



Chapter 9

The Power of Beliefs

Beliefs have great power. They can let information in or shut it out. They can make you do stupid things or wildly beneficial ones. Beliefs provide both motivation and permission to behave in alignment with our beliefs. Most beliefs operate outside of your conscious awareness.

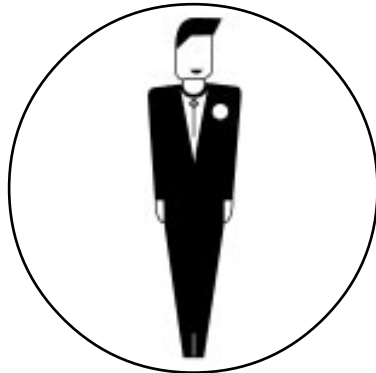
Most beliefs help you, but limiting beliefs can stop you from achieving your dreams and ambitions. Limiting beliefs often serve a positive purpose—safety, security, etc., but at a high cost of living a less than enjoyable life. All beliefs are formed, over time, through interaction with people and surroundings. It's difficult if not impossible to motivate someone to do something that conflicts with their beliefs.



Belief Shield

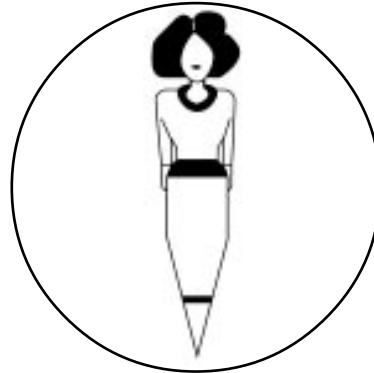
People cling to old beliefs, values, abilities, and identities, even at the expense of their well-being.

Belief



Shield

Belief



Shield

But here's the good news: Beliefs can be changed! By understanding each belief's:

- positive intention and benefits
- presuppositions or assumptions
- structure

Using these three elements of a belief, you can begin to expand, clarify, redefine, or retrain your mind and the minds of other people in ways that will change the belief from limiting to empowering.

Belief Shield

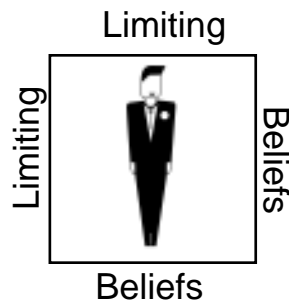
Beliefs are what Peter Senge, author of *The Fifth Discipline*, calls “mental models.” Beliefs, like an invisible bubble or boundary shield, sift through all of the information you receive through your senses, keeping what’s “true” (i.e., aligns with, supports and reinforces your beliefs) and rejecting what’s “false” (i.e., conflicts with your beliefs). Beliefs are neither true nor false; they are simply mental filters that you have created to make daily life simpler. You can let them fall away like leaves from a tree or scales from a fish, and replace them with more useful, more invigorating beliefs.

Empowering Belief: Any belief can be changed. Exchange your limiting beliefs for more successful ones. Tune up your empowering beliefs to be more powerful.

Limiting Beliefs

Limiting beliefs are often created as an excuse to hide our lack of knowledge about how to do something—relating, being, doing, learning, getting, or having. There are five common limiting beliefs: hopeless, helpless, worthless, useless, and blameless. Their expansive coun-

Limiting Beliefs



Limiting Beliefs

Hopeless Not possible

Helpless Not capable

Worthless Not worthy

Useless Not desirable

Blameless Not responsible

terparts are possible, capable, worthy, valuable, and responsible. Let's examine each one:

1. **It's hopeless** (i.e., it's not possible). Sometimes, faced with a seemingly insurmountable problem, we can take the easy way out by saying: "It's not possible; it's hopeless." Of course, when we say this, it immediately starts to block information to the contrary. We stop seeking the answers we need to solve whatever problem that confronts us. It doesn't matter if the issue is healing an illness, making a million dollars, or finding a mate, if we don't think it's possible, we just won't do what's necessary to make it happen. One of the most blatant of these is when a doctor gives a patient a "terminal" diagnosis; it's only "terminal" because *the doctor doesn't know how to cure it*, not because it's *incurable*. When a patient spontaneously recovers from a "terminal" disease, it's perceived as a "misdiagnosis" not a brilliant act of self-healing. Why aren't we more curious about how spontaneous remission occurs?

