

Part I

Builders Activate a Growth Mindset

I embrace the label of bad feminist because I am human. I am messy. I'm not trying to be an example. I am not trying to be perfect. I am not trying to say I have all the answers. I am not trying to say I'm right. I am just trying—trying to support what I believe in, trying to do some good in this world, trying to make some noise with my writing while also being myself. . . .

—ROXANE GAY, *BAD FEMINIST*

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Stumbling Upward

Early in his career, Hollywood executive Perrin Chiles was searching for the right subject for his first documentary film. Autism diagnoses were skyrocketing and a groundswell of science was emerging. Stereotypes about children with autism and judgments of their parents were also on the rise. Empathy was in short supply. Perrin did not know much about autism, nor was he close to any parents of children with autism. Yet he believed that he could tackle his ignorance through effort and the help of others. He did not assume that he knew what he needed to know or that he needed to prove to others that he already knew the answers. When it came to his knowledge about autism, he viewed himself as a work-in-progress. He had what psychologist Carol Dweck calls a growth mindset.

Growth Versus Fixed Mindset

Mindset refers to our belief about our capacity to learn and improve. If I have a growth mindset about drawing, I believe that I can improve my stick figures with effort, time, and feedback. The alternative, a fixed mindset, is where I see myself as fully formed—either as someone who is terrible at drawing or wonderful at

drawing or somewhere in between—and destined to stay that way. The fixed mindset is an “either/or” mindset because it allows no room for being a work-in-progress. Our mindsets vary across the different parts of our lives. I might believe my drawing skills to be set and my math skills to be malleable.

Perrin’s belief that he could learn about autism allowed him to enter unfamiliar territory with humility, take risks, and learn from others: “I came into the experience just knowing that I didn’t have the answers.” Directed by Tricia Regan, *Autism: The Musical* was Perrin’s first documentary film, following a group of children with autism and their parents over several months as they staged a live musical. The film premiered at the Tribeca Film Festival in 2007, aired on HBO, was short-listed at the Oscars, and won two Emmy Awards. It is filled with heart-warming euphoria and heartbreaking pain, with the parents and children centered in the telling of their stories. I doubt even the most stoic parent—or human—has ever watched this movie without a lump in his or her throat. Many families affected by autism recommended the film to friends and family members. Perrin believed he was a work-in-progress in his understanding of autism and tried to listen to those who knew more. The results were powerful.

After *Autism: The Musical*, projects came and went. Perrin now had a family and a mortgage, and his eyes were open for new opportunities. He noticed that many well-vetted scripts, pilots, pitches, and stories in Hollywood had been “back-burnered.” These abandoned intellectual properties could be purchased for pennies on the dollar. They were seeds that needed attention, maybe a new pot or fresh soil. With two co-founders, Perrin started Adaptive Studios to buy and grow those seeds, one of which was *Project Greenlight*.

“Talent Can Come from Anywhere”

Before *American Idol* and *The Voice*, *Project Greenlight* was an innovative film-writing and filmmaking talent discovery competition. In its original form, the contest generated a television program, which showed the behind-the-scenes process of selecting a contest winner and making a movie. Judges picked the winner and then mentored the winner through the moviemaking process.

Before Perrin got involved, the show first aired in 2001 and was led by actors Ben Affleck and Matt Damon. *Project Greenlight* was an attempt to replicate their surprising rise from unknowns to Oscar winners for the script of their first movie, *Good Will Hunting*. The show was ahead of its time, airing before DVRs, social media, crowdsourcing, and widespread broadband Internet. Contest participants stood in line at the post office to mail in VHS tapes.

In the first three seasons of the show, the judges picked three talented, up-and-coming filmmakers and writers as winners. *Project Greenlight* ran on HBO and then on Bravo, before being canceled after three seasons as other reality talent competitions entered the landscape. It sat on the back burner for almost a decade.

Enter Perrin and Adaptive Studios. The time was ripe to modernize *Project Greenlight* for a digital age, by reviving and modernizing its original spirit—“given the opportunity, talent can come from anywhere and go everywhere.” In those first three seasons, the panels of all/almost all white male judges had also selected three consecutive white male winners. Despite the intent to find new voices from different communities, Perrin could see that the insider system was still replicating itself. He wanted to revitalize the show’s original ethos.

