to respond more and gave more time for responses.
4. Feedback: Teachers gave "special" students more feedback, both verbally and non-verbally, on their performance.



Research on expectations has expanded beyond teachers to include other mentors such as managers, health care providers, justice department employees, and more. The research all shows that the perceptions influential people in our lives have of our abilities exert significant influence over our outcomes across a wide variety of domains.^{xviii} In fact, this holds true even for individuals diagnosed with schizophrenia (a condition which can significantly compromise the ability to effectively understand external cues and engage with others). Schizophrenic patients whose case managers had positive expectations of their abilities to work were employed 70 percent more days (over a two-year period) than patients whose case managers had low expectations.^{xix}

It is also valuable to note that sometimes mentors' expectations are not just held about individuals, but carry over to entire groups. For example, research has shown that teachers can be categorized by the degree to which they hold high or low expectations for how their entire class is likely to perform. Teacher expectations of classes have an even more powerful effect on student performance than expectations of individual students. The reasons appear to be that when teachers believe that all students have the ability to learn, the teachers consistently create classrooms with encouraging climates, introduce more challenging content across the board, and create stronger mechanisms for student input and feedback. Overall, these environments appear to lift all students and have the greatest positive impact on students who might otherwise be expected (based on prior school performance and other social and demographic factors) to have the greatest challenges in the classroom.^{xx}

Unfortunately, mentors also have expectations for entire societal groups. It has been consistently demonstrated that teachers' expectations are lower for students of color and for those who are from low-income families. These differences in expectations have direct impacts on student outcomes.^{xxi}

The combined weight of stereotype threat and low mentor expectations can be very difficult to overcome. As discussed earlier, this pressure diminishes our internal analytic thinking (our ability to weigh and accept or reject the cues we receive) and causes us to be more externally driven and reactive. This pressure causes individuals from lower socio-economic-status (SES) groups to be more sensitive than higher SES individuals to external cues such as facial expressions, and therefore more readily influenced by even subtle positive or negative mentor cues. They express lower sense of personal control, intrinsic motivation, and trust; and they give a higher weight to external factors, rather than personal reasons for their failure or success.^{xxii}

Our ability to engage, and achieve, is highly contingent on our sense of whether or not we are likely to be successful.

Our ability to engage, and achieve, is highly contingent on our sense of whether or not we are likely to be successful. **If we are members of a stigmatized group, we are not only more likely to receive negative cues about our potential, but we are also more likely to believe those cues and less likely to feel our efforts will be successful.**

THE IMPORTANCE OF GROWTH MINDSET IN FORMING MENTOR EXPECTATIONS

One of the key ways in which people's expectations are shaped is by their beliefs in the abilities of individuals to grow and change. In general, people's beliefs about this seem to fall somewhere along a spectrum: at one end is the belief that most people are born with an inherent set of abilities and little can be done to substantively alter them (a "fixed mindset"); at the other end is the belief that people are born with significant abilities to learn and improve, and the degree to which they do so is a function of how much they invest in building their skills (a "growth mindset"). For example, people with a highly **fixed mindset** believe that individuals are born with a certain level of intelligence, math ability, or ability to play an instrument, and nothing much can be done to change this. Those with a strong **growth mindset** believe that people are born with certain differences in their abilities, but the amount of work they put into practice and learning has a much greater impact on their ultimate skills and who they become than any genetic endowments or gifts they may possess at birth.

Unfortunately, mindsets mirror the other stereotypes that permeate our society. People with lower SES are more likely than those of higher SES to believe that humans are born with characteristics and talents unlikely to change much over time (fixed mindset) and such beliefs have been shown to have significant impact on their life outcomes. One recent study of more than 125,000 California students in grades four through seven showed that students' mindsets differed by race and poverty status. The impact of a moving from a fixed to a neutral mindset on low-income students' outcomes was estimated to be equivalent to gaining 19 days of school.^{xxiv}

Another national study of over 168,000 students in the tenth grade showed that students from the lowest income families were more than twice as likely to have a fixed mindset as those from the highest income families. Even more strikingly, the small number of low-income students who had managed to acquire a growth mindset scored, on average, at the level of students whose families earned 13 times more (80th percentile of earnings) on language and math tests. The authors of this research concluded that mindset is a more important predictor of success for low-income students than for their high-income peers, and that "fixed mindset is more debilitating (and growth mindset is more protective) when individuals must overcome significant barriers to succeed."^{xxv}

Beliefs about mindset are particularly important in the work of mentors because mentors, such as teachers, managers, and coaches, are the people in our lives who not only provide some of our strongest cues as to who we are and **what** we can expect to achieve, but they are also the ones who provide us with crucial information about **how** to achieve it.

When mentors have fixed mindsets, they will often tell their students or employees that the top performers did well because they are naturally "stars" and the poorer performers did badly because they lack the talent necessary to excel. This can serve to de-motivate both stars and poorer performers as it undervalues the reality that hard work is what contributes most to outcomes. In managerial contexts, it can lead to strategies of trying to find the perfect employee (the stars) and underinvesting in the development of staff capacities. This, in turn, has been shown to decrease employees' satisfaction and perceptions of manager quality and fairness, as well as diminish organizational success.^{xxvi}

We need mentors who have high expectations for us.



In order to become more successful, we all need mentors who give us a positive sense of who we are, and who tell us that our hard work is likely to pay off. We need to hear from our mentors what science is actually saying:

- IQ and skills are not fixed; they are a reflection of our life experience and our opportunities to learn and practice.
- Brain wiring is built through practice; hard work and challenges grow brain wiring and grow skills.
- There certainly are periods in our lives when building brain wiring is easier to do, but our ability to learn and grow never stops; we can always build new brain wiring and skills.

We need mentors who have high expectations for us because the science is clear: people rise to their mentors' expectations and if those expectations are low, participant outcomes will be too.

It Is Extremely Challenging for Mentors to Maintain High Expectations

Unfortunately, it is not easy for mentors to have high expectations for their participants, especially those participants who have encountered the greatest obstacles to success. The reasons for this are numerous, logical, and often extremely challenging to overcome.

