



BELIEFS AND CONVICTIONS

“The mind is the greatest power in the world. The only thing limiting anyone is their self-limiting beliefs. Holding onto poisonous beliefs shuts out all of the abundance life has to offer. . . Simply refuse to limit yourself in any way.” – David Wolfe

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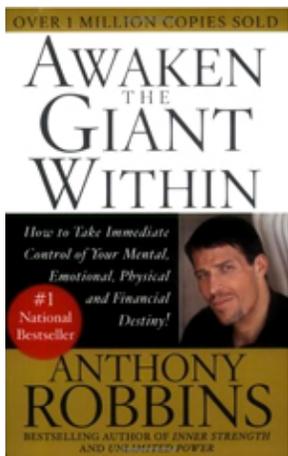
Conventional: “I hold firm to all my beliefs. Period.”

Terms: **Kaizen**
Constant and Never-Ending Improvement (CANI)

BELIEF SYSTEMS: THE POWER TO CREATE AND THE POWER TO DESTROY

Source: Tony Robbins, *Awaken the Giant Within*, Chapter 4

“Under all that we think, lives all we believe, like the ultimate veil of our spirits.” —ANTONIO MACHADO



He was bitter and cruel, an alcoholic and drug addict who almost killed himself several times. Today he serves a life sentence in prison for the murder of a liquor store cashier who “got in his way.” He has two sons, born a mere eleven months apart, one of whom grew up to be “just like Dad”: a drug addict who lived by stealing and threatening others until he, too, was put in jail for attempted murder. His brother, however, is a different story: a man who’s raising three kids, enjoys his marriage, and appears to be truly happy. As regional manager for a major national concern, he finds his work both challenging and rewarding. He’s physically fit, and has no alcohol or drug addictions! How could these two young men have turned out so differently, having grown up in virtually the same environment? Both were asked privately, unbeknownst to the other, “Why has your life turned out this way?”

Surprisingly, they both provided the exact same answer: “What else could I have become, having grown up with a father like that?”

So often we’re seduced into believing that events control our lives and that our environment has shaped who we are today. No greater lie was ever told.

It’s not the events of our lives that shape us, but our beliefs as to what those events mean.

Two men are shot down in Vietnam and imprisoned in the infamous Hoa Lo prison. They are isolated, chained to cement slabs, and continuously beaten with rusty shackles and tortured for information. Yet although these men are receiving the same abuse, they form radically different beliefs about their experience. One man decides that his life is over, and in order to avoid any additional pain, commits suicide. The other pulls from these brutalizing events a deeper belief in himself, his fellow man, and his Creator than he’s ever had before. Captain Gerald Coffee uses his experience of this to remind people

all over the world of the power of the human spirit to overcome virtually any level of pain, any challenge, or any problem.

Two women turn seventy years old, yet each takes a different meaning from the event. One “knows” that her life is coming to an end. To her, seven decades of living mean that her body must be breaking down and she’d better start winding up her affairs. The other woman decides that what a person is capable of at any age depends upon her belief, and sets a higher standard for herself. She decides that mountain climbing might be a good sport to begin at the age of seventy. For the next twenty five years she devotes herself to this new adventure in mastery, scaling some of the highest peaks in the world, until today, in her nineties, Hulda Crooks has become the oldest woman to ascend Mount Fuji.

You see, it’s never the environment; it’s never the events of our lives, but the meaning we attach to the events—how we interpret them—that shapes who we are today and who we’ll become tomorrow. Beliefs are what make the difference between a lifetime of joyous contribution and one of misery and devastation.

Beliefs are what separate a Mozart from a Manson. Beliefs are what cause some individuals to become heroes, while others “lead lives of quiet desperation.” What are our beliefs designed for? They’re the guiding force to tell us what will lead to pain and what will lead to pleasure. Whenever something happens in your life, your brain asks two questions: 1) Will this mean pain or pleasure? 2) What must I do now to avoid pain and/or gain pleasure? The answers to these two questions are based on our beliefs, and our beliefs are driven by our generalizations about what we’ve learned could lead to pain and pleasure. These generalizations guide all of our actions and thus the direction and quality of our lives. Generalizations can be very useful; they are simply the identification of similar patterns. For example, what allows you to open a door?. You look down at a handle and, although you’ve never seen this specific one before, you can generally feel certain that this door will open if you turn the handle right or left, if you push or pull it. Why do you believe this? Simply, your experience of doors has provided enough references to create a sense of certainty that allows you to follow through. Without this sense of certainty, we would virtually be unable to leave the house, drive our cars, use a telephone, or do any one of the dozens of things we do in a day. Generalizations simplify our lives and allow us to function. Unfortunately, generalizations in more complex areas of our lives can oversimplify and sometimes create limiting beliefs.

Maybe you’ve failed to follow through on various endeavors a few times in your life, and based on that, you developed a belief that you are incompetent. Once you believe this is true, it can become a self-fulfilling prophecy. You may say, “Why even try if I’m not going to follow through anyway?” Or perhaps you’ve made a few poor decisions in business or in relationships, and have interpreted that to mean you will always “sabotage” yourself. Or maybe in school you didn’t learn as quickly as you thought other kids did, and rather than considering the idea that you had a different learning strategy, you may have decided that you were “learning- disabled.” On another level, isn’t racial prejudice fueled by a wholesale generalization about an entire group of people? The challenge with all these beliefs is that they become limitations for future decisions about who you are and what you’re capable of. We need to remember that most of our beliefs are generalizations about our past, based on our interpretations of painful and pleasurable experiences.

The challenge is threefold:

- 1) most of us do not consciously decide what we're going to believe;
- 2) often our beliefs are based on misinterpretation of past experiences; and
- 3) once we adopt a belief, we forget it's merely an interpretation.

We begin to treat our beliefs as if they're realities, as if they are gospel. In fact, we rarely, if ever, question our long-held beliefs. If you ever wonder why people do what they do, again, you need to remember that human beings are not random creatures: all of our actions are the result of our beliefs. Whatever we do, it is out of our conscious or unconscious beliefs about what will lead to pleasure or away from pain. If you want to create long-term and consistent changes in your behaviors, you must change the beliefs that are holding you back.

Beliefs have the power to create and the power to destroy. Human beings have the awesome ability to take any experience of their lives and create a meaning that dis-empowers them or one that can literally¹⁰ save their lives. Some people have taken the pain of their past and said, "Because of this, I will help others. Because I was raped¹¹, no one else will be harmed again." Or, "Because I lost my son or daughter, I will make a difference in the world." It's not something they wanted to believe, but rather, adopting this type of belief was a necessity for them to be able to pick up the pieces and move on to live empowering lives. We all have the capacity to create meanings that empower us, but so many of us never tap into it, or even recognize it. If we don't adopt the faith that there is a reason for the unexplainable tragedies of life, then we begin to destroy our capacity to truly live.

The need to be able to create a meaning out of life's most painful experiences was observed by psychiatrist **Viktor Frankl** as he and other Holocaust victims survived the horrors of Auschwitz and other concentration camps. Frankl noted that those special few who were able to make it through this "hell on earth" shared one thing in common: they were able to endure and transform their experience by finding an empowering meaning for their pain. They developed the belief that because they suffered and survived, they would be able to tell the story and make certain that no human being would ever suffer this way again. Beliefs are not limited to impacting our emotions or actions. They can literally change our bodies in a matter of moments. I had the pleasure of interviewing Yale professor and best-selling author Dr. Bernie Siegel. As we began to speak about the power of belief, Bernie shared with me some of the research he'd done on people with Multiple Personality Disorders.

Incredibly, the potency of these people's beliefs that they had become a different person resulted in an unquestioned command to their nervous system to make measurable changes in their biochemistry. The result? Their bodies would literally transform before the researchers' eyes and begin to reflect a new identity at a moment's notice. Studies document such remarkable occurrences as patients' eye color actually changing as their personality changes, or physical marks disappearing and reappearing! Even diseases such as diabetes or high blood pressure come and go depending on the person's belief as to which personality they're manifesting. Beliefs even have the capacity to override the impact of drugs on the body. While most people believe that drugs heal, studies in the new science of psychoneuroimmunology (the mind- body relationship) have begun to bear out what many others have suspected for centuries: our beliefs about the illness and its treatment play as significant a role, maybe an even more significant role, than the treatment itself.