Perrin, also a white male, knew Hollywood. The statistics are striking. If an alien were to stumble upon an archive of American film and television, this alien would conclude that we are a mostly male, overwhelmingly white, overwhelmingly straight population, with few people over sixty or with physical disabilities. Female speaking characters are only 29 percent of those in film and 36 percent of those on television. These statistics have not changed meaningfully in more than half a century. Whites are overrepresented, comprising 72 percent of speaking parts (versus 62 percent of the population). In a study of the top one hundred films of 2015, forty-eight did not include a single black character with a speaking part (defined as one word or more). Seventy films did not include an Asian or Asian American character. Across film and television, only 15 percent of directors are female and 29 percent of writers are female. In film, women are even harder to find in director's chairs; about 4 percent of movies are directed by women. Media scholar Stacy Smith, who leads the massive research effort that produced these findings, calls this an "epidemic of invisibility." Perrin realized that *Project Greenlight* had fallen into similar patterns.

The revived season four of *Project Greenlight* was an opportunity for change. The contest was still structured around the discovery of an unknown director/writer. This winning filmmaker would receive a \$3 million budget and a deal with HBO. Still, the judging panel remained mostly white men with the addition of one white woman and one black woman.

HBO would film the judging process and the winner's attempt to make his or her first feature film, creating the behind-the-scenes content. The result would be a reality series—featuring the judges, the contestants, the winning director, multiple mentors, Damon and Affleck, and the crew—plus the resulting movie itself, featuring its cast and crew. Viewers of the reality series would see "the drama behind making a comedy."

Project Greenlight's star digital expert, Brittany Turner, led the revamp of the contest engine. The key innovation was that anyone, anywhere, with a Facebook account, could enter the contest. At first, the new contest engine appeared to be a massive success, generating five thousand submissions, perhaps the largest-scale video contest submission ever. Talent was apparently coming from everywhere and the *Project Greenlight/Adaptive Studios* team was optimistic.

Time to Activate

Upon closer examination, however, something "crushing" became clear. Of those five thousand submissions, fewer than 15 percent were from women and fewer than 5 percent were from people of color. Brittany, who is African American, says with a sigh, "You didn't have to go through a gatekeeper. We thought if the contest was open to everybody, then everybody would apply." Everybody did not apply. Like so many organizations, Adaptive Studios wondered why.

"There's the issue of access to technology and privileges like an expensive film school," Brittany speculates. But she also had an additional hypothesis. "The legacy of *Project Greenlight* was Matt Damon and Ben Affleck," she says. "My perception of that, especially as a woman of color myself, is that I think people see those two guys and they assume 'This contest is not for me' or 'They're not gonna get my perspective.'" In other words, while they may be big names, they were not necessarily big draws for everyone, or big names everyone could see themselves in.

Researchers have studied the role of "representation" in talent-search processes and the findings support Brittany's instincts. Black and Hispanic job applicants are more likely to apply for

jobs when black or Hispanic representatives are depicted in company recruitment materials. It also matters how those representatives are portrayed. In one study, black undergraduates were more likely to apply for jobs portraying black company employees, especially if the employees were in supervisory positions. If you are underrepresented, you are more likely to look for representation clues, however superficial, and take them into account.

Everyone was frustrated. “By the time we arrived to do our judging, we knew we had blown it,” Matt Damon would later tell the *New York Times*. This frustration flowed into the judges’ discussions in the first episode. A controversial exchange about diversity erupted on camera between Damon and fellow judge Effie Brown during the judging process. An edited clip of the exchange aired in the HBO series, went viral, and sparked a nationwide discussion. Many viewers of the clip condemned Damon for “mansplaining” and “whitesplaining” to Brown, an experienced and respected black female colleague, about diversity when she tried to raise issues. Some observers wondered how challenging the diversity and inclusion issues must be off camera, if this happened on camera and survived editing. Others wondered what nuance was omitted in the editing process. Nevertheless, the judges picked a winner: another white male.

From there, the controversy grew. Once the winner was selected, Brown’s role was to serve as the film’s line producer. In the making of a movie, the line producer is accountable for keeping the movie on schedule and within budget, particularly important for a director working on his or her first feature-length film. Despite Brown’s significantly longer and more successful track record, the inexperienced director was frequently shown questioning her decisions, competence, and intentions.