2. **I'm helpless** (i.e., I don't know how to do it). We have these big brains, but sometimes we don't have what I call the *KnowWare* to run them. It's like having a computer with a huge hard drive, but no application software. Or, we may know how to do something very similar in another situation, but we don't notice how to use it in a similar, but different situation. Some people, for example, find it easy to meet and talk to other people in a business context, but stammer and hesitate in a bar with the opposite sex.

Most of us have the mental software to handle most situations. (Here's an **empowering belief**: Everyone already has all the KnowWare they need.) But often we have

How Beliefs Form



compartmentalized that ability into a single context, place or time. So you might be great with unruly children, but not unruly co-workers or vice versa. To overcome the “know how” limitation, we can:

- discover what KnowWare we already have that can be enhanced to work in a new situation
- invoke our “learning” KnowWare to learn how to do something using books, tapes, seminars, and courses.

3. **I'm worthless** (i.e., I don't deserve success, love, happiness, etc.). Many ideologies pound this belief in from an early age. Parents, the earliest programmers, may deny children love or attention. Not in the spirit of harshness, but because of their own positive intentions and limitations. Remember, *your parents are running the KnowWare that they got from their parents*. It's hand-me-down, archaic code, so don't be surprised if some of it was limiting. It's the best they could do with what they had. From these repeated experiences, a child can create a belief that they aren't worthy.

There's a flip side to this belief: “I deserve, *because* I'm limited (incapable, helpless).” People are conditioned to believe that the world owes them something. One welfare recipient told me: “I deserve welfare, *because* I'm disabled.” I asked, “How does being disabled actually mean that you are more employable?” Similarly, in relationships, people sometimes feel that “I deserve to have *you make me feel good*, because it means that you love me.” (Don't you deserve to feel good about yourself anyway!)

Self-Fulfilling Prophecy

One-quarter to one-third of patients will improve if they merely believe they are taking effective medication.

-Bernie Siegel, M.D.

A man is what he believes.

- Anton Chekhov

4. **It's useless** (i.e., I don't want it). Invariably, this limitation comes from a misguided sense of values. We begin to believe that getting one thing *means* giving up something more important. For single people, getting married often seems to *mean* giving up their freedom. If we don't want something, we won't go after it.

This limitation is about an either/or decision: I can have either A or B (but not A *and* B). You can challenge this by asking: "How would getting A actually mean you can have more B?" How would being married actually give you more freedom? Remember, beliefs tend to blind us to other possibilities. They despise conflicting information.

Special Note: To motivate yourself and others you have to *want* to motivate them. You may not want some prospects as clients, so motivating them to buy would be counterproductive. You may not want to motivate your child to put a dirty shirt in the laundry.

5. **I'm blameless** (i.e., I'm not responsible) Patients turn over their health to doctors. Lovers turn over their happiness to their partners. Workers turn over job satisfaction to their managers. With this belief, people stop taking action to achieve their outcomes. They turn control over to someone else and *passively* wait for something to happen, then blame the other person if nothing does happen. Take control of your life, health, and happiness. (Better belief: I'm responsible for creating my life.)

One way this shows up in marriages is when one spouse makes the other miserable in an attempt to get the other person to initiate a divorce. That way, they are absolved of blame or guilt from the breakup of the marriage.



Edges of Possibility

*Perhaps nobody ever
accomplishes all that he
feels lies in him to do, but
nearly every one who tries
his powers touches the walls
of his being occasionally,
and learns about how far to
attempt to spring.*

-Charles Dudley Warner



In a business, employees can make mistakes, offend co-workers, and act aggressively in an attempt to get fired from a job they don't like or enjoy. Again, to absolve themselves of blame for being fired. If their initial efforts to get fired don't work, they may escalate their behavior until it becomes dangerous, even fatal.