Dr. Henry Beecher from Harvard University has done extensive research that clearly demonstrates that we often give credit to a drug, when in reality it's the patient's belief that makes the difference. One demonstration of this was a groundbreaking experiment in which 100 medical students were asked to

participate in testing two new drugs. One was described to them as a super-stimulant in a red capsule, the other as a super-tranquilizer in a blue capsule. Unbeknownst to the students, the contents of the capsules had been switched: the red capsule was actually a barbiturate, and the blue capsule was actually an amphetamine. Yet half of the students developed physical reactions that went along with their expectations—exactly the opposite of the chemical reaction the drugs should have produced in their bodies! These students were not just given placebos; they were given actual drugs. But their beliefs overrode the chemical impact of the drug on their bodies. As Dr. Beecher later stated, a drug's usefulness "is a direct result of not only the chemical properties of the drug, but also the patient's belief in the usefulness and effectiveness of the drug."

"Drugs are not always necessary, [but] belief in recovery always is."
-NORMAN COUSINS

I had the privilege of knowing Norman Cousins for almost seven years, and I was fortunate enough to have the last taped interview with him just one month before he passed on. In that interview, he shared a story about how strongly our beliefs affect our physical bodies. At a football game in Monterey Park, a Los Angeles suburb, several people experienced the symptoms of food poisoning. The examining physician deduced that the cause was a certain soft drink from the dispensing machines because all of his patients had purchased some prior to becoming ill. An announcement was made over the loudspeaker requesting that no one patronize¹² the dispensing machine, saying some people had become ill and describing the symptoms. Pandemonium immediately broke out in the stands as people retched and fainted in droves. Even a few people who had not even gone near the machine became ill! Ambulances from local hospitals did a booming business that day, as they drove back and forth to the stadium, transporting multitudes of stricken fans. When it was discovered that the dispensing machine was not the culprit¹³, people immediately and "miraculously" recovered. We need to realize that our beliefs have the capacity to make us sick or make us healthy in a moment.

Beliefs have been documented to affect our immune systems. And most importantly, beliefs can either give us the resolve to take action, or weaken and destroy our drive. In this moment beliefs are shaping how you respond to what you've just read and what you're going to do with what you're learning in this book. Sometimes we develop beliefs that create limitations or strengths within a very specific context; for instance, how we feel about our ability to sing or dance, fix a car, or do calculus. Other beliefs are so generalized that they dominate virtually every aspect of our lives, either negatively or positively. I call these global beliefs. Global beliefs are the giant beliefs we have about everything in our lives: beliefs about our identities, people, work, time, money, and life itself, for that matter. These giant generalizations are often phrased as is/am/are: "Life is . . ." "I am . . ." "People are . . ." As you can imagine, beliefs of this size and scope can shape and color every aspect of our lives. The good news about this is that making one change in a limiting global belief you currently hold can change virtually every aspect of your life in a moment! Remember: Once accepted, our beliefs become unquestioned commands to our nervous systems, and they have the power to expand or destroy the possibilities of our present and future.

If we want to direct our lives, then, we must take conscious control over our beliefs. And in order to do that, we first need to understand what they really are and how they are formed.

WHAT IS A BELIEF?

What is a belief, anyway? Often in life we talk about things without having a clear idea of what they really are. Most people treat a belief as if it's a thing, when really all it is is a feeling of certainty about something. If you say you believe that you're intelligent, all you're really saying is, "I feel certain that I'm intelligent." That sense of certainty allows you to tap into resources that allow you to produce intelligent results. We all have the answers inside of us for virtually anything—or at least we have access to the answers we need through others. But often our lack of belief, our lack of certainty, causes us not to be able to use the capacity that resides within us.

A simple way of understanding a belief is to think about its basic building block: an idea. There are a lot of ideas you may think about but not really believe. Let's take, for example, the idea that you're sexy. Stop for a second and say to yourself, "I'm sexy." Now, whether it's an idea or a belief will come down to the amount of certainty you feel about this phrase as you say it. If you think, "Well, I'm not really sexy," what you're really saying is, "I don't feel very certain that I'm sexy."

How do we turn an idea into a belief? Let me offer you a simple metaphor to describe the process. If you can think of an idea as being like a tabletop with no legs, you'll have a fair representation of why an idea doesn't feel as certain as a belief. Without any legs, that tabletop won't even stand up by itself. Belief, on the other hand, has legs. If you really believe, "I'm sexy," how do you know you're sexy?

Isn't it true that you have some references to support the idea—some experiences in life to back it up? Those are the legs that make your tabletop solid, that make your belief certain.

What are some of the reference experiences you've had? Maybe men and women have told you that you're sexy. Or maybe you look at yourself in the mirror, compare your image to that of those whom other people consider sexy, and say, "Hey, I look like them!" Or maybe strangers on the street call out and wave to you. All these experiences mean nothing until you organize them under the idea that you're sexy. As you do this, the legs make you feel solid about the idea and cause you to begin to believe it. Your idea feels certain and is now a belief.

Once you understand this metaphor, you can begin to see how your beliefs are formed, and get a hint of how you can change them as well. First, though, it's important to note that we can develop beliefs about anything if we just find enough legs—enough reference experiences—to build it up. Think about it. Isn't it true that you have enough experiences in your life, or know enough other people who have gone through tough times with other human beings, that if you really wanted to you could easily develop the belief that people are rotten and, given half a chance, would take advantage of you?

Maybe you don't want to believe this, and we've already discussed that it would be disempowering, but don't you have experiences that could back up this idea and make you feel certain about it if you wanted to? Isn't it also true that you have experiences in life—references—to back up the idea that if you really care about people and treat them well, they are basically good and will want to help you too?

The question is: which one of these beliefs is the true belief? The answer is that it doesn't matter which one is true. What matters is which one is most empowering. We all can find someone to back up our belief and make us feel more solid about it. This is how human beings are able to rationalize. The key question, again, is whether this belief is strengthening or weakening us, empowering or disempowering us on a daily basis. So what are the possible sources of references in our lives?

Certainly, we can pull from our personal experiences. Sometimes we gather references through information we get from other people, or from books, tapes, movies, and so on. And sometimes we form references based solely on our imagination. The emotional intensity we feel about any of these references will definitely affect the strength and width of the leg. The strongest and most solid legs are formed by personal experiences that we have a lot of emotion attached to because they were painful or pleasurable experiences. The other factor is the number of references we have—obviously, the more reference experiences supporting an idea, the stronger your belief will be in it.

Do your references have to be accurate in order for you to be willing to use them? No, they can be real or imaginary, accurate or inaccurate—even our own personal experiences, as solidly as we feel about them, are distorted by our own personal perspective.

Because human beings are capable of such distortion and invention, the reference legs we can use to assemble our beliefs are virtually unlimited. The downside of this is that, regardless of where our references come from, we begin to accept them as real and thus no longer question them! This can have very powerful negative consequences depending upon the beliefs we adopt. By the same token, we have the ability to use imagined references to propel us in the direction of our dreams.

People can succeed if they imagine something vividly enough just as easily as if they had the actual experiences. That's because our brains can't tell the difference between something we've vividly imagined and something we've actually experienced. With enough emotional intensity and repetition, our nervous systems experience something as real, even if it hasn't occurred yet. Every great achiever I've ever interviewed has had the ability to get themselves to feel certain they could succeed, even though no one before them had ever accomplished it.

They've been able to create references where no references existed and achieve what seemed to be impossible. Anyone who uses a computer is likely to recognize the name "Microsoft." What most people don't realize is that Bill Gates, the co-founder of that company, was not just some genius who got lucky, but a person who put himself on the line with no references to back up his belief. When he found out that an Albuquerque company was developing something called a "personal computer" that needed BASIC software, he called them up and promised to deliver it, even though he had no such thing at the time. Once he had committed himself, he had to find a way. His ability to create a sense of certainty was his real genius. Many people were just as intelligent as he was, but he used his certainty to be able to tap into his resources, and within a few weeks he and a partner had written a language that made the personal computer a reality. By putting himself on the line and finding a way, Bill Gates set in motion that day a series of events that would change the way people do business, and became a billionaire by the time he was thirty years old. Certainty carries power!

Do you know the story of the four-minute mile? For thousands of years, people held the belief that it was impossible for a human being to run the mile in less than four minutes. But in 1954, Roger Bannister broke this imposing belief barrier. He got himself to achieve the "impossible" not merely by physical practice but by constantly rehearsing the event in his mind, breaking through the four-minute barrier so many times with so much emotional intensity that he created vivid references that became an unquestioned command to his nervous system to produce the result. Many people don't realize, though, that the greatest aspect of his breakthrough was what it did for others. It had seemed no one would ever be able to break a four-minute mile, yet within one year of Roger's breaking the barrier, 37 other runners also broke it. His experience provided them with references strong enough to

create a sense of certainty that they, too, could “do the impossible.” And the year after that, 300 other runners did the same thing!