The director then wrote and made a movie titled *The Leisure Class*. The movie featured a 100 percent white cast and a subservi-

ent, one-dimensional female lead character. At multiple points in the series, Brown is the sole voice challenging the racial makeup of the cast and crew and the flatness of the female lead character. Brown’s colleagues ranged from inconsistent in their support to undermining of her work. The story line of the movie focused on a family from the “1 percent” striving to protect its multigenerational wealth and reputation. It was a fine script and a fine movie, but given the stated goals of this particular competition, the outcome was disappointing.

The whole endeavor became a high-profile lightning rod. Numerous postmortem interviews reflect that many people had good intentions going into this project. They were believers. Still, these intentions did not translate into their becoming builders, or prevent them from choosing a winner from the most overrepresented profile in Hollywood: a straight white male director with film-school training. Brittany winces as she remembers, “It felt like taking a big punch for all of us.”

Psychological Safety in Teams and Growth Mindset in Individuals

Workplace teams require patience and flexibility under the best of conditions and the *Project Greenlight* scenario was hardly ideal. The Adaptive Studios team consisted of mostly white men and a sole black woman in the national spotlight, trying to navigate racially charged fallout. Such a scenario is known to especially deplete and alienate the woman or the minority in the “hot seat.”

I asked Brittany what it was like to work in that context, on issues of race and gender. “As a woman of color, a part of me felt ‘I should’ve known this.’ I should have known how to ‘formally do diversity,’ but it is something you have to learn.” She

was highlighting the difference between being a believer and a builder. Her experiences as a black woman had given her firsthand reasons to be a believer, but they did not equip her with the skills to be a builder. She, too, needed to have a growth mindset.

Brittany's beliefs about her ability to grow were necessary, though not sufficient. The beliefs she had about the people around her also mattered, specifically, her belief about what business school professor Amy Edmondson calls "psychological safety." Edmondson studies teams and has shown that when a group believes they can speak up, ask for help, admit mistakes, propose ideas, take blame, confess uncertainty, and disclose inability, they learn more and perform better.

Consider the teams where you have held back from asking questions, because you did not want to seem stupid. Maybe you made suggestions and felt they were dismissed without any real consideration. You may have been slow to reveal mistakes, even when it would have been useful for others to know about them, because you did not want to be judged negatively. You tried to hide your weaknesses. These are all normal responses to low psychological safety, where interpersonal fear is high. Now think about a team where you were less likely to behave in these ways and notice what changed in your growth and performance. Low psychological safety teams foster fixed mindsets and are less likely to perform well. When a team's psychological safety is high, however, it is easy to imagine how growth mindsets, and performance, will flourish.

Edmondson finds that the most important influence on psychological safety is one's manager.* For Brittany, Perrin's behavior was critical. As he had done with the topic of autism, Perrin

* This finding reminds me of the words said to me by a former client manager from my days in consulting, Dave Kuhlman. When we started working together, Dave told me, "There is no mistake you can make that I haven't already made." He made himself vulnerable so that I would be willing to do the same.

decided he had room to grow on the topic of diversity and inclusion. This topic and situation was more threatening to his identity than autism. In fact, self-threat could not have been higher on a topic like racism and sexism and therefore the importance of his work-in-progress mindset could not have been greater. His mindset would shape what he did and what he learned during this time of controversy and crisis.

Consider what happened when researchers created a high-self-threat situation in a lab experiment. They tested participants on their general knowledge and then put electrodes on their heads to measure their attention levels to the feedback on their performance. The electrodes measured event-related brain potential, which reveals how much attention people are giving to particular tasks and information. Participants in a fixed mindset paid close attention when told which answers were right versus wrong, but when they were given the chance to learn by seeing the correct answers, they tuned out. Participants in a growth mindset paid close attention to both types of information. In other words, they were willing to learn.

Perrin had essentially been told he got the answer wrong. In a fixed mindset, he would tune out, while in a growth mindset, he would tune in. In her book *Teaming*, Edmondson recommends that leaders foster psychological safety by acknowledging the limits of their current knowledge, displaying fallibility, highlighting failures as learning opportunities, and inviting participation. If Perrin did, it would liberate Brittany to do the same.