Common Limiting Beliefs

- Spirit
 - It's a sin, because a higher power would judge it so.
- Identity
 - I'm shy, lazy, not creative (characteristics)
 - I'm a victim of:
 - my environment (present),
 - childhood (past),
 - internal demons (devil made me do it),
 - external demons (others)
- Beliefs
 - Achieving success means *losing something more valuable*.
- Values
 - Getting married means giving up my freedom.
- Capabilities
 - I'm not good enough
 - I don't know enough
 - I can't get out of debt, poverty, this job, etc.
- Environment
 - Life is hard
 - You have to struggle to survive

Spin

We also make excuses for the way we behave because it's easier than changing behaviors. Some of the ways are:

- Judging others is often a way to feel superior. Underlying judgements reflect beliefs. Examples: criticiz-



Convictions

*Convictions are more
dangerous enemies of
truth than lies.*

-Nietzsche



- ing other drivers for slowness (my time is important) or bad driving (safety is important).
- Judgements of self—I'm not good enough, therefore I can't do something.
 - Illusion of Safety—Limiting beliefs are like a cocoon that appear to keep us safe (It's not safe to be in a relationship), but actually prevent us from experiencing the fullness of life.
 - Saves time and effort. "I'm not well" can cause others to take on more of your responsibilities.
 - Generalizations about the past (In *Pretty Woman*, Julia Robert's character says, "I'm a bum magnet.")
 - Generalizations from minimal evidence. Remember the convincer strategy? How many examples does it take to begin to form a belief...two or three?
 - Distortions—turning opposing into supporting evidence
 - Deletions—eliminating conflicting evidence
 - Justification by imagining future results
 - Self-fulfilling prophesy: belief causes action which reinforces the belief.

Changing Beliefs with Language

I've found "sleight of mouth" language patterns a powerful antidote for limiting beliefs. The great thing about them is that they can be used in everyday conversation with co-workers and family members.

Beliefs always take the linguistic form of:

"A means B" or "A causes B" or "I'm B because of A."

For example, "Being late, *means* you don't love me. Being late *makes* me think you don't love me. You don't



Sleight of Mouth

*Sleight of Mouth
patterns help people
enrich their
perspective, expand
their maps of the world
and reconnect with
their experience.
-Robert Dilts*



love me *because* you're always late." In this case, the behavior—being late—means or causes the person to feel unloved. You can imagine how someone who feels unworthy might take even these simple actions as evidence that they are worthless.

Transforming Limiting Beliefs

To gather the information you need to transform the belief using simple conversation, ask,

What's the opposite of A? Then ask:

What's the opposite of B?

Example: What's the opposite of being late? *Being on time*. What's the opposite of not loving you? *Caring about me*. Notice that what you think might be the opposite may not be what the other person holds in their mind as the opposite.

Now that you know the limiting belief and the opposites of A and B, ask the person each of the following questions. The belief will usually shift completely:

How would A actually mean/cause [opposite of B]?

How would [opposite of A] actually mean/cause B?

How would A actually mean/cause *not* B?

How would *not* A actually mean/cause B?

How would *not* A actually mean/cause *not* B?

How would being late actually mean I care about you?

How would being on time actually mean I don't love you?

How would being late actually mean I love you?

How would not being late actually mean I don't love you?

How would not being late actually mean I don't care?



Intelligence

*The greatest
intelligence is
precisely the one that
suffers most from its
own limitations.*

-Andre Gide



Example 2: "Falling off a bike means I'm clumsy."

A = Falling off a bike

B = I'm clumsy

Opposite of **A**: riding effortlessly

Opposite of **B**: coordinated

How would falling off a bike actually mean you're coordinated?

I didn't hurt myself when I fell. Even the best riders sometimes fall.

When would riding effortlessly actually mean you're clumsy?

When falling would prevent greater injury.

How would falling off a bike actually mean you're not clumsy?

It might mean I'm pushing the envelope, learning what I can do.

How would not falling off a bike actually mean you're clumsy?

When falling would prevent greater injury.

How would not falling off a bike actually mean you're not clumsy?

It would mean I've learned how to ride well.

Many people have a limiting belief that "doing it wrong means I'm stupid." It's difficult to motivate someone to do something if they believe they are bad, stupid or dumb about it. Empowering belief: I learn something from everything I do. Ask: "How does doing it wrong accelerate your learning?"

This linguistic pattern helps create multiple points of view from which the limiting belief becomes more pliable



Limits

We expect more of ourselves than we have any right to, in virtue of our endowments.