“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

People so often develop limiting beliefs about who they are and what they’re capable of. Because they haven’t succeeded in the past, they believe they won’t be able to succeed in the future. As a result, out of their fear of pain, they begin to constantly focus on being “realistic.”

Most people who constantly say, “Let’s be realistic,” are really just living in fear, deathly afraid of being disappointed again. Out of that fear, they develop beliefs that cause them to hesitate, to not give their all—consequently they get limited results. Great leaders are rarely “realistic.” They are intelligent, and they are accurate, but they are not realistic by other people’s standards. **What is realistic for one person, though, is totally different from what is realistic for another person, based upon their references. Gandhi believed he could gain autonomy for India without violently opposing Great Britain—something that had never been done before. He wasn’t being realistic, but he certainly proved to be accurate.** By the same token, it certainly wasn’t realistic for a man to believe he could give the world happiness by building a theme park in the middle of an orange grove and charging people not only for the rides, but even to get in! At the time, there was no such park in the world. Yet Walt Disney had a sense of certainty like few people who have ever lived, and his optimism transformed his circumstances.

If you’re going to make an error in life, err on the side of overestimating your capabilities (obviously, as long as it doesn’t jeopardize your life). By the way, this is something that’s hard to do, since the human capacity is so much greater than most of us would ever dream. In fact many studies have focused on the differences between people who are depressed and people who are extremely optimistic. After attempting to learn a new skill, the pessimists are always more accurate about how they did, while the optimists see their behavior as being more effective than it actually was. Yet this unrealistic evaluation of their own performance is the secret of their future success. Invariably the optimists eventually end up mastering the skill while the pessimists fail. Why? Optimists are those, who, despite having no references for success, or even references of failure, manage to ignore those references, leaving unassembled such cognitive tabletops as “I failed” or “I can’t succeed.” Instead, optimists produce faith references, summoning forth their imagination to picture themselves doing something different next time and succeeding. It is this special ability, this unique focus, which allows them to persist until eventually they gain the distinctions that put them over the top. The reason success eludes most people is that they have insufficient references of succeeding in the past. But an optimist operates with beliefs such as, “The past doesn’t equal the future.” All great leaders, all people who have achieved success in any area of life, know the power of continuously, pursuing their vision, even if all the details of how to achieve it aren’t yet; available. If you develop the absolute sense of certainty that powerful beliefs provide, then you can get yourself to accomplish virtually anything, including those things that other people are certain are impossible.

“Only in men’s imagination does every truth find an effective and undeniable existence. Imagination, not invention, is the supreme master of art, as of life.”

JOSEPH CONRAD

One of the biggest challenges in anyone's life is knowing how to interpret "failures." How we deal with life's "defeats" and what we determine is the cause will shape our destinies. We need to remember that how we deal with adversity and challenges will shape our lives more than almost anything else. Sometimes we get so many references of pain and failure that we begin to assemble those into a belief that nothing we do can make things better. Some people begin to feel that things are pointless, that they're helpless or worthless, or that no matter what they try they'll lose anyway. These are a set of beliefs that must never be indulged in if we ever expect to succeed and achieve in our lives.

These beliefs strip us of our personal power and destroy our ability to act. In psychology, there is a name for this destructive mindset: learned helplessness. When people experience enough failure at something—and you'd be surprised how few times this is for some people—they perceive their efforts as futile and develop the terminal discouragement of learned helplessness.

Dr. Martin Seligman of the University of Pennsylvania has done intensive research on what creates learned helplessness. In his book *Learned Optimism* he reports on three specific patterns of beliefs that cause us to feel helpless and can destroy virtually every aspect of our lives. He calls these three categories permanence, pervasiveness, and personal.

Many of our country's greatest achievers have succeeded in spite of running into huge problems and barriers. The difference between them and those who give up revolves around their beliefs about the permanence, or lack thereof, of their problems. Achievers rarely, if ever, see a problem as permanent, while those who fail see even the smallest problems as permanent. Once you adopt the belief that there's nothing you can do to change something, simply because nothing you've done up until now has changed it, you start to take a pernicious poison into your system. Eight years ago, when I had hit rock bottom and despaired of ever turning things around, I thought my problems were permanent. That was the closest thing to emotional death I've ever experienced. I learned to link so much pain to holding that belief that I was able to destroy it, and I've never indulged in it again. You must do the same. If you ever hear yourself or anyone you care about starting to express the belief that a problem is permanent, it's time to immediately shake that person loose.

No matter what happens in your life, you've got to be able to believe, "This, too, shall pass," and that if you keep persisting, you'll find a way. The second difference between winners and losers, those who are optimistic and those who are pessimistic, is their beliefs about the pervasiveness of problems. An achiever never sees a problem as being pervasive, that is, that one problem controls their whole life. They always see it as, "Well, it's just a little challenge with my eating pattern." They don't see it as, "I'm the problem. Because I overeat, my whole life is destroyed." Conversely, those who are pessimistic—those who have learned helplessness—have developed a belief that because they screwed up in one area, they are a screw-up! They believe that because they have financial challenges, their whole life is now destroyed: their kids won't be taken care of, their spouses will leave them, and so on. Pretty soon they generalize that things are out of control and feel completely helpless. Imagine the impact of permanence and pervasiveness together! The solution to both permanence and pervasiveness is to see something you can take control of in your life, and begin to take action in that direction. As you do this, some of these limiting beliefs will disappear. The final category of belief, which Seligman calls personal, I refer to as the problem being personal. If we don't see a failure as a challenge to modify our approach, but rather as a problem with ourselves, as a personality defect, we will immediately feel overwhelmed. After all, how do you change your entire life? Isn't that more difficult than just changing

your actions in a particular area? Be wary of adopting the belief of the problem being personal. How inspired can you get by beating yourself up?

Holding these limiting beliefs is equivalent to systematically ingesting minute doses of arsenic that, over time, build up to a fatal dose. While we don't die immediately, we start dying emotionally the moment we partake of them. So we have to avoid them at all costs. Remember, as long as you believe something, your brain operates on automatic pilot, filtering any input from the environment and searching for references to validate your belief, regardless of what it is.

"It is the mind that maketh good of ill, that maketh wretch or happy, rich or poor." - EDMUND SPENSER

HOW TO CHANGE A BELIEF

All personal breakthroughs begin with a change in beliefs. So how do we change? The most effective way is to get your brain to associate massive pain to the old belief. You must feel deep in your gut that not only has this belief cost you pain in the past, but it's costing you in the present and, ultimately, can only bring you pain in the future. Then you must associate tremendous pleasure to the idea of adopting a new, empowering belief. This is the basic pattern that we'll review again and again in creating change in our lives. Remember, we can never forget that everything we do, we do either out of our need to avoid pain or our desire to gain pleasure, and if we associate enough pain to anything, we'll change. The only reason we have a belief about something is that we've linked massive pain to not believing it or massive pleasure to keeping it alive.

Secondly, create doubt. If you're really honest with yourself, aren't there some beliefs that you used to defend heart and soul years ago that you'd be almost embarrassed to admit to today? What happened? Something caused you to doubt: maybe a new experience, maybe a counterexample to your past belief. Perhaps you met some Russians and found out that they were people just like you, not part of some "evil empire." I think that many Americans today feel a genuine compassion for Soviet citizens because they see them as people who are struggling to take care of their families. Part of what changed our perceptions was exchange programs in which we actually met Russians and saw how much they share in common with us. We got new experiences which caused us to question, interrupted our patterns of certainty, and began to shake our reference legs.

However, new experience in and of itself doesn't guarantee a change in belief. People can have an experience that runs directly counter to their belief, yet reinterpret it any way they want in order to bolster their conviction. Saddam Hussein demonstrated this during the Persian Gulf War, insisting that he was winning despite the destruction that surrounded him. On a personal level, a woman at one of my seminars started to experience some rather unique mental and emotional states, claiming that I was a Nazi and was poisoning the people in the room with invisible gases flowing through the air conditioning vents. As I tried to calm her down by slowing my speech patterns—a standard approach in causing someone to relax—she pointed out, "See, it's already beginning to slur your speech!" No matter what happened, she managed to use it to back up her conviction that we were all being poisoned. Eventually I was able to break her pattern. How do you do that? We'll talk about that in the next chapter. New experiences trigger change only if they cause us to question our beliefs. Remember, whenever we believe something, we no longer question it in any way. The moment we begin to

honestly question our beliefs, we no longer feel absolutely certain about them. We are beginning to shake the reference legs of our cognitive tables, and as a result start to lose our feeling of absolute certainty. Have you ever doubted your ability to do something? How did you do it? You probably asked yourself some poor questions like "What if I screw up?" "What if it doesn't work out?" "What if they don't like me?" But questions can obviously be tremendously empowering if we use them to examine the validity of beliefs we may have just blindly accepted. In fact, many of our beliefs are supported by information we've received from others that we failed to question at the time. If we scrutinize them, we may find that what we've unconsciously believed for years may be based on a false set of presuppositions.