Holding high expectations for participants in human service programs often flies in the face of overwhelming facts and data. How are mentors supposed to believe that program participants can be successful at achieving goals when the average participant is not? When the prevailing data demonstrates that only about one out of four people born into poverty in the US ever gets out, completes a public community college degree close to on time, or accumulates even \$500 in net assets, why is it logical for staff in anti-poverty, community college, or financial literacy programs to expect that their participants will be successful?^{xxvii} Staff know the facts, and when the factual odds are stacked three-to-one against participants, one could argue that they would have to be less than fully rational to expect participant success.

There is also the problem that mentors, just like their participants, are highly influenced by prevailing environmental cues and stereotypes. Those messages are often discouraging of high expectations. For example, one study of college students' attitudes found that they believed the poor significantly more likely to be "angry," "dirty," "unpleasant," and "violent" than the middle class, and they believed them less likely to be "family oriented," "hardworking," "moral," and "responsible."^{xxviii}

Another meta-analysis of 36 rigorous studies on public attitudes toward those with behavioral health challenges found consistent negative bias against individuals with conditions such as depression, ADHD, substance abuse, and schizophrenia. Public perceptions were that people with such diagnoses were more likely to be "dangerous," "violent," "lazy," and "less competent" than those without such mental health conditions.^{xxix}

Other studies show that news media coverage of people of color tend to disproportionately portray them as "criminal" and "dangerous." In print and television journalism, "African Americans are more likely to be depicted as criminals than whites, are more likely to be discussed with prejudicial information, are shown at a rate inconsistent with real-world statistics," and such coverage has been proven to directly influence public attitudes about race.^{xxx}

Mentors are aware of negative stereotypes. In a recent training on coaching practices that EMPATH provided for human service workers and leaders from organizations across the US, attendees were asked to list the most common messages they hear describing the people they serve (see Illustration 1: photo of actual training session responses). The phrases they listed included: "you have no work ethic," "you are inferior to those with money," "you're dumb," "you brought it upon yourself," "what's the point?" "you can't go to college," and "you [just] have to survive." The attendees said that the impact of such messages were that they were "internalized" and produced "lack of motivation," "disengage[ment]," "frustration," "anger," "re-trauma[tization]," and "little belief [in the ability] to get out of [their] situation."^{xxxi}

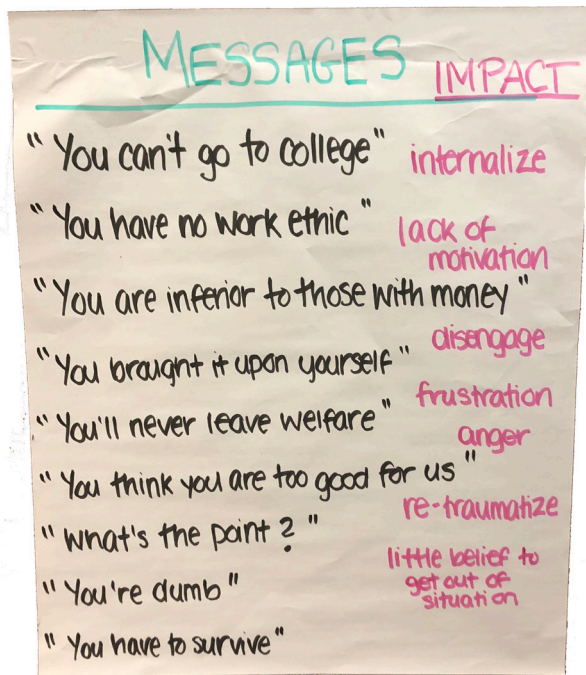


Illustration 1

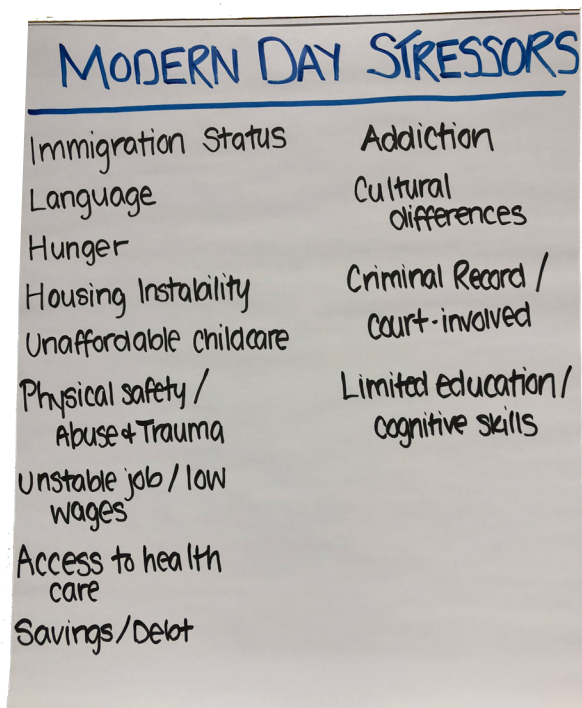


Illustration 2

If negative external messages about their participants' likelihood of success are not enough to diminish mentor expectations, there are the omnipresent challenges presented by the situations the participants are in and their reactions to them. Because of their experiences with systemic oppression, lack of opportunity, and negative stereotypes, participants often come to their mentors demoralized, depressed, and with little sense of self-efficacy. And research shows that depression, anxiety, and the stresses of poverty can directly affect peoples' abilities to invest in longer-term goals.^{xxxii}

Additionally, participants face many real and serious obstacles to completing their goals. In Illustration 2: "Modern Day Stressors" (created at the same training as Illustration 1), we see some of the myriad life challenges, including hunger, work volatility, criminal records, abuse, and lack of childcare, that mentors encounter with virtually every participant. Such obstacles are often frustrating and extremely difficult to resolve, and serve as major barriers to participant achievement. They can cause mentors to become worn down, reassess the goals that have been set, and lessen their expectations. In some cases, mentors also feel the need to shift from spending time on how best to help participants move ahead, to providing sympathy, comfort, and rationalization for the participants' lack of achievement.^{xxxiii}

Such tendencies to lessen expectations and shift to protection against further participant losses (so called "stabilization" strategies) are completely expected: it is human nature to protect against loss. Decades of research in behavioral economics and psychology demonstrate that people are inherently loss averse and tend to focus on protecting the status quo. When given a choice, human beings generally fight harder to prevent losses than

to make gains.^{xxxiv,xxxv} It is completely natural for mentors to want to protect against participant losses as opposed to taking on the challenges and risks of setting high goals to make substantive life changes.