-Oliver Wendell Holmes, Sr.



and open to reinterpretation. Limiting beliefs often take the following forms:

<u>Limiting Beliefs</u>	<u>Core Value</u>	<u>Reason</u>
It's not possible to...	relate	because _____.
I can't...	be	because _____.
I don't deserve to...	do	because _____.
I don't want to...	learn	because _____.
I'm not responsible...	get/have	because _____.

<u>Benefit</u>	<u>Equals</u>	<u>Greater Cost</u>
Getting what I want...		giving up _____.
Learning...		forgetting _____.
Doing...	means	losing _____.
Being...		abandoning _____.
Relating...		letting go of _____.

Limiting Belief:

Achieving success means giving up _____.

"Achieving success means selling my soul."

"Getting married means giving up my friends."

"Doing this job is a waste of time."

Shifting Beliefs Example

How would achieving success actually mean getting more _____?

How would *not* achieving success actually mean giving up more _____?

How would giving up _____ actually mean not getting success?

How would not giving up _____ actually mean getting more success?

Once we know the structure and content of a person's belief, we can begin to shift it using sleight-of-mouth



Belief

*A firm belief attracts facts.
They come out of holes in
th' ground an' cracks in th'
wall to support belief, but
the run away fr'm doubt.
-Finchley Peter Dunne*



Loosening Beliefs

Sometimes, we need to loosen a person's hold on a belief so that we can start to shift it using the words *seems* or *appears*: So, for you it *seems* like getting success means giving up _____. (This statement presupposes that not everyone sees it the same way.)

Shifting Outcomes

Sometimes we have to shift the person's attention away from what they might lose to a more useful outcome: How would getting success mean *having more to give*?

Reframing

Sometimes we have to expand or narrow the focus of belief to get a shift. Expand to include more time, people, or situations, or narrow to focus on fewer people, situations or time. Or shift from short-term to long-term: How would achieving success make *your whole life better*? How would achieving success make *each day better*?

Intention

Sometimes it helps to draw people's attention to the positive intention of their belief, and move their attention off the limitation.

Belief: "Success means giving up time with my spouse."

So it's important to *sustain and enrich your marriage*. How would success make it *even easier to spend more quality time with your family and friends*?

Redefine

Sometimes we can redefine what either A or B would mean to the person:



Empowering Belief

The belief that becomes truth for me...is that which allows me the best use of my strength, the best means of putting my virtues into action
-Andre Gide



"I'm *afraid* achieving success would *take too long*."

So you're *concerned* that success would take *more time than you're willing to commit to it*. You're going to use that time one way or another; why not use it to achieve success?

Notice that we can change a word like *afraid* and soften it to *concerned*, thereby redefining and reframing the meaning. Consider the words: successful, wealthy, and *filthy* rich. The implications are vastly different. These shifts are the essence of what the media calls "spin."

Chunking

Ever noticed how some people like the view from 30,000 feet (big picture) and others want to bring the discussion back down to earth (detail)? To shift a belief, you can shift up to a more general, down to a more specific, or across to a similar, yet different point of view. Almost everyone who has difficulty succeeding has a hard time with the word, *selling*. The most common form of people's limiting belief is:

"Selling means manipulation."

Chunk up: Selling means helping people get what they want.

Chunk up: Selling means solving customer problems.

Chunk down: Selling means asking questions to verify the customer needs what we offer.

Chunk across: Selling means planting seeds to grow long-term relationships.

Counterexample

Sometimes a single example that runs counter to the limiting belief will change it. This is especially true when

the belief involves words like *all* or *none*, *always*, or *never*, *everyone* or *no one*.

"I'll *never* succeed."

Never? You've never succeeded at anything? You survived your birth. You breathe, you eat, you walk.

Apply to Self

Another way to attack a belief is with its own language:

"You can't *trust* people."

So you can't *trust* what you just said?

That's not a very *trusting* thing to say.

Intention

The goal of these sleight-of-mouth patterns is to change:

Problems	into	Solutions
Failure	into	Learning
Impossibility	into	Possibility

Summary

The five limiting beliefs: hopeless, helpless, worthless, useless, and blameless can inhibit motivation. They often involve one of the five core values: people, places, activities, knowledge or things. Beliefs can form through accumulation, erosion, or trauma. They can be changed verbally by playing with the belief's structure and content using sleight of mouth.