If you use a typewriter or computer, I'm sure you'll appreciate this example. Why do you think the traditional arrangement of letters, numbers, and symbols on 99 percent of all typing devices is universally accepted around the world? (By the way, that arrangement of characters is known as QWERTY. If you type, you know that these are the characters on the top left row of your keyboard.) Obviously this arrangement was devised as the most efficient configuration to bolster typing speed, right? Most people never question it; after all, QWERTY has existed for 120 years. But in fact, QWERTY is about the most inefficient configuration you can imagine! Many programs such as the Dvorak Simplified Keyboard have been proven to cut errors and increase speed radically. The truth is, QWERTY was deliberately designed to slow down the human typist at a time when typewriter pans moved so slowly that they would jam if the operator typed too fast.

Why have we clung to the QWERTY keyboard for 120 years? In 1882, when almost everyone typed with the hunt-and-peck method, a woman who had developed the eight-finger typing method was challenged to a typing contest by another teacher. To represent her, she hired a professional typist, a man who had memorized the QWERTY keyboard. With the advantage of memorization and the eight-finger method, he was able to beat his competitor, who used the four-finger hunt-and-peck method on a different keyboard. So from then on, QWERTY became the standard for "speed," and no one even questioned the reference anymore to see how valid it was. How many other beliefs do you have in daily life about who you are, or what you can or cannot do, or how people should act, or what capabilities your kids have that you're failing to question also—disempowering beliefs you've begun to accept that limit your life, and you're not even aware of it?

If you question anything enough, eventually you'll begin to doubt it. This includes things that you absolutely believe "beyond the shadow of a doubt."

Years ago, I had the unique opportunity of working with the U. S. Army, with whom I negotiated a contract to reduce certain training times for specialized areas. My work was so successful that I also went through top-secret clearance and had a chance to model one of the top officials in the CIA, a man who'd worked his way up from the bottom of the organization. Let me tell you that the skills that he and others like him have developed for shaking another person's convictions and changing their beliefs are absolutely astounding. They create an environment that causes people to doubt what they've always believed, and then give them new ideas and experiences to support the adoption of new beliefs. Watching the speed at which they can change someone's belief is almost scary, yet it's powerfully fascinating. I've learned to use these techniques on myself to be able to eliminate my disempowering beliefs and replace them with empowering ones. Our beliefs have different levels of emotional certainty and intensity, and it's important to know just how intense they really are. In fact, I've classified beliefs into three categories: opinions, beliefs, and convictions. An opinion is something we feel relatively certain about, but the certainty is only temporary because it can be changed easily.

Our cognitive tabletop is supported by wobbly, unverified reference legs that may be based on impressions.

For example, many people originally perceived George Bush as a "wimp," based solely on his tone of voice. But when they saw how he was able to galvanize support from leaders around the world and effectively deal with Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait, there was a clear shift in the public opinion polls. Bush soared to one of the highest levels of public popularity of any president in modern history. But by the time you read this paragraph, this cultural opinion may have changed. Such is the nature of opinions: they are easily swayed, and usually based on only a few references that a person has focused on in the moment. A belief, on the other hand, is formed when we begin to develop a much larger base of reference legs, and especially reference legs about which we have strong emotion. These references give us an absolute sense of certainty about something. And again, as I've said before, these references can come in a variety of forms: anything from our personal experiences to information that we've taken in from other sources, or even things we've imagined vividly.

People with beliefs have such a strong level of certainty that they are often closed off to new input. But if you have rapport in communicating with them, it's possible to interrupt their pattern of closing off, and get them to question their references so they begin to allow for new input. This creates enough doubt to destabilize old references and make room for a new belief. A conviction, however, eclipses a belief, primarily because of the emotional intensity a person links to an idea. A person holding a conviction does not only feel certain, but gets angry if their conviction is even questioned. A person with a conviction is unwilling to ever question their references, even for a moment; they are totally resistant to new input, often to the point of obsession. For example, zealots through the ages have held the conviction that their view of God is the only correct one, and they will even kill to maintain those beliefs. The conviction of true believers has also been exploited by would-be saviors cloaking their murderous intent under holy guises; it's what caused that group of people living in Guyana to poison their own children, and then themselves, by drinking cyanide-laced Kool-Aid at the direction of the messianic madman Jim Jones.

Of course, fervent conviction is not the exclusive property of fanatics. It belongs to anyone with a high enough degree of commitment and dedication to an idea, principle, or cause. For example, someone who disagrees strongly with the practice of underground nuclear testing has a belief, but someone who takes an action—even an action others do not appreciate or approve, such as demonstrating in a protest march at the facility, has a conviction. Someone who bewails the state of public education has a belief, but someone who actually volunteers in a literacy program to try to make a difference has a conviction. Someone who fantasizes about owning an ice hockey team has an opinion about their desire, but someone who does whatever it takes to gather the necessary resources to buy a franchise has a conviction. What's the difference?

Clearly, it's in the actions that one is willing to take. In fact, someone with a conviction is so passionate about their belief that they're even willing to risk rejection or make a fool of themselves for the sake of their conviction.

Probably the single biggest factor separating belief and conviction, though, is that a conviction has usually been triggered by significant emotional events, during which the brain links up, "Unless I believe this, I will suffer massive pain. If I were to change this belief, then I would be giving up my entire identity, everything my life has stood for, for years." Holding the conviction thus becomes crucial to the person's very survival. This can be dangerous because anytime we're not willing to even

look at or consider the possibility that our beliefs are inaccurate, we trap ourselves in rigidity which could ultimately condemn us to long-term failure. Sometimes it may be more appropriate to have a belief about something rather than a conviction.

On the positive side, convictions—by the passion they inspire in us—can be empowering because they compel us to act. According to Dr. Robert P. Abelson, professor of psychology and political science at Yale University, **"Beliefs are like possessions, and convictions are simply more valued possessions which allow an individual to passionately work toward either large-scale or individual completion of goals, projects, wishes, and desires."**

Often the best thing you can do to create mastery in any area of your life is to raise a belief to the level of conviction. Remember, conviction has the power to drive you to action, to push you through all kinds of obstacles. Beliefs can do this as well, but some areas of your life may require the added emotional intensity of conviction. For example, the conviction to never let yourself become overweight will compel you to make consistently healthy lifestyle choices, allowing you to get more enjoyment out of your life, and perhaps even saving you from a heart attack. The conviction that you are an intelligent person who can always find a way to turn things around can help steer you through some of the toughest times in your life.

So how can you create a conviction?

1) Start with the basic belief.

2) Reinforce your belief by adding new and more powerful references.

For example, let's say you've decided never to eat meat again. To strengthen your resolve, talk to people who've chosen a vegetarian or vegan lifestyle: what reasons prompted them to change their diet, and what have been the consequences on their health and in other areas of their lives? In addition, begin to study the physiological impact that animal protein has. The more references you develop, and the more emotional the references are, the stronger your conviction will become. 3) Then find a triggering event, or else create one of your own. Associate yourself fully by asking, "What will it cost me if I don't?" Ask questions that create emotional intensity for you. For example, if you want to develop a conviction never to abuse drugs, make the painful consequences of drug abuse feel real to you by viewing films or, better yet, visiting a shelter to see firsthand the devastation wrought by drug abuse. If you've vowed to give up smoking, visit the intensive-care wing of a hospital to observe emphysema patients confined to oxygen tents, or view an X-ray of a smoker's black lungs. These kinds of experiences have the power to push you over the edge and establish true conviction. 4) Finally, take action. Each action you take strengthens your commitment and raises the level of your emotional intensity and conviction.

One of the challenges with convictions is that they're often based on other people's enthusiasm for your beliefs. So often people believe something because everybody else believes it. This is known in psychology as social proof. But social proof is not always accurate. When people are not sure what to do, they look to others for guidance. In Dr. Robert Cialdini's book *Influence*, he describes a classic experiment in which someone yells "Rape!" for a subject's benefit while two people (psychological plants) ignore the cries for help and keep walking. The subject doesn't know whether to respond to the pleas or not, but when he sees the other two people act as if nothing is wrong, he decides that the cries for help are insignificant and to ignore them also.