Having high expectations for their participants and truly believing that they can make significant gains pose real professional and personal risks for mentors. First, there is the personal risk associated with believing in their participants and having those beliefs dashed if a participant is not successful. It is easy in such circumstances for mentors to feel like failures or to feel that they were wrong to hold high expectations. Second, there is often professional risk associated with setting goals and expectations that, when not achieved, can create a professional record of the mentors "falling short." Organizations are increasingly measuring and often setting targets for participant achievements. If participant outcomes are not good, staff often fear they will be blamed or face other negative professional consequences.

It is therefore easier (and according to loss aversion theory, much more natural) for mentors to keep their expectations low, argue for low achievement targets, and to work to "stabilize" participants (protect against further participant loss) rather than "catalyze" participants and push for stronger gains.

We at EMPath see ample evidence of this in our own work. Without a doubt, the single most common refrain we hear as we train and mentor human service workers and leaders is, **"You don't understand, my people can't do that!!"** The list of things "my people can't" do is exhaustive: staff believe their participants can't be expected to save money, eliminate debt, go back to college, get a better job, complete training programs, maintain sobriety, get therapy, pay rent on time, and many more.

We are told this by our own staff, even after they have had extensive training on the brain science of poverty, coaching techniques, and goal-setting. We are told this by staff and leaders in partner organizations we train. "My people can't do that" is the most automatic reaction to any new implementation of coaching with which EMPath is involved.

The second most common reaction EMPath gets when training new staff on coaching is, "You're setting the goals for participants too high." Staff routinely ask, "Why does the Bridge to Self-Sufficiency® (EMPath's core framework for goal-setting) have as its end goal the status of being completely economically independent and in a family-sustaining job? That's too high. My people can't do that. If they are given goal-setting frameworks that suggest they should try, they will only get overwhelmed and depressed. You're going to lose people if they think you expect that much of them."

Another problem with creating and maintaining high expectations in mentors is that such expectations are not effective if they are "faked."^{xxxvi} As was previously discussed, high expectations are conveyed in a number of ways, including: verbal and non-verbal cues, the nature of the materials used, the level of work tackled, and the goals set within a program setting. It is therefore virtually impossible to be successful at creating true high expectations in mentors through anything as simple as training alone. Staff can read and hear about the importance of having high expectations, and such exposure may begin to alter their perspectives, but when they return to their work, the same environmental messages, participant needs, and natural loss aversion dominate and overwhelm the impact of training. Therefore, it is not surprising

that studies of ways to mitigate bias and improve expectations show that single-intervention strategies such as training alone do not create lasting impacts, and that to be successful, intervention strategies must be multi-faceted.^{xxxvii}

To summarize, there are many reasons why it is exceedingly difficult for mentors to have high expectations for their participants:

- The weight of data showing that people in poverty who try to make substantive gains are rarely successful;
- The saturation of prevailing stereotypes which, at best, often depict participants as lacking the personal characteristics necessary for success and, at worst, often characterize participants as detrimental to society;
- The overwhelming personal and life challenges daily faced by participants;
- The documented tendency of people to protect against loss rather than take risks to gain something better;
- And the professional and personal risks involved in mentors' having high hopes and expectations for their participants.

However, there is no getting around it: mentors' high expectations for their participants are crucially important. When mentors do not have high expectations for their participants, the coaching process can be over before it has even started. But when mentors have high expectations for what participants can accomplish, that belief alone can become a life-changing boost (often a 30 percent advantage) to future success.^{xxxviii} In fact, studies in education settings have shown that teacher expectations can have a greater impact on student outcomes than classroom size or the students' race or income.^{xxxix} So it is critical for programs wanting to make substantive change in people's lives to seek ways to create and fortify the high expectations of their staff.

When mentors do not have high expectations for their participants, the coaching process can be over before it has even started.

Early EMPATH Evidence on Staff and Participant Mindsets and Expectations

In order to learn more about mindsets and expectations of human service workers and participants, EMPATH conducted a survey of its own staff (n=46) and participants (107), as well as the staff of EMPATH's **Economic Mobility Exchange™** (n=119), a network of organizations across the US and four other countries learning about and implementing aspects of EMPATH's mentoring model, Mobility Mentoring®. EMPATH staff and participants were asked questions relating to their own personal mindset and goal-setting, and Economic Mobility Exchange (Exchange) staff were asked questions relating to the mindset and goal-setting of their organizations. The first four questions were based upon standardized mindset evaluation survey instruments.^{x1} A fifth question, which assessed goal-setting preferences and risk aversion, asked respondents to show their degree of agreement with the statement "It is worse to set goals too high than too low" (see Box A below).