"Before season four, the conversations [about race- and gender-type issues] weren't at the level that I would have preferred them to be," Brittany says. "Now, I genuinely feel like I can have an open dialogue about race [and gender]. I've worked and lived and gone to school in places where that hasn't been the case. What happened with season four opened that door even further. It

doesn't mean that they're always going to understand immediately but they will put in the work to understand. That way, I can meet them halfway." This sharing of responsibility so that people from marginalized groups are not always doing all of the work is critical.

Together, Perrin and Brittany scoured Twitter feeds, read think pieces, and reflected on their role in unintentionally replicating the problem they were trying to address. "We had to take a step back, listen, not get defensive, and try to take the lessons learned and apply them to the next thing," Brittany says. At a time when an either/or mindset would have doomed them to a defensive stance, they tried to stay in their work-in-progress mode. Brittany says, "Perrin is a great listener. He did a ton of reading and listening and talking with people. It is so easy to get defensive and say 'Well, we tried. All these people are mad for no reason.'"

When people are angry at you, activating a growth mindset is critical to learning why they are angry. It is easy to write off the anger as sour grapes, as Brittany pointed out. This defensive dismissal—typical in a fixed mindset—is unwise. Research shows that people are far more willing to accept bad outcomes if they view the outcomes as fair. A funny example lies in a TED Talk by biologist Frans de Waal about the moral life of animals. Capuchin monkeys behave in many humanlike ways and thus are a popular way of studying humanlike behavior. In the video, researchers work with capuchins trained to exchange a rock for a food reward. One capuchin dutifully exchanges a rock for a cucumber and happily eats the cucumber. Then the researcher moves to the next capuchin and switches to a sweeter and juicier reward, a grape. The first capuchin sees the whole thing, tries for a grape, and once again is given a cucumber. The now-furious capuchin shakes the bars of the cage and throws things at the researcher. It was not about the grape; it was about the inequity.

As believers, we know that inequity is real in this country. Inequity triggers anger. Therefore, anger is a natural response from people from marginalized groups—whether they be women, or people of color, or gay people, or immigrants. However, the resulting anger can generate heat and self-threat. It can confuse or shut down fixed mindset observers.

As builders, our opportunity is to learn from this anger, not to recoil from or "tone police" it. When people are expressing anger about something being unfair, consider listening with the intent to grow from what you hear. Even if the anger makes you uncomfortable, do not let it stop you from listening. Perrin and Brittany understood that they had things to learn from the anger.

When Growth Mindsets Matter the Most

It would have been tempting for Perrin to defer to Brittany, which happens so often in organizations. "They didn't put it on me as the woman of color. In fact, they were really cognizant of avoiding a whole 'Brittany knows the answer' or 'Let Brittany go figure out this diversity thing' type of approach." This leadership move was important, as it signaled that the problem was everyone's to fix. It is at these moments when mindset shapes leadership response. In a fixed mindset, a leader might feel pressure to have all the answers rather than be a work-in-progress. So, rather than risk being exposed, he or she pushes the problem to someone else, or denies the problem. When psychological safety is needed most, a fixed mindset approach from leadership will shut it down.

Just as Perrin had activated a growth mindset to learn about autism, he needed to activate a growth mindset to learn about bias. "There are things in Hollywood that a lot of people have just taken for granted, or not thought about," he says. "People like me, I should

say. Blind spots in our own life experiences, our own perspectives, and how those perspectives inform our actions and what we do. We saw that, as well intentioned as we were, this is a systemic problem and it's something we need to figure out how to better address if we are going to continue to do this."

When it comes to issues like bias, it is more likely than not that our mindset will be fixed. In our national discourse, we stick to either/or labels: racist or not, sexist or not, homophobe or not, good person or not. The goal is to dodge the negative label. The psychology of good-ish people says otherwise. Our bounded ethicality means that all of us have blind spots. In fact, if you find yourself thinking or saying "I don't think I have any blind spots," then *that* is your blind spot.*

The difference between a fixed mindset and a growth mindset lies in whether we believe we have blind spots. As builders, we should never make claims of not being racists, sexists, etc. These claims are rarely accurate and usually lower our credibility. Rather, we should say, and believe, "I know that I have work to do in this area." That statement, if made with sincerity, reveals movement from a reflexive fixed mindset to a more intentional growth mindset. In other words, we can be good-ish.