Using social proof is a great way to limit your life—to make it just like everybody else's. Some of the strongest social proof that people use is information that they get from "experts." But are experts always right? Think about our healers throughout the years. It wasn't that long ago that the most up-to-date doctors believed absolutely in the curative properties of leeches! And in our own generation, doctors gave pregnant women a soothing-sounding medication for morning sickness—Bendectin, which sounds like "benediction"—which turned out to be linked to birth defects. Of course, these doctors were prescribing this drug because the drug companies—pharmaceutical experts—gave them certainty that this was the finest drug available. What's the lesson? **Trusting experts blindly is not well-advised. Don't blindly accept everything I say, either! Consider things in the context of your own life; does it make sense for you?**

Sometimes even the evidence of your senses can't be trusted, as the story of Copernicus illustrates. In the days of this seminal Polish astronomer, everyone knew that the sun moved around the earth. Why? Because anyone could walk outside, point to the sky and say, "See? The sun has moved across the sky. Obviously the earth is the center of the universe." But in 1543 Copernicus developed the first accurate model of our sun-based solar system. He, like other giants through the ages, had the courage to challenge the "wisdom" of the experts, and eventually the truth of his theories gained acceptance in the general populace, although not during his lifetime.

PAIN IS THE ULTIMATE TOOL FOR SHIFTING A BELIEF

Again, pain is still the most powerful way to change a belief. A great illustration of the power of changed beliefs occurred on the Sally Jessy Raphael show when a brave woman stood before a studio and world audience to renounce her alliance with the Ku Klux Klan. Ironically, she had been on the same show only a month before, participating in a panel of KKK women railing against all who didn't share their convictions about race, angrily shouting that racial mixing—educationally, economically, or socially—would be the downfall of the country and its people. What made her beliefs change so drastically? Three things: First, a young woman in the audience during the original show had stood up, crying, and pleaded for understanding. Her husband and child were Hispanic, and she sobbed that she couldn't believe a group of people could be so hateful.

Second, flying home, she yelled at her son (who had appeared with her, yet didn't share her views) for "embarrassing" her on national television. The rest of the women chastised him for being disrespectful, and quoted to him from the Bible: "Thou shalt honor thy mother and father." Her sixteen-year-old son responded by saying that God certainly didn't intend for him to respect the evil she was espousing, and he immediately got off the plane in Dallas, vowing never to come home again. As the woman continued her flight home, her mind raced over the day's events, and also began to think about the war that her country was fighting in the Middle East. She remembered what another member of the audience had said to her that day: "Young men and women of color are over there fighting not only for themselves, but also for you." She thought about her son, how much she loved him, and how spiteful she had been with him. Would she allow that brief exchange of words to be their last? Even the thought of it was too painful for her to bear. She had to make a change immediately.

As a result of this experience, she told the audience, she received a message from God, which she heeded immediately: to quit the Klan and to begin to love all people equally, as her brothers and

sisters. Certainly she will miss her friends—she'll be ostracized by the group—but she says that her soul is now cleansed and that she will begin her life anew with a clear conscience. It's vital to examine our beliefs, and their consequences, to make sure that they're empowering us. How do you know what beliefs to adopt? The answer is to find someone who's producing the results you truly want in your life.

These people are the role models who can give you some of the answers you seek. Invariably, behind all successful people lies a specific set of empowering beliefs.

The way to expand our lives is to model the lives of those people who are already succeeding. It's powerful, it's fun, and these people are available all around you. It's just a matter of asking questions: "What do you believe makes you different? What are the beliefs you have that separate you from others?" Years ago I read a book called [Meetings with Remarkable Men](#), and used that as a theme to shape my life. Since then I've become a hunter of excellence, constantly seeking out the leading men and women in our culture to discover their beliefs, values, and strategies for achieving success. Two years ago I developed POWER TALK™ my monthly audio magazine in which I interview these giants. In fact, many of the key distinctions I'm sharing with you in this book were made as a result of interviews with some of these people who are the finest in their particular areas of endeavor. By having a commitment to share these interviews, my newest thoughts, and a summary of a national best-selling book with you each month, I've developed a consistent plan not only for empowering other people but for constantly improving myself as well. I'll be happy to help you in your modeling of successful people through my program, but remember: you're not limited to me. The models that you need are surrounding you every single day.

"We are what we think. All that we are arises With our thoughts. With our thoughts, We make our world." - BUDDHA

For almost a decade now I've talked to people in my Living Health™ seminars about the direct correlation between the high percentage of **animal protein in the typical American diet and the high incidence of this nation's top two killers: heart disease and cancer**. By doing this, I contradicted one of the belief systems that has most significantly shaped our physical destiny for the past thirty five years: the "Four Basic Food Groups" plan that recommends generous daily servings of meat, chicken, or fish. Yet today, scientists have now established beyond the shadow of a doubt a direct relationship between eating animal protein and being at risk of developing heart disease and cancer. In fact, the 3,000- member Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine has asked the Department of Agriculture to drop meat, fish, poultry, eggs, and milk products from the recommended daily allowances. And the government itself is considering changing the four basic food groups to six, relegating meat, chicken, and fish to just a tiny proportion of the whole. This massive shift in beliefs has caused outrage in many quarters. I believe this follows a pattern that we see throughout history and throughout our culture, and that is simply this:

As the German philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer stated, all truth goes through three steps.

First, it is ridiculed.

Second, it is violently opposed.

Finally, it is accepted as self-evident.

These ideas about animal protein used to be ridiculed; now they're being violently opposed. Eventually they'll be accepted—but not until a lot more people become sick or even die because of their limiting beliefs about how important excessive amounts of animal protein is for their bodies.

In business, too, we have a set of false beliefs that are leading us down a road of economic frustration, and some say potential disaster. Our economy faces challenges in virtually every sector. Why? I found one clue in an article I read in the March 1991 Forbes magazine. This article describes two cars—the Chrysler-Plymouth Laser and the Mitsubishi Eclipse—and notes that Chrysler averaged only thirteen sales per dealership of their car while Mitsubishi averaged over 100! You may say, "What else is new? The Japanese are beating the pants off the American companies in selling cars." But the unique thing about these two cars is that they're exactly the same—they were built in partnership between these two companies. The only difference between the Laser and the Eclipse is the name and the company who's selling it. How can this be? As you may have guessed, research investigating the cause of the discrepancy in sales has shown that people want to buy Japanese cars because they believe they are of greater quality. The problem in this case is that it's a false belief. The American company's car is of the same quality because it's the very same car.

Why would consumers believe this? Obviously, it's because the Japanese have created a reputation for quality, providing us with numerous references to back it up—even to the point where we no longer question its validity. It may surprise you that the Japanese commitment to increasing quality is actually the result of an American export in the person of Dr. W. Edwards Deming. In 1950 this renowned quality-control expert was brought to Japan by General MacArthur, who was frustrated with a war-ravaged Japanese industrial base where he couldn't even count on being able to complete a phone call. At the request of the Japanese Union of Scientists and Engineers, Deming began to train the Japanese in his total quality-control principles. When you hear this, do you immediately think it refers to monitoring the quality of a physical product? Nothing could be further from the truth. Deming taught the Japanese fourteen principles and a basic core belief that is the foundation of virtually all decisions made in every successful, major, multinational Japanese corporation to this day.

The core belief, simply, is this: a constant, never-ending commitment to consistently increase the quality of their business every single day would give them the power to dominate the markets of the world. Deming taught that quality was not just a matter of meeting a certain standard, but rather was a living, breathing process of never-ending improvement. If the Japanese would live by the principles that he taught, he promised them, within five years they would flood the world with quality products and within a decade or two become one of the world's dominant economic powers.

Many thought Deming's proclamations were crazy. But the Japanese took him at his word, and today he is revered as the father of the "Japanese miracle." In fact, each year since 1950, the highest honor a Japanese company can receive is the National Deming Prize. This award is given on national television and is used to acknowledge the company that represents the highest level of increases in quality of products, service, management, and worker support throughout Japan.

In 1983 Ford Motor Company hired Dr. Deming to conduct a series of management seminars. One of the attendees was Donald Petersen, who would later become chairman of Ford and put Deming's principles into practice throughout the company. Petersen decided, "We need this man to turn our company around." At the time, Ford was losing billions of dollars a year. Once Deming was brought in,

he changed their traditional Western belief from, "How can we increase our volume and cut our costs?" to "How can we increase the quality of what we're doing, and do it in such a way that quality would not cost more in the long term?" Ford reorganized its entire focus to make quality the top priority (as reflected in their advertising slogan, "Quality is Job 1"), and by implementing Deming's systems. Ford within three years moved from a staggering deficit to the dominant industry position with a \$6 billion profit!