BOX A: GROWTH MINDSET AND GOAL-SETTING QUESTIONS

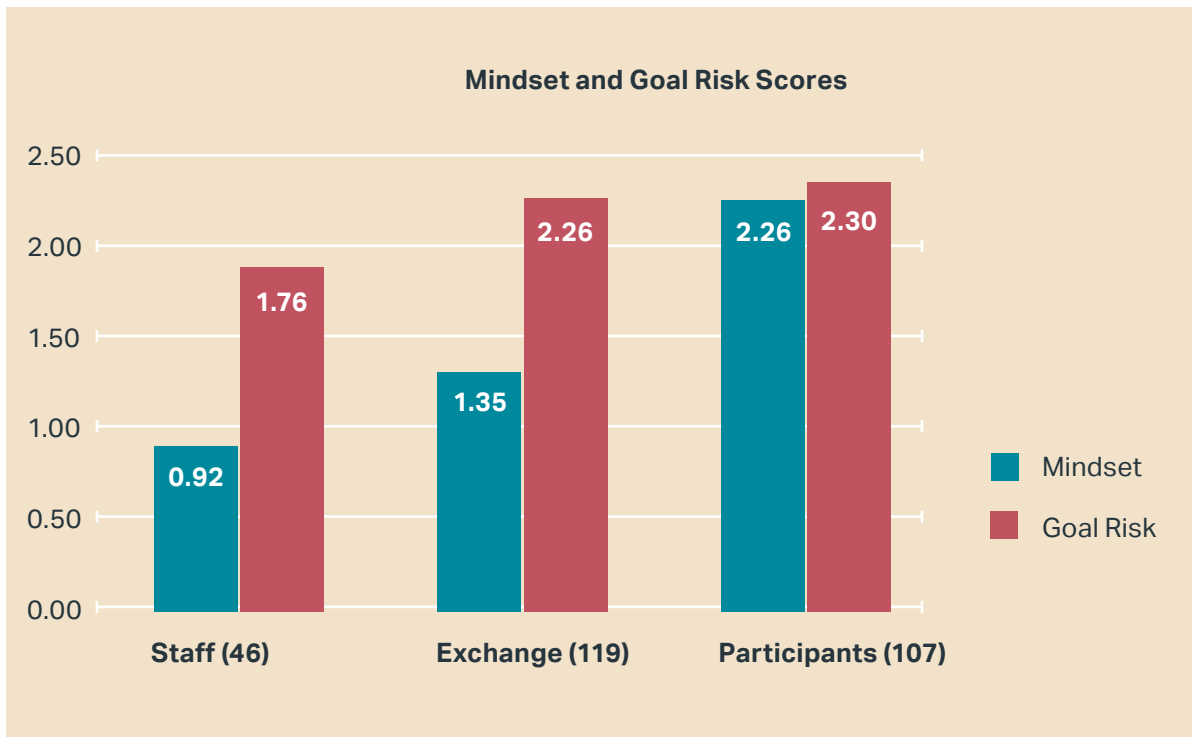
Please tell us how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statements

(0= strongly disagree, 1=disagree, 2= somewhat disagree, 3=neutral, 4=somewhat agree, 5= agree, 6=strongly agree)

Questions	Rating 0-6
1. People's basic abilities are things that they can't change very much	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. There are some things people are not capable of learning	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. If people are not naturally good at something, they will never do it well	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. Challenging yourself won't change your basic abilities	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. It is worse to set goals too high than too low	<input type="checkbox"/>

For the four mindset questions, a response of zero indicates a very strong **growth** mindset and a response of six indicates a very strong **fixed** mindset. For the one goal-setting question, a response of zero indicates a very strong preference for setting goals too high (suggesting **high expectations and low risk aversion**) and a response of six indicates very strong preference for setting goals too low (suggesting **low expectations and high risk aversion**).

RESULTS OF EMPATH MINDSET AND GOAL RISK SURVEY



Results of the survey showed that EMPath staff had an average score of .92 (**very** strong growth mindset) to mindset questions and an average score of 1.76 (high goal-setting preference/low risk aversion) to the goal-setting question.

Exchange staff had an average score of 1.35 (strong growth mindset) to mindset questions and an average score of 2.26 (somewhat high goal-setting preference/low risk aversion) to the goal-setting question. There was a strong correlation ($p < .001$) between Exchange members' mindset and preferences for goal-setting, indicating that the stronger their organization's growth mindset, the more likely the organization was to prefer setting high goals.

Comments of Exchange survey respondents add to our understanding of how growth mindsets and preferences for high goal-setting can affect their thoughts about their work with participants. Exchange staff with the **strongest** growth mindset and goal-setting scores offered comments about their work, such as:

“ I can't speak for every individual, but the organization's pillars are based in service that empowers, and in order to do so, participants are treated as though they have the ability to learn and change. On my team in particular, we believe that participants have untapped potential, and that all the strengths they seek are already there. It is only a matter of learning what they need in order to enhance their innate strengths.

Whereas, those with the **weakest** growth mindset and goal-setting scores said things such as:

“ *A person[']s capacity of learning may [limit] their ability to do and/or learn certain things. Most people have a certain capacity and forcing people into situations that exceed that capacity will frustrate that person.*

People are who they are at the core and we can't change that. I have heard this all too often at [my] office. Most staff don't believe people can change nor want to. Very sad.

Survey data also showed a noticeable (although not statistically significant) positive relationship between the length of time member organizations had been in the Economic Mobility Exchange™ and the strength of their growth mindset and high expectations.^{xii} This correlation pattern suggests that the longer an organization has been a member of the Exchange (from a low of zero to a high of four years), the stronger the staff perceive an organizational culture of growth mindset and preference for high goal-setting.

EMPath staff have, on average, been exposed for many years to approaches and curriculum designed to reinforce growth mindset and high expectations. Correspondingly, their growth mindset is approximately 32 percent stronger (mean of .92 vs. 1.35) and EMPATH staff preference for high goal-setting is approximately 22 percent stronger (mean of 1.76 vs. 2.26) than Exchange members' perceptions of their own organizations.

This pattern bears further examination; we are hopeful that these data suggest that organizations such as EMPATH who are actively working on supporting growth mindset and high expectations may over time become more proficient in doing so and thereby strengthen their outcomes.

EMPATH participants had an average score of 2.26 (somewhat positive growth mindset) to mindset questions and an average score of 2.30 (somewhat high goal-setting preference/low risk aversion) to the goal-setting question. Although these scores show a tendency to growth mindset and preference for high goals, they are, not surprisingly, lower than the scores held by their mentors. Participants with the strongest growth mindset (mean of 1.55-1.88) were primarily located in EMPATH's most intensive supported housing and multi-year coaching programs, and participants with lowest growth mindset (mean of 2.26-3.54) were primarily located in EMPATH's transitional housing and least intensive community-based programs. The differences in mindset scores shown between participants in the more intensive versus the lesser intensive interventions were statistically significant ($p < .05$).