When we are in a fixed mindset, we are walking on I'm-a-good-person eggshells. We are in a constant struggle to not say the wrong thing or do the wrong thing. I call this overwhelming feeling the "fixed mindset tax" because it is taxing on our attention. We focus less on the project, person, or policy at hand and more on not being wrong. Furthermore, our preoccupation with not being wrong means that we will not learn from our mistakes, which means we are even *more* likely to be wrong. The fixed mindset tax can be costly.

* I am not sure where I first heard this line, but it is advice that I repeat often. Thank you to the unknown original source.

High-stress, high-self-threat moments trigger these reactions. Research shows that we are more likely to try to prove that we are right or to withdraw effort when we are in a fixed mindset and challenged by others. We are then in a worse position when we next say something, second-guessing how it will be received without the insight to help us improve.

In contrast, in a growth mindset, we still make mistakes and we learn from them, which makes mistakes less likely in the future. In a growth mindset, it is possible to make good mistakes. Some people worry that if mistakes are accepted as part of learning, then we give people a free pass to make mistakes. Yet research says that when we view ourselves as works-in-progress, we are more willing to hold ourselves accountable for our actions. We are more likely to apologize to people we have hurt and we offer better, more complete apologies. Accountability is higher, not lower, when we give ourselves room to grow.

Listening to Your Mindset Voice

Thankfully, psychologists such as Carol Dweck and others have tested a host of ways to help us activate a growth mindset. The gist of these interventions lies in listening to what our "mindset voice" tells us about who we are and our capabilities. Let's say you make a comment that you feel is legitimate and inoffensive. To your surprise, people are offended and you are told that your comment is racist. Your fixed mindset voice might lead you to think, "That is ridiculous. I am not a racist. I should have kept my mouth shut. I will just say that I am sorry the other person was offended and get out of this conversation as fast as possible." Try to activate a different voice, which leads you to say, "That was not my intention. Would you be willing to tell me what I did wrong?"

An inspiring example of how to do this well took place on live television in 2016. Heather McGhee, president of the public policy and advocacy organization Demos, often appears on national television providing thought leadership on equity issues. In this segment, McGhee (who is African American) was taking live viewer calls about race. A caller named Garry Civitello from North Carolina said: “I’m a white male. And I’m prejudiced. What can I do to change? To be a better American?”

Such openness to growth on the topic of race is rare. The clip went viral, with more than eight million views. That call started a conversation between McGhee and Civitello that continued long after the show was over. McGhee reports that Civitello has been enjoying the work of renowned black social activist and scholar Cornel West. Learning and growing is the work of builders.

The impact of growth mindset on psychological safety is significant. If Brittany had perceived her team as low in psychological safety, based on Perrin’s behavior, she would have been taking a massive career and interpersonal risk to speak openly to her white male boss about race and gender issues. If Perrin had perceived his team as low in psychological safety, he would have been far less likely to discuss his blind spots with a black female subordinate. While reacting to the fallout of season four, Perrin and Brittany could have turned up the psychological safety or shut it down. They had a choice.

Psychological Safety and Experimentation

Adaptive Studios had many projects beyond *Project Greenlight*. As it turned out, they had already been planning to launch something new the day after the final airing of *Project Greenlight*’s season four. The initiative, Project Greenlight Digital Studios

(PGDS), would channel the *Project Greenlight* original spirit and mission into a 24/7 contest engine focusing on emerging talent and emerging technologies. A TV show would not necessarily be part of the equation, allowing for more contests and more experimentation. Brittany had been tapped to run PGDS, long before the fallout of season four. Now, the project’s mission made more sense than ever. Brittany realized that the approach would need to be refined to “dig into communities that are often silent or not heard, to find talent which is there and just needs to be nurtured.”

The team decided they needed to re-engineer the contest engine, to run more contests, and to leverage the timing flexibility of a digital platform. They did not have to wait for Hollywood gatekeepers to move forward. While the public controversy and spotlight had focused on the show, they saw deeper, more systemic issues. Waiting until people had already applied (or not applied) to create opportunity and access was waiting too long. “We can’t just run this contest and after the fact realize, Oh shoot, there are no minorities, there are no queer people,” Brittany says. “It doesn’t work that way. You have to know where the pain points are and then attack them—hypertarget them—with all your might.”