How did they do it? They found that Americans' perception of Japanese quality, while frustrating, had much to teach them. For example, Ford contracted with a Japanese company to make half the transmissions for one of their cars in order to keep the volume up. In the process, they found that American consumers were demanding the Japanese transmission. In fact, they were willing to put their names on a waiting list, and even pay more money for them! This upset many of the executive staff at Ford, whose first reaction was, "Well, it's merely a false belief on the part of people in our culture; they're conditioned to respond this way." But under Deming's supervision the transmissions were tested, and they found that in fact the Ford transmission was much louder, broke down much more often, and was returned more often than the Japanese transmission, which had virtually no trouble, no vibration, and no sound. Deming taught the members of the Ford team that quality always costs less. This was directly the opposite of what most people believed: that you could only achieve certain levels of quality before costs got out of hand. When the experts took the Ford transmissions apart and measured all the parts, they found that all of them met the standards set forth in the Ford manual, the same standards that had been sent to the Japanese. But when they measured the Japanese transmissions, they found virtually no measurable differences among any of them! In fact, the transmissions had to be brought into a laboratory and measured under a microscope in order to detect differences.

Why did this Japanese company hold themselves to a higher standard of quality than even their contract required? They believed that quality costs less, that if they created a quality product they would not just have satisfied customers but loyal customers—customers who would be willing to wait in line and pay more money for their product. They were operating from the same core belief that propelled them to one of the top market positions in the world: a commitment to never-ending improvement and a constant increase in the quality of life for their customers. This belief was an American export—one I believe we need to repatriate in order to change the direction of our economic future.

One toxic belief that may be destroying our economic strength as a nation is what Deming calls managing by the visible numbers, the conventional corporate belief that profits are made by cutting costs and increasing revenues. A notable example occurred when Lynn Townsend took charge of Chrysler during an industry-wide sales slump. Townsend immediately tried to increase revenues, but more importantly, he cut costs. How? He fired two-thirds of the engineering staff. In the short term, it looked like he'd made the right decision. Profitability shot up, and he was dubbed a hero. But within a few years Chrysler was again in financial straits. What happened? Well, there certainly wasn't any one factor. But in the long term, the decisions Townsend made may have been destroying the basis of quality upon which the company's success depended. Often the very people who are injuring our companies are rewarded because they produce results in the short term. Sometimes we treat the symptoms of a problem while we nurture the cause. We've got to be careful how we interpret results. By contrast, one of the most important factors in turning Ford Motor Company around was their design staff, who came up with a new car called the Taurus. The quality of that car set a new standard for Ford, and consumers bought it in droves.

What can we learn from all this? The beliefs that we hold in business and in life control all of our decisions, and therefore our future. One of the most important global beliefs that you and I can adopt is a belief that in order to succeed and be happy, we've got to be constantly improving the quality of our lives, constantly growing and expanding.

In Japan, they understand this principle well. In fact, in Japanese businesses, as a result of Deming's influence, there is a word that is used constantly in discussions about business or relationships. That word is kaizen. This word literally means constant improvement, and the word is constantly used in their language. They often speak of the kaizen of their trade deficit, the kaizen of the production line, the kaizen of their personal relationships. As a result, they're constantly looking at how to improve. By the way, kaizen is based upon the principle of gradual improvement, simple improvements. But the Japanese understand that tiny refinements made daily begin to create compounded enhancements at a level that most people would never dream of. The Japanese have a saying: "If a man has not been seen for three days, his friends should take a good look at him, and see what changes have befallen him." Amazingly, but not surprisingly, we have no equivalent word for kaizen in English.

The more I began to see the impact of kaizen in the Japanese business culture, I realized that it was an organizing principle that made a tremendous impact in my own life. My own commitment to constantly improve, to constantly raise my own standards for a quality life is what's kept me both happy and successful. I realized that we all need a word to anchor ourselves to the, focus of Constant and Never-ending Improvement. When we create a word, we encode meaning and create a way of thinking. The words that we use consistently make up the fabric of how we think and even affect our decision making.

As a result of this understanding, I created a simple mnemonic: **CANI! (pronounced kuhn-EYE), which stands for Constant And Never-ending Improvement.** I believe that the level of success we experience in life is in direct proportion to the level of our commitment to CANI!, to constant and never-ending improvement. CANI! is not a principle related merely to business, but to every aspect of our lives. In Japan, they often talk of company-wide quality control. I believe we have to focus on CANI! in our business, CANI! in our personal relationships, CANI! in our spiritual connection, CANI! in our health, and CANI! in our finances. How can we make constant and never-ending improvement in each of these areas? This makes life an incredible adventure in which we're always looking forward to the next level.

CANI! is a true discipline. It can't just be practiced every once in a while, when you feel like it. It must be a constant commitment backed up by action. The essence of CANI! is gradual, even minute, continuous improvement that over the long term sculpts a masterpiece of colossal proportions. If you've ever visited the Grand Canyon, you know what I'm talking about. You've witnessed the awe-inspiring beauty produced by millions of years of gradual change as the Colorado River and numerous tributaries have continually chiseled the rock to create one of the Seven Natural Wonders of the World.

Most people never feel secure because they are always worried that they will either lose their job, lose the money they already have, lose their spouse, lose their health, and so on. The only true security in life comes from knowing that every single day you are improving yourself in some way, that you are

increasing the caliber of who you are and that you are valuable to your company, your friends, and your family. I don't worry about maintaining the quality of my life, because every

day I work on improving it. I constantly strive to learn and to make new and more powerful distinctions about ways to add value to other people's lives. This gives me a sense of certainty that I can always learn, that I can always expand, that I can always grow. CANI! doesn't mean you never experience challenges. In fact, you can only improve something if you realize that it's not quite right, that it's not yet at the level it should be. The purpose of CANI! is to discover problems in the making and handle them before they become crises. After all, the best time to kill a "monster" is while it's still little. As an integral part of my personal commitment to CANI!, at the end of each day I ask myself these questions: What have I learned today? What did I contribute or improve? What did I enjoy? If every day you constantly improve your ability to enjoy your life, then you'll experience it at a level of richness most people never even dream of.

SMALL IMPROVEMENTS ARE BELIEVABLE AND THEREFORE ACHIEVABLE!

Pat Riley, formerly of the Los Angeles Lakers organization, is the winningest coach in NBA history. Some say he was fortunate because he had such incredible players. It's true that he had incredible players, but many people have had the resources to succeed and have not done so consistently. Pat's ability to do this has been based on his commitment to CANI! In fact, he said that at the beginning of the 1986 season he had a major challenge on his hands. Many of the players had given what they thought was their best season in the previous year but still had lost to the Boston Celtics. In search of a believable plan to get the players to move to the next level, he decided upon the theme of small improvements. He convinced the players that increasing the quality of their game by a mere 1 percent over their personal best would make a major difference in their season. This seems ridiculously small, but when you think about twelve players increasing by 1 percent their court skills in five areas, the combined effort creates a team that's 60 percent more effective than it was before. A 10 percent overall difference would probably be enough to win another championship. The real value of this philosophy, however, is that everyone believed that it was achievable. Everyone felt certain that they could improve at least 1 percent over their personal bests in the five major areas of the game, and that sense of certainty in pursuit of their goals caused them to tap even greater potentials. The result? Most of them increased by at least 5 percent, and many of them by as much as 50 percent. According to Pat Riley, 1987 turned out to be their easiest season ever. CANI! works if you commit to it.

Remember, the key to success is developing a sense of certainty—the kind of belief that allows you to expand as a person and take the necessary action to make your life and the lives of those around you even greater. You may believe something is true today, but you and I need to remember that as the years go by and we grow, we'll be exposed to new experiences. And we may develop even more empowering beliefs, abandoning things we once felt certain about. Realize that your beliefs may change as you gather additional references. What really matters now is whether the beliefs you have today empower or disempower you. Begin today to develop the habit of focusing on the consequences of all your beliefs. Are they strengthening your foundation by moving you to action in the direction you desire, or are they holding you back?

"As he thinketh in his heart, so is he." —PROVERBS 23:7

We've discovered so much about beliefs, but in order to truly take control of our lives, we've got to know what beliefs we're already using to guide us. So right now, stop everything else you're doing and take the next ten minutes to have some fun. Begin to brainstorm all the beliefs you have, both those that empower you and disempower you: little beliefs that don't seem to matter at all and global beliefs that seem to make a big difference. Make sure you cover:

- If-then beliefs like, "If I consistently give my all, then I will succeed," or "If I'm totally passionate with this person, then they'll leave me"
- Global beliefs, like beliefs about people—"People are basically good" or "People are a pain"—beliefs about yourself, beliefs about opportunity, beliefs about time, beliefs about scarcity and abundance.