This relationship between coaching exposure and participant mindset also bears further examination. The correlation may suggest that although participants often enter into programs with lower expectations for themselves than their mentors appear to have, regular coaching from mentors positively influences those participant expectations. The pattern may also suggest that participants with stronger growth mindset are readier to engage and more likely to seek intensive coaching programming.

Organizational Strategies That Help Mentors Create and Maintain High Expectations

As can be seen from all the above, external messages and stereotypes are powerful, and overcoming them, along with all the other legitimate challenges to holding high expectations, is no easy task. Systematically creating and then maintaining an organizational culture of high expectations requires a multi-pronged approach that starts with creating an organizational environment that fights against prevailing stereotypes and low expectations: in other words, an environment that forcefully counters what staff and participants typically hear about their chances of success.^{xlii}

SATURATE THE ORGANIZATION WITH MESSAGES REINFORCING HIGH EXPECTATIONS

It is important, from the moment that participants and staff make contact with an organization, that the cues they are receiving reinforce high expectations. When conveyed effectively, such consistent counter-narrative has been shown to increase program outcomes.^{xliii} But the specific nature of the cues is very important because to battle against a world of negative messages and expectations, the counter-narrative must be clear, believable, relevant, and compelling.

To be effective, cues should be very clean and simple. It is difficult to break through to gain the attention of people under stress: to do so, ideal messages need clear language and images that register completely in a glance.^{xliii} In order to be even more believable, it is helpful for the messages to be authoritative and factual. To counteract negative stereotypes, EMPATH frequently states, on posters, mailings, and reports, things like **“Last year, 74 percent of EMPATH participants achieved their goals!”** This is a short clear message that uses data to convey a powerful message that, although in the broader world the odds for success may not be very good, within the organization something different can be expected to happen.

Illustration 3: EMPATH participant who just bought her own home



In order to be relevant and meaningful to staff and participants, messages should contain images of people like them attaining goals they want to achieve. Research has also shown that positive messages provided by leaders that participants and staff admire can be effective in countering negative expectations. This is especially true when the messages are specific and factual. For example, one study of adolescents showed that when students heard messages by former First Lady Michelle Obama about growth mindset and the fact that with hard work, all students could succeed, their outcomes were better than when the same message was delivered without her.^{xiv}

It is important for the organization to take every opportunity to convey messages of high expectations. As was previously discussed, people take their cues about their likelihood of success from many places, and if the external world is filled with negative expectations, it is critical for the organizational environment to be equally saturated with positive ones. Opportunities for placement of such messaging abound, including: hanging on program walls, prominently displayed on forms and training materials, and conveyed in staff meetings and organizational communications such as newsletters. The list of messaging opportunities is virtually endless. What is important is to use as many as possible. Consistent, clear, and frequent positive messaging about high expectations has been shown to be effective in increasing organizational outcomes, improving staff expectations and performance, and counteracting negative stereotypes.^{xvi}

At EMPATH, we do many things to reinforce high expectations for staff. We have a mascot named Data Cat who routinely sends out digital “Stat Attacks” showing interesting tidbits of data about successful outcomes achieved in the organization (see Illustration 4.)

Illustration 4

STAT ATTACK!

by Data Cat



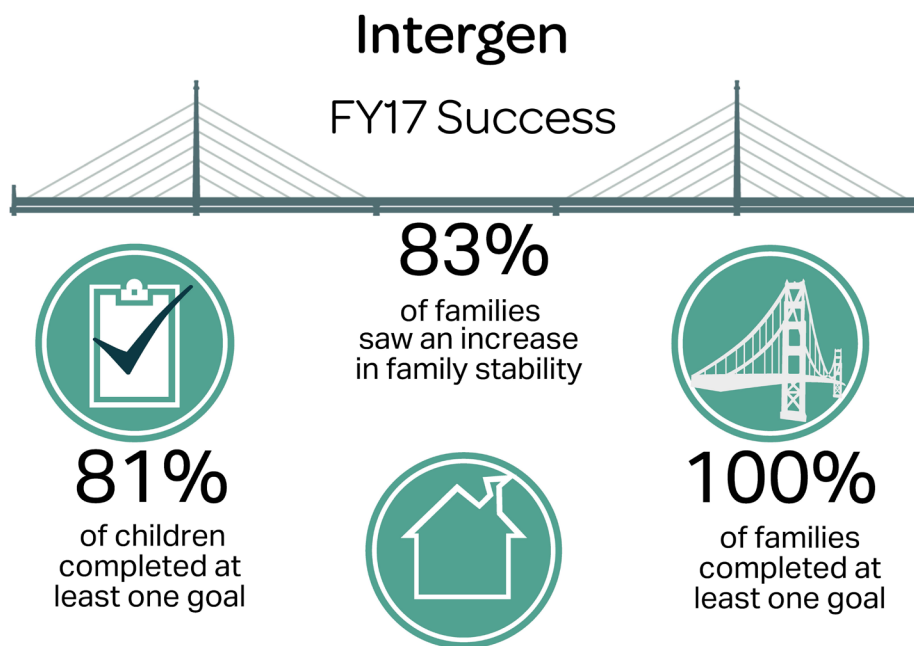
As of today, 74% of our participants are working or in school.
From this group, 80% are working and 44% are in school!

Annually, in an organization-wide celebration, each department receives a “Bragging Board” touting the past year’s departmental achievements such as the numbers and percentages of participants who graduated from school, saved money, and obtained new jobs or homes. The Bragging Boards are large (3’ x 4’) and convey successes with both simple images and data points that are powerful and easy to read (see Illustration 5). They are hung in the main program areas where they are seen by both staff and participants.