With each subsequent contest, they tried new things. In the first filmmaker contest after *Project Greenlight*’s season four, Brittany noticed an increase in submissions from people of color and women, seemingly from the inspiring impact of Effie Brown’s presence and courage. Representation alone had seemed to attract new viewers and new contest participants. The winners were a team of Haitian American filmmakers. “I don’t know if our winners, Josh [Jean-Baptiste] and Edson [Jean], would have applied otherwise,” Brittany recalls. “And they were, by far, the standout submission.”

Next, in the New Normal contest, they partnered with YouTube

star-turned-HBO star Issa Rae, who served as the executive producer and face of the contest. As a black woman creator known for challenging the Hollywood status quo, Issa actively promoted the contest to her huge fan base. Like season four, the New Normal contest was an open submission process through a widely available technology platform. Both contests had backers interested in non-traditional and underrepresented voices. Both had a Hollywood outsider-turned-insider at the helm.

Upon closer examination, the New Normal contest reflected key lessons from season four. The New Normal contest put an underrepresented voice at the helm and was explicit in its invitation to specific, underrepresented voices. They did not assume those applicants would find the contest; they went and looked for the applicants. The resulting application pool looked far more like the one they had been hoping for in the season four contest. In the end, the judges selected three female winners—one Asian Canadian, one Indian American, and one African American. The contest brought many new people into the PGDS community, which now leans female, based on social media followership.

PGDS still needs to work on better tracking of their progress. Data collection of contest participation demographics, aside from gender, has been uneven. The eyeball method suggests much progress has been made, but going forward, they are working on developing benchmarks and measurements to accurately track their alignment with their mission. “It’s really easy to say ‘Yeah, it looks more diverse,’ but what does that mean?” Brittany wonders.

Her worry is well founded. For example, my coauthors—Edward Chang, Katherine Milkman, and Modupe Akinola—and I studied the gender balance of corporate boards. Corporate boards are under scrutiny and face pressure to increase gender diversity. To no one’s surprise, our analysis found that most boards were predominantly male. But, more surprisingly, we found that

many boards had exactly two women on them, more frequently than would happen by chance. Through several studies, we found that what used to be tokenism (one woman) was now “twokenism” (two women). Boards appear to be defining gender diversity through the lens of what the social norm is, rather than through the lens of what would actually constitute gender balance. In this particular context, two women met the social norm, especially relative to past board composition. As Brittany speculated, “looking diverse” does not necessarily mean diversity has been achieved.

Organizational scholar Miguel Unzueta further notes that perceptions of diversity are fluid. What we perceive as diversity does not necessarily line up with the actual numbers because “diversity is what you want it to be.” People will perceive a group as more diverse if they tend toward a more hierarchical view of the world. They will perceive a group as more diverse if they are feeling motivated to protect their own group. Members of minority groups will perceive more diversity if their own group is represented, versus if other minority groups are represented. Similarly, Brittany and her colleagues were prone to perceived diversity distorting their true progress. While our categories of race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity, and more are imperfect and convoluted, they still offer us important measures. The numbers do not tell the whole story and yet they are needed in the story if we are to track the impact of the work.

The Adaptive Studios team also concluded that marketing and outreach to underrepresented communities require money and resources. Finding new voices would require a committed search. Brittany stresses that money is needed for targeted marketing through social media, film schools, community-specific presentations, and production budgets, as well as cash to help with liquidity, relocation support, and an attractive prize purse for contestants and winners.

We Need to Find, and Center, Our Partners

The team reached another critical conclusion: They needed partners. “It’s really important that we don’t center ourselves and pat ourselves on the back for our efforts,” Brittany says. “It’s important to center the people who are representatives of that group. We’re not saying or doing anything that people of underrepresented groups haven’t been talking about forever.”

Perrin explains his view on partnerships. “For me, being white, being male, being straight, it was very important that we find partners and that they were well represented in terms of making the right decision on what content we greenlight. A lot of Hollywood is driven by ego and power and all of those things, and our approach is almost the exact opposite. We would rather lead with great material and great partnerships and be good long-term partners.”

Enter Allie Esslinger. In 2015, she was working in the indie film space as the founder of a digital streaming platform and content creator network called Section II. Section II, named after a law that once outlawed portrayals of homosexuality in film, was Allie’s response to the dearth of LGBTQ women in film. For example, in 2014, 1,633 films were released, only 6 of which featured LGBTQ women. Allie described Section II to me as “Netflix for lesbians.”