Jot down as many of these as you can imagine for the next ten minutes. Please give yourself the gift of doing this right now. When you're done, I'll show you how you can strengthen your empowering beliefs and eliminate the disempowering ones.

Do it right now.

EMPOWERING BELIEFS: DISEMPOWERING BELIEFS

Did you take enough time to make sure you wrote out both lists, both the empowering beliefs and disempowering beliefs? If not, go back and do it now!

What have you learned by doing this? Take a moment now to review your beliefs. Decide upon and circle the three most empowering beliefs on your list. How do they empower you? How do they strengthen your life? Think about the positive processional effects they have upon you. Years ago, I made a list like this, and I found it invaluable because I discovered that I had a belief that was underemployed. It was the belief "There's always a way to turn things around if I'm committed." When I read my list, I thought, "This is a belief that needs to be strengthened and turned into a conviction." I'm so glad I did because only about a year later that conviction was a life preserver that pulled me through one of the toughest times, a time when everything around me seemed to be sinking. Not only did it buoy my spirit, but it also helped me deal with one of the most difficult personal and business challenges I had yet faced. This one belief, this sense of certainty, enabled me to find ways to turn things around when everybody around me said it couldn't be done. I not only turned things around, I turned my biggest challenges into my biggest opportunities—and so can you! Review this list and strengthen your emotional intensity and sense of certainty that these beliefs are true and real so they can guide your future behaviors.

Now let's take a look at your limiting beliefs. As you review them, what are some of the consequences that these beliefs carry with them? Circle the two most disempowering beliefs. Decide right now, once and for all, that you're no longer willing to pay the price that these beliefs are charging your life. Remember that if you begin to doubt the beliefs and question their validity, you can shake their reference legs so they no longer impact you. Knock those legs of certainty out from under your disempowering beliefs by asking yourself some of the following questions:

- 1. How is this belief ridiculous or absurd?**
- 2. Was the person I learned this belief from worth modeling in this area?**
- 3. What will it ultimately cost me emotionally if I don't let go of this belief?**
- 4. What will it ultimately cost me in my relationships if I don't let go of this belief?**
- 5. What will it ultimately cost me physically if I don't let go of this belief?**
- 6. What will it ultimately cost me financially if I don't let go of this belief?**
- 7. What will it cost my family/loved ones if I don't let go of this belief?**

If you've taken the time to really answer these questions, you may find that your beliefs have been significantly weakened under the scrutiny of these questions. Now become fully associated to what these beliefs have been costing you and the real costs in your future if you do not change. Link such intense pain that you'll want to rid yourself of them forever, and then, finally, decide to do so now.

Finally, we can't get rid of a pattern without replacing it with a new one. So right now, write down the replacements for the two limiting beliefs you've just eliminated. What is their antithesis? For example, if you had a belief that "I can never succeed because I'm a woman," your new belief might be, "Because I'm a woman, I have resources available to me that no man could ever dream of!" What are some of the references you have to back up this idea so you begin to feel certain about it? As you reinforce and strengthen this belief, it will begin to direct your behavior in an entirely new and more empowering way.

If you're not getting the results you want in your life, I suggest you ask yourself, "What would I have to believe in order to succeed here?" Or "Who is already succeeding in this area, and what do they believe differently than I do about what's possible?" Or "What's necessary to believe in order to succeed?" You may very well discover the key belief that's been eluding you. If you're experiencing pain, if you feel challenged or frustrated or angry, you may want to ask yourself, "What would I have to believe in order to feel the way I do?" The miracle of this simple process is that it will uncover beliefs you aren't even aware you have. For example, if you're feeling depressed and ask yourself, "What would I have to believe in order to feel depressed?" you'll probably come up with something that relates to the future, like, "Things will never get better," or "There's no hope." When you hear these beliefs verbalized, you might well think, "I don't believe that! I feel bad right now, but I know it's not going to be bad forever. This, too, shall pass." Or you may just decide that a belief about having problems permanently is totally destructive and one you're not willing to ever consider again.

While you're examining these limiting beliefs, notice how your feelings change. Realize, believe, and trust that if you change the meaning of any event in your mind, you will immediately change how you feel and what you do, which will lead you to change your actions and thus transform your destiny. Changing what something means will change the decisions you make. Remember, nothing in life has

any meaning except the meaning you give it. So make sure that you consciously choose the meanings that are most in alignment with the destiny you've chosen for yourself.

Beliefs have the awesome potential to create or destroy. I believe you picked up this book because deep down you've decided you will not settle for less than the best you know you're capable of. Do you truly want to harness the power to create the vision you want rather than destroy your dreams? Then learn to choose the beliefs that empower you; create convictions that drive you in the direction of the destiny that calls to the highest within you. Your family, your business, your community, and your country deserve no less.

LEADERSHIP AND THE POWER OF BELIEF

Leaders are those individuals who live by empowering beliefs and teach others to tap their full capabilities by shifting the beliefs that have been limiting them. One great leader who impresses me is a teacher by the name of **Marva Collins**. You may have seen the *60 Minutes* program or the movie that was made about her.

Thirty years ago, Marva utilized her personal power and decided to touch the future by making a real difference in the lives of children. Her challenge: when she got to her first teaching job in what many considered to be a ghetto of Chicago, her second-grade students had already decided that they didn't want to learn anything. Yet Marva's mission is to touch these children's lives. She doesn't have a mere belief that she can impact them; she has a passionate, deep-rooted conviction that she will influence them for good. There was no limit to the extent she would go. Faced with children labeled as dyslexics and every other kind of learning or behavioral disorder, she decided that the problem was not the children, but the way they were being taught. No one was challenging them enough. As a result, these kids had no belief in themselves. They had no references of ever being pushed to break through and find out who they really were or what they were capable of. Human beings respond to challenge, and these children, she believed, needed that more than anything else. So she threw out all the old books that read, "See Spot run," and instead taught Shakespeare, Sophocles, and Tolstoy. All the other teachers said things like, "There's no way it can happen. There's no way these kids can understand that." And as you might guess, many of them attacked Marva personally, saying that she was going to destroy these children's lives. But Marva's students not only understood the material, they thrived on it. Why? Because she believed so fervently in the uniqueness of each child's spirit, and his or her ability to learn anything. She communicated with so much congruency and love that she literally got them to believe in themselves—some of them for the first time in their young lives. The results she has consistently produced for decades have been extraordinary.

I first met Marva and interviewed her at Westside Preparatory School, the private school she founded outside the Chicago city school system. After our meeting, I decided to interview some of her students. The first young man I met was four years old, with a smile that would knock your socks off. I shook his hand.

"Hi, I'm Tony Robbins."

"Hello, Mr. Robbins, my name is Talmadge E. Griffin. I am four years old. What would you like to know?!"

"Well, Talmadge, tell me, what are you studying these days?" "I'm studying a lot of things, Mr. Robbins."

"Well, what books have you read recently?"

"I just finished reading *Of Mice and Men*, by John Steinbeck."

Needless to say, I was pretty impressed. I asked him what the book was about, figuring he'd say something like it was about two guys named George and Lenny.

He said, "Well, the main protagonist is ..."

By this time I was a believer! Then I asked him what he had learned from the book.

"Mr. Robbins, I more than learned from this book. This book permeated my soul."

I started to laugh, and asked, "What does 'permeate' mean?"

"To diffuse through," he said, then gave me a fuller definition than I could give you.

"What touched you so much in this book, Talmadge?"

"Mr. Robbins, I noticed in the story that the children never judge anyone else by the colour of their skin. Only the adults did that. What I learned from this is that although I will someday become an adult, I'll never forget the lessons of a child."

I started to get teary-eyed because I saw that Marva Collins was providing this young man and so many others like him with the kinds of powerful beliefs that will continue to shape his decisions not only today, but throughout his life. Marva increases her students' quality of life by using the three organizing principles I talked about in the beginning of this book: she gets them to hold themselves to a higher standard, she assists them in adopting new, empowering beliefs that enable them to break through their old limitations, and she backs all this up with specific skills and strategies necessary for lifelong success. The results? Her students become not only confident, but competent. The immediate results in terms of their academic excellence are striking, and the processional effects generated in their everyday lives are profound.

Finally I asked Talmadge, "What's the most important thing that Mrs. Collins has taught you?"

"The most important thing Mrs. Collins has taught me is that SOCIETY MAY PREDICT, BUT ONLY I WILL DETERMINE MY DESTINY!"