Staff (in staff meetings) and participants (in program meetings) are encouraged to talk about the goals they have set, how they have worked to overcome challenges, and the successes they are achieving, so that their peers can clearly see relevant models of success. Messages about how challenges have been surmounted and achievements attained are also routinely included in staff communications, organizational publications, and most organizational meetings.

Because of this saturation of messages, it would be logical to fear that they might, over time, lose their effectiveness; and, indeed, if the same message were delivered every time, they probably would. However, this problem is avoided by constantly refreshing the messaging with new data points, stories, and images while at the same time consistently reinforcing the same organizational theme: **the world may say high outcomes cannot happen, but here, within this organization, we know they do. We have proof that great things are possible for staff and participants like us. We know that when we invest in ourselves and each other, we almost always get better at things and accomplish what we set out to do.**

Illustration 5: Sample Bragging Board



Organizations we work with often ask how to start a process of messaging about high expectations when they are just getting started and haven't yet developed a track record of success. A good place to start is by importing positive messaging from other successful interventions or programs whose approaches you are adopting. For example, messaging for organizations replicating some of the work we do at EMPATH could start out as, "Evidence shows that with the right supports, 74 percent of participants like ours will achieve their goals." This statement is derived from the fact that this is the successful goals outcome rate at EMPATH and implies that because it was possible at EMPATH, it is possible at other organizations as well. Obviously, the messages are more powerful when they come from within the organization itself, but using external organizations' outcomes or evidence from research as a way of reinforcing what is possible is a good way to start, especially when staff see the messages accompanied with new organizational change.

Another way to start shifting to high expectations messaging is to methodically capture and share stories of staff and participants who are making gains, overcoming challenges, and achieving results. Most organizations do this, but often see such stories as something primarily to be used externally to obtain funding and public support. In order to create high staff and participant expectations, the information needs to be frequently and systematically collected from and then shared within the organization. A single success story can be easily dismissed as an outlier, but when such stories become habitual and are proliferated throughout the organization, they have much greater impact.^{xlvii}



BUILD A STAFF WITH GROWTH MINDSET AND HIGH EXPECTATIONS

Through the hiring process

In addition to building a consistent counter-narrative of high expectations that envelops staff, it is important to hire and train human services staff in a way that ensures they can internalize these expectations. Building a staff with high expectations starts with the hiring process. We hear all the time that it is important to hire diverse staff, and research on high expectations substantiates yet another reason why hiring diverse staff matters. As was referenced earlier in this paper, there is evidence of strong correlations between race/SES and expectations, showing that those who are minorities or low-income are often negatively influenced by prevailing stereotypes and more likely to believe that people are born with a set of abilities that are unlikely to change no matter what they do (fixed mindsets). What was also noted is that this population is more sensitive to external cues such as those given by mentors, and so are more likely to be influenced by their mentors' expectations.

This is critical because it is clear that although, in general, mentors have lower expectations for participants of color and those who are from lower SES groups, mentor expectations vary depending on the race of the mentor. For example, studies show that black teachers have higher expectations for black students than do white teachers. Further, the outcomes of black students are more highly influenced by these expectations than their white peers, with the most significant impacts occurring for lowest performing students.^{xlviii} This suggests that in order to build a staff with high expectations, we should, whenever possible, start by hiring diverse staff who represent the participants they will be serving—both because they are more likely to hold high expectations for others like them, and also because their participants are more likely to positively respond to their mentorship.

It can also be useful to screen staff for their biases, mindsets, and expectations during the hiring process itself. Most organizations attempt to hire strong staff with skills and attitudes that will contribute to their role as mentors, but it can be hard to do this in a way that can be routinized and objective. Screening incoming staff for their mindsets can be one way to do this. As was noted earlier in this brief, researchers have codified a series of simple questions that can measure the degree to which a person holds a growth or fixed mindset. Such questions are easily administered and can be used as part of the hiring process. In such screening, applicants are typically asked standardized questions such as those provided on page 16. Hiring managers would likely seek candidates with scores indicating a growth mindset (e.g. less than 2.5) and might avoid hiring candidates with higher scores (e.g. greater than 3.5) that show a more fixed mindset.

It can also help to ask applicants to explain the reasons they think people become low-income, jobless, or homeless. Prospective candidates' responses to such questions can often reveal much about their mindsets and biases.

Lastly, as has been mentioned earlier, participants are highly affected by the interpersonal warmth exhibited by their mentors. In fact, our perceptions of others' warmth are even more important than our perceptions of their competence when we are forming opinions about with whom to trust and collaborate.^{xlix} It is therefore important for hiring managers to include in the hiring processes careful screening for the interpersonal affect shown by candidates for human service, especially for those seeking mentoring positions.

Through staff training

It is important when hiring not to expect that any staff member has to be “perfect” or a “superstar,” but instead to understand that superstar staff can and should be grown and nurtured.ⁱ Therefore, after hiring the best staff possible, the next step we can take is to provide training and capacity building designed to help staff hold high expectations for their participants.

Research demonstrates that both low expectations and fixed mindsets can be raised through education and training. Simply making people aware of prevailing stereotypes and how they impact our expectations can reduce the negative impacts such biases create. In the earlier mentioned case of Asian women and the effects of stereotype threats on their math performance, educating them on such threats was shown to lessen the impact of negative stereotypes and significantly increased their outcomes.ⁱⁱ

Training teachers on growth mindsets has been shown to improve student outcomes by as much as 28 percent.ⁱⁱⁱ These outcomes were obtained by not only explaining the science of growth mindset to teachers, but also modeling the ways in which their cues (such as warmer attitudes) conveyed their expectations to their students. Large-scale studies also highlight that as little as 45 minutes of mindset training (such as explaining to students that brains grow through exercise and with hard work all brains can be developed and new skills learned) improved performance in core courses an average of 6.4 percent and created even greater impacts for students with the poorest past performance.ⁱⁱⁱ

Often, mindset training involves having a person read an article on growth mindset and then teach the content to another. The process of digesting such content and then sharing with others has been shown to heighten the mindset shift in the person doing the teaching as well as their audience.^{iv} A good example of articles used in mindset training is, *“Prepare for Success: New Research Shows that the Brain Can be Developed Like a Muscle.”* It can be accessed through Central Michigan University and is only one of numerous instructional materials and videos based on this scientific evidence that are readily available.^{iv}

Through staff practices

Prevailing negative stereotypes have been shown to create stresses that tax the brain’s working memory, cognitive functions, and ability to exercise self-control. However, evidence also shows that individuals can push back against such negative impacts through practicing new skills, meditation, positive self-affirmation, and self-control. Although staff may not find it valuable to incorporate all such practices into their work, evaluating and then selecting approaches that appear most useful is an additional way to help staff mitigate biases and increase their expectations.