While season four was unfolding amid great public scrutiny, Allie sensed through Perrin’s social media comments that he was listening with an intention to learn, not to defend or dodge. At this point in her career, Allie had tried to explain the goals of Section II to many straight white men in power positions like Perrin. It had not gone well. She was used to pushback or superficial responses (“Maybe you should try to reach out to Ellen [DeGeneres]”). She typically braced herself for disappointment or

for empty PR-driven promises. Nonetheless, she decided to reach out to Perrin via Twitter. To Allie’s surprise, Perrin wrote back immediately and suggested they meet.

“A lot of times, it’s really hard to explain or tell a story to someone who isn’t affected by the outcomes of the story, but he got it,” Allie recalls. “He asked a lot of questions, but he didn’t question the philosophical or business validity of what it means to have better representation, in front of and behind the camera. He sees entertainment as transformative.”

Perrin saw the meeting with Allie as an opportunity to learn and partner in new ways. “We rolled up our sleeves and talked to leaders of different communities, saying ‘This is our intent. Help us think about a contest or think about a greenlighting process that would benefit your community.’” Both Perrin and Allie came away from the conversation feeling hopeful, and Perrin introduced Allie to Brittany.

Allie feels timing worked in her favor, on the heels of great cost to others. “I got the benefit of the mistakes they made on *Project Greenlight*,” she says. “I think that must have been a traumatic experience for Effie. No one wants to be someone else’s learning curve. I benefited from their desire to do better after that.”

One year later, Section II and Project Greenlight Digital Studios launched the See Yourself filmmaker competition. Absent the lessons of season four, they do not think they would have done this contest. In marketing the competition, PGDS used the normal film and indie film trade magazine outlets. They also designed specific outreach efforts at LGBTQ film festivals like Outfest, using Section II’s database of filmmakers, and in media outlets like *The Advocate*. By launching the contest at Outfest, they hoped to center people from the target community, not themselves. The result was a dialogue within (rather than outside and about) the community.

The outreach effort showed up in the submissions. At least 20 percent of the people who were present at the event applied for the competition. PGDS reports that they saw more women, people of color, and LGBTQ submissions than in the past.

As always, there were more lessons to learn. While their applicant pool had more LGBTQ applicants than previous contests, male applicants still dominated. “We had more of the elements in place with the judging panel and the outreach, but . . .” Brittany’s voice trails off. “I think the targeting was still too broad. Were we targeting queer women, particularly knowing that they tend to be underrepresented? It’s so many layers and layers and you really have to crack open each one. We haven’t even scratched the surface.”

The result has been a series of contests over the past two years, each experimenting with new forms of judging, outreach, mentorship, and selection. Perrin reflects, “I’m really proud of what we’ve been able to do, but it really is an evolving process. I often say in the best way I can, we are stumbling upward.”

How to Activate Your Growth Mindset

Everyone stumbles. Let’s say someone suggests that you have said or done something racist or sexist or homophobic, or you are wrestling in your own mind with something you might have done. Be on the alert for the fixed mindset voice declaring: “I’m not a racist!” When this happens, you are probably slipping into an either/or mindset. If you find yourself telling others how you support people from marginalized groups, that is another possible sign of a fixed mindset (especially if the people you are telling this to are from a marginalized group). If you keep repeating what you “really” meant, that is another possible sign.

When you activate a growth mindset voice, you are more likely to respond, “I don’t really understand what I did wrong, but I would like to understand,” or to take the time to figure it out on your own. You are more likely to apologize by saying “I am sorry, I was wrong” than by saying “I am sorry you were offended,” which points the finger at the other person for taking offense rather than at ourselves for delivering the offense. In a growth mindset, you are more likely to accept that your apology may not erase the damage done, and to refrain from reburdening the other person by asking them to make you feel better or put their anger aside. If these are new ways of responding, you may feel uncomfortable. Keep trying. Like all habits, these get easier with practice.

As builders, we are ready to look at ourselves as individuals who carry unconscious biases and examine ourselves as part of systems in which biases are baked in culturally, legally, and structurally. To confront both unconscious and systemic bias, we will need to keep our growth mindsets activated.