Maybe we all need to remember the lessons of a child. With the beliefs young Talmadge expressed so beautifully, I guarantee that he, as well as the other children in the class, will have a great opportunity to continuously interpret their lives in a way that will create the future they desire, rather than the one that most people fear. Let's review what we've learned so far. We're clear that there's a power inside us that needs to be awakened. That power starts with the capability to make conscious decisions that shape our destiny. But there is one core belief that we must explore and resolve, and this belief can be found in your answer to the question . . .

BELIEFS

Source: Lesson 4 in *The Sunfood Diet Success System* by David Wolfe (41-45)

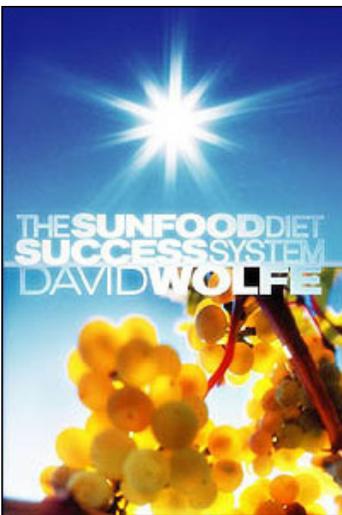


“If you believe that you can do a thing, or if you believe you cannot, in either case, you are right.”

--Henry Ford

“Beliefs are prearranged, organized filters to our perceptions of the world.”

--Anthony Robbins



A belief is a habitual pattern of thinking about yourself and the world. A belief is a template of thoughts.

Your mind functions on the Law of Belief: whatever you believe with confidence becomes your own self-fulfilling prophecy. Believe it, and it will come to pass. "If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth" (Mark 9:23).

The power of belief is overwhelming: no matter how right or how true something is, if you believe you can't do it, guess what—you can't.

Expectations

Your expectations in any area of life are dependent upon your beliefs. Whatever you believe to be true in terms of health, wealth, or spiritual growth will be reflected in your expectations about those areas. The world conforms to your expectations. You receive what you expect to receive.

You are where you are and what you are because of the beliefs you have about who you are. You are healthy or unhealthy, successful or unsuccessful, happy or sad because of the beliefs you have about yourself in those areas.

If you keep believing what you are believing, you will keep achieving what you are achieving. If you

keep doing what you are doing, you will keep getting what you are getting.

We have, as part of our mind, a filter container called the **Reticular Activation System (RAS)**. The RAS contains our belief system which sensitizes us to certain types of information from our environment that we are tuned in to see, hear, and feel.

Our experience of an event is not the actual event itself, but a representation of the event after it has been run through the RAS filter of our belief system. Because there are billions of pieces of information coming into our sphere every moment, our belief system determines what we are going to allow to enter our awareness—if it did not filter this out, we would be overwhelmed and surely driven insane by too much information.

We do not experience things as they really are! We experience things only through a filter and that filter determines what information will enter our awareness and what will be rejected. If we change the filter (our belief system), then we automatically experience the world in a completely different way.

From this understanding about the RAS, we may realize that little in the universe is absolutely known because what we think is real is actually only a reflection of our beliefs in that area. Two insightful sayings state: "You don't believe what you see, rather, you see what you already believe" and "Seeing is believing? No, believing is seeing." Complete objectivity, in any field, may be impossible. We see that "objective science" is most often subjective (as we shall explore in **Lesson 9: Origins**)!

We do not know how the world really is, we only know what our beliefs are about the world. Our perceptions create our reality. The reality of our day-to-day lives consists of an endless flow of perceptual interpretations which we, as individuals who live in a specific society, have learned to hold in common with other individuals.

The world we think we see is only a view, a collective description of the world, that we create through our belief systems. Accepting this fact seems to be one of the most empowering things one can do.

The "reality" of our world is not as real, or as "out there," as we believe it is. Reality is only a description. That which is held in our minds as the real world is merely a description of the world; a description that has been developing within us from our first moments. Overcome the illusion - the world may be a far different place than we believe now.

Your beliefs determine what you consider real.

To believe that the world is only as you think it is now, is funny!

How many times have you had a belief in your life which turned out to be wrong? To be totally false? How did those beliefs affect your life? Your potential? Remember, it is our beliefs which shape and create our reality, so we must choose resourceful and empowering beliefs for ourselves and others.

[ADDITION]

A young widower, who loved his five year old son very much, was away on business, and bandits came, burned down his whole village, and took his son away. When the man returned, he saw the ruins and panicked. He took the charred corpse of an infant to be his own child, and he began to pull his hair and beat his chest, crying uncontrollably. He organized a cremation ceremony, collected the ashes and put them into a very beautiful velvet bag. Working, sleeping, eating, he always carried the bag of ashes with him.

One day his real son escaped from the robbers and found his way home. He arrived at this father's new cottage at midnight, and knocked at the door.



You can imagine at that time, the young father was still carrying the bag of ashes, and crying. He asked, "Who is there?" And the child answered, "It's me, Papa. Open the door, it's your son." In his agitated state of mind the father thought that some mischievous boy was making fun of him, and he shouted at the child to go away, and he continued to cry. The boy knocked again and again, but the father refused to let him in. Some time passed, and finally the child left. From that time on, father and son never saw one another. After telling this story, the Buddha said, "Sometime, somewhere you take something to be the truth. If you cling to it so much, when the truth comes in person and knocks at your door, you will not open it." Guarding knowledge is not a good way to understand. Understanding means to throw away your knowledge. You have to be able to transcend your knowledge...understanding is always letting go of our views and knowledge to transcend. This is the most important teaching.

--Thich Nhat Hanh from [Being Peace](#)

An individual's true beliefs are discovered by what they do, not by what they say. What you *truly* believe is determined by the actions you take. You always act and think in a manner which is consistent with your beliefs. This is true even if your beliefs are totally irrational and ridiculous. If you believe any "thing," then that "thing" is true for you.

Your beliefs affect your physical body.

They shape how you look. The cells are constantly changing and reformulating themselves based on the thought template provided by your beliefs. The mind carves the body.

The physical body is nothing more nor less than the beliefs we have about it. Not only do the beliefs themselves create the body we have, but the beliefs also induce the actions. The derivative actions have their effect too! The actions of diet, exercise, rest, play, and joy all have their influence.

The question is not: "What should I believe?" The question is: "What is useful for me to believe?" Beliefs are either effective or ineffective. They either help the achievement of our goals and spiritual desires or hinder them.

The mind is the greatest power in the world. The only thing limiting anyone is their self-limiting beliefs. Holding onto poisonous beliefs shuts out all of the abundance life has to offer.

Change your beliefs about what you deserve and you will attract a whole new reality around you. You can do this by creating a belief paradigm which allows you to live to your highest health potential - physically, emotionally, mentally, and spiritually in a manner which honors all life forms.

As young children we possess a perfect mind and a perfect memory. It is through limiting beliefs that this potential is dampened. When you overthrow [transform] limiting beliefs, you will be returned to a perfect mind and a perfect memory.

At any given time you may regain your extraordinary potential by identifying (in writing) all your disempowering beliefs and dissolving them in oceans of new knowledge and wonder.

Simply refuse to limit yourself in any way.

Ideally, we should proceed as if limits to our abilities did not exist.

When we have eliminated our own limiting beliefs, then we automatically help those around us eliminate their limiting beliefs. This is another aspect of The Principle of Life Transformation: a change of beliefs on the inside of your mind produces a change of beliefs in other minds.

One of the greatest gifts we can give to another is our own strong belief in their potential. By influencing their belief system, we help them achieve their true potential - which makes everybody better off. I attribute much of my success in life to the influence of my Aunt Dee-Dee, who consistently instilled confidence in my abilities. Perhaps the greatest gift one can bestow upon another is to instill confidence by saying: "I believe in you. You are something special. You can do it!"

Action Steps:

- 1.** You have beliefs about how you look, what is a good weight for you, how much you should eat, what types of foods you should eat, and how much you should exercise. What are they? Write them down in your journal. Ask yourself: "How can I immediately and powerfully improve or replace these beliefs and enjoy the process? Write down the answers to this question for each belief, and act upon them immediately.
- 2.** Identify 5 limiting beliefs in writing in your journal. Replace each limiting belief with a one-sentence empowering belief. For example, if your old belief was "I am too fat," change it to "I am daily making choices which make me look excellent."
- 3.** Tell all the special people around you that you believe in them. Tell them how special they are to you. Sincerely help and support them. By the universal karmic law (the Law of Reciprocity), what you send out will come back multiplied. This is the way to receive the belief and support you deserve.