Meditation is frequently used to counteract the impacts of stress and thereby increase bandwidth, self-control, and cognition, and it has also been shown, when using the right focus, to decrease implicit bias. One such bias reduction approach is Lovingkindness meditation. In this practice, “individuals contemplate warm feelings toward a person they care most about (e.g. a family member). They then extend these positive thoughts first to themselves and then to a growing circle of others, eventually to all sentient beings.” This practice has been shown

to significantly reduce stress and decrease implicit bias toward others and therefore supports higher expectations for their outcomes.^{lvi}

In addition, it can be helpful for staff to think about and potentially practice an activity they think will be challenging before they have to do it “for real.” It has been shown that rehearsing or role-playing potentially difficult interactions, such as goal-setting with a particularly challenging participant, can mitigate the effects that negative stereotypes have on outcomes. For example, staff who are uncomfortable speaking with participants about their money or personal relationships can practice with other staff how they would do so. Such practice increases confidence and also creates a response that is more automatic, even under pressure, thereby improving performance and future confidence in success.^{lvii}

Exercises that affirm self-integrity and value have also been validated as a way of diminishing the impacts of negative stereotypes. In this practice, the staff member might start the day or a particular work session by concentrating on and perhaps writing about the top two or three things they value most about themselves, work, and their participants, and affirming why such values are important to them. Such values-based exercise appears to help dispel negative self-ideation and has been shown to improve outcomes.^{lviii}

STRUCTURING WORK TO ROUTINIZE HIGH EXPECTATIONS

It is not enough to create an organizational narrative and staff capacity-building approaches that support high expectations. Organizations also need to create work processes that incorporate building and maintaining high expectations into the very work itself. Such processes create a routine of high expectations that, when practiced, create a positive feedback loop that helps staff internalize and maintain those expectations. In this manner, high expectations are transformed from individual dreams just waiting to be dashed into daily work that is routinely shown to be effective.

In other words, just as participants routinely gain high expectations for themselves through the positive cues, warmth, and challenging goals they experience with their mentors, mentors can gain those expectations for themselves through the positive cues, warmth, and challenging goals set by the organization. This is the kind of organizational framing that converts “My people can’t . . .” into “Well, here our people do. It is how we work.” The conversion is accomplished through a routine of high expectations that all mentors adhere to as their standard work practice.

For example, as standard practice, all EMPATH participants are expected to work with a mentor to self-assess where they stand on their path to self-sufficiency. A tool called the Bridge to Self-Sufficiency[®] allows participants to examine their family stability, well-being, money management, education, and career status so that they can begin to think of the key areas of their lives they would most like to improve. Then, all participants are expected to work with their mentor to set and then work toward at least one active goal (and usually more than one) at all times.

Program staff also set annual goals for their program outcomes, such as, “Based on last year’s outcomes, we expect that at least 74 percent of our participants will have successfully completed at least one goal,” or more specific outcome goals, such as, “Based on last year’s performance, we expect that at least 65 percent of our participants will become successfully engaged in work or school.”

Evidence shows that **structured goal-setting processes**, especially when using a SMART Goals format, not only produce high outcomes but also create and reinforce growth mindset in mentors. SMART Goals are goals that are *Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-bound*, and when all of these characteristics are deployed in the goal-setting process, it substantially increases achievement outcomes.^{lix, lx}

Structured organizational expectations shift the internal doubts staff might have about participants' abilities ("I don't know if my participant can do this") into organizational routines that say, "**All our participants do this and most succeed.**" The work of staff becomes to execute on these high organizational expectations instead of just protecting participants from their challenges. Over time, as staff internalize organizational expectations and practice delivering them, they come to see that high expectations are believable, and staff are then able to give even more powerful cues to participants that they can achieve strong outcomes.

Earlier in this brief, we discussed the strong preference of people to protect against losses rather than risk for gains, and that this natural tendency can hold mentors back in having high expectations for their participants' successes. Organizations can help mentors fight this loss aversion by creating a learning culture that celebrates staff and participants' **efforts, progress, and learning** more than their achievement of any particular goal. So, for example, in a learning/growth mindset organization, a higher priority is placed on year-over-year improvements in outcomes rather than the attainment of any one fixed goal. Staff are celebrated for the goals they have set and seriously worked toward; and if they fall short of achieving the goal, they are encouraged to talk about their lessons learned and their strategies for improvement in future outcomes.

This type of environment supports informed risk-taking and genuine effort, and in the end, research has shown that it fosters growth mindset, which in turn is modeled for participants.^{lxi} One of the more prominent academics in the field, Stanford psychologist Carol Dweck, speaks about fostering such a climate by using "the power of **yet.**" By this, she means that when faced with a goal that might seem daunting, we can promote the value of effort over outcome by saying the word "yet": "You haven't met your savings goal . . . yet"; "I haven't passed my high school equivalency . . . yet"; "Our department hasn't achieved that goal . . . yet." The shift in mindset this word creates is powerful because it clearly conveys the expectation that goals, even challenging ones, can be achieved by all as long as we keep investing ourselves in the process.^{lxii}

How organizations use **data** can also support a culture of high expectations. Typically, organizations use data primarily to evaluate their performance. Data is gathered at the end of an intervention and is principally used to make judgements about the quality of past performance. However, in learning organizations with a growth mindset culture, data is an intrinsic tool used daily by staff and participants to improve their work together. As discussed above, in SMART Goals, the "M" stands for measurable. Data and measurement help frame the questions, "Where am I starting? Where do I want to go? How far is my goal from where I am today? How well am I doing? What progress am I making?" It helps people set the goals and take the progressive steps that lead to things like moving out of a homeless shelter and into permanent housing, obtaining new educational credentials, saving money, getting out of debt, and moving ahead in a career.

Therefore, in order to support high expectations, organizations must shift from thinking of data as something that is primarily used externally to prove organizational merit, and instead think of data as a critical tool staff and participants use daily to create positive change. When this change is accumulated and measured over time, it becomes a way for staff and participants to see the progress they have made, and for the organization to provide powerful proof of impact. This proof of impact and positive change reinforces staff high expectations for the future.

There is no surer way to saturate an organization with strong messages, build a staff willing and able to take risks and hold high expectations, and routinize setting high goals, than to consistently celebrate the successes, large and small, that staff and participants achieve. Behavioral psychologists have long recognized that people feel more strongly about changes in status than absolute outcomes.^{lxiii} In general, if we win on a scratch ticket, there is less of a difference to us between winning \$100 and \$250 than there is in just winning itself. We feel good because we won.



89%

OF CHILDREN SAW AN INCREASE
IN EXECUTIVE FUNCTIONING SKILLS

among children in
EMPath's Intergen Project



To support staff in the challenging process of developing and holding high expectations, celebrating the gains matters more than celebrating the exact outcomes. Outcomes matter too, but high outcomes are achieved through a series of smaller wins. High expectations need to be built incrementally through a series of investments that are shown to bear fruit. When we celebrate staff and participants for their progress, it serves many important purposes: it memorializes and reinforces the positive change itself, so that we better remember the gains and raise our expectations for future success; it reinforces for those around us that positive change is possible and raises other's expectations too; it reminds people that gains are achieved through hard work; and it makes people happier and more productive.

FINANCIAL COSTS TO ORGANIZATIONS

The costs of supporting high expectations within organizations are, not surprisingly, directly related to the intensity with which they are implemented. Emails with positive messaging cost little more than the staff time required to produce them and the production costs of making them visible to participants and staff. At EMPath, 3' x 4' bragging boards, and posters with photos of participants and staff cost approximately \$250 each (\$50 for printing costs and \$200 for staff production costs).

Annual costs for improving staff hiring and training processes may range from as low as a few dollars per staff person⁴ to modestly alter staff hiring and training processes, to \$1,000–\$2,000 per staff person for organizations to implement comprehensive staff capacity building processes. Such comprehensive staff training and support programs might include routine training on growth mindset and goals-based coaching with high expectations, shadowing and one-on-one staff training by experienced mentors, peer-support mentor meetings, role play for/with mentors, and reflective supervision.

Costs of implementing data capture for positive reinforcement of staff and participants also vary significantly. Since most organizations are required to capture outcomes data for funders, the incremental costs of intentionally using such data internally to reinforce staff expectations can be quite minimal. Capturing and using positive participant stories to create positive expectations also need not be expensive.

But creating powerful data systems that give staff the tools they need to compare what they and their participants have accomplished to date; their gains in things such as education, earnings, and family stability; and the rates at which they are setting goals and achieving them, can be very expensive and require significant organizational investment. EMPath annually spends over \$4,000 per staff person per year for such measurement and evaluation systems, and also has plans to increase this budget in coming years.

As with all such organizational change, costs cannot be measured in budget numbers alone. The real cost is in the institutional effort required to become more intentional in thinking about stereotypes, the ways that they affect staff and participants, and how we can shift the myriad ways we communicate, model, and create high expectations for our staff and everyone else our organization touches.

**High outcomes are
achieved through a series
of smaller wins.**

4 Costs per staff person are defined as total expenditures per year per total FTE organizational employees (not per organizational mentors).

Conclusion

As children, many of us learned the nursery rhyme, "Sticks and stones may break my bones, but names will never hurt me." Although it may be comforting to think this is true, science now clearly shows us it is not. The way others feel about us, especially those we respect and trust, has a huge impact on how we think and behave and can profoundly influence our life chances. High expectations for those we mentor can literally mean the difference between success and failure. But holding high expectations for others, especially when they are from groups that face significant obstacles to success, is not easily done.

Organizations in the business of helping participants acquire new skills and improve their pathways to success must think seriously about how they can support staff to consistently hold high expectations. It is much more logical and common for staff to believe, "My people can't do that," than it is to see infinite potential in those they serve and help them to embark on a path of challenging goals. For this to happen, organizations must methodically build supports for staff that ultimately create a powerful coaching culture of high expectations.

As always, research points the way and suggests that creating an environment of strong positive messages, hiring staff who are most likely to foster high expectations, building their capacities, supporting their practices, and finally creating organizational structures that routinize high expectations for all, can create life-changing improvements in outcomes.

Endnotes

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Acknowledgements

The author would like to thank the many staff and participants of EMPath and its partner organizations in the Economic Mobility Exchange™ for their responses to surveys and the helpful ideas and illustrations that contributed to this paper.

Sincere thanks are also extended to the thoughtful colleagues who reviewed and commented on earlier drafts of this brief: Lindsay Albright, Chief Operating Officer, Episcopal Community Services of Philadelphia; Anthony Barrows, Managing Director, ideas42; David T. Ellwood, Director, Malcolm Wiener Center for Social Policy, Isabelle and Scott Black Professor of Political Economy, Harvard Kennedy School; David D. Fukuzawa, Managing Director, Health & Human Services, The Kresge Foundation; Robert Giloth, Vice President, Center for Economic Opportunity, The Annie E. Casey Foundation; Raquel T. Hatter, Deputy Director Human Services, The Kresge Foundation; Nisha Patel, Executive Director, US Partnership on Mobility from Poverty; Jack Shonkoff, Director, Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University; Jonathan Skolnick, Executive Vice President for Programs and Strategy, Education Alliance, New York, New York.



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