



PERSONAL MYTHS

BELIEFS THAT
MIGHT BE HOLDING
YOU BACK

THE SNEAKY SEVEN OF DISCOURAGEMENT AND DEFEAT PART 2

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This is the second part of an article on personal beliefs or myths that can set us up to lose; the first part looked into ambition, confusion, and impatience. It also covered a few aspects on how language informs our thinking, what myths are in the literal sense, plus a three-second test to determine whether the unconscious assumptions that inform your actions energize and inspire you.

4. DISAPPOINTMENT

“I’m not getting what I want”

You feel disappointed when you seem to have done everything right but still don’t get the results you want. You’ve spent a lot of time and have travelled a long way. Is it time to give up and try something new? Sometimes it is – but not always. It can feel safe and be comforting (in a limiting sort of way) to get dragged down by disappointment, but from there, it really is just one small step to falling in the trap of letting your

preconceived notions like *“nothing will ever change, and nothing I could ever do will make a difference”* become a cheap excuse for not even trying.

Have you really tried everything – have you tweaked your strategy, listened carefully to feedback from clients and peers? Look at the support you got: did you really use it to its fullest extent? Or do you happen to believe that if you don’t make it alone, success doesn’t count? Have you read the books, listened to expert advice or, if there’s really a lot at stake for you, had a few sessions with a coach to expand your beliefs? Or perhaps you’ve set your goals so high that it’s unrealistic to achieve them in the time you’ve set. You probably can achieve very ambitious goals, but definitely not irrespective of resources and context.

Don’t get lost in a cycle of recrimination and self-judgment, finding yourself at fault for not meeting your expectations, or for not being the person you wish you could be – just yet.

Get some input from others, and set up a support system – complete with a “personal board of advisors” – revise your goal, and make a new plan; then go into action mode. If you then still realize you are in the wrong place, you’ll be much better equipped to deal with the situation – since you’ll already be in action mode! Even if the next steps entail changing your employer, or even your career, you might find you are ready to take those steps.

5. UNWORTHINESS

“I’m not worthy of success”

Now we’re getting into deeper, darker territory where we doubt our intrinsic value. When we don’t feel smart enough, good enough or talented enough, we doubt our ability to manage our existing team and goals (let alone new ones), or to take on something truly innovative. This is a place of low self-esteem, and sometimes self-loathing. To quit at this

point is common, but we can carry this around like a cross for a very long time, being victims of our perceived inadequacies.

It's easy to find reasons for unworthiness, but this is the lazy way of avoiding success. Why not build arguments for your worthiness instead? What have you succeeded at, no matter how modest? What are you good at? What do you love to do?

ROLE MODELS

Of course it can be inspiring to hear successful men and women share their (ex-post!) evaluations of how events led to become their "oh-my-god" careers. This is especially so if the people sharing them are conscious of the difference between how they felt about things at those famous crossroads – and how things played out in hindsight. In all other cases, these inspirational stories are simply stories.

I often feel we may be looking for inspiration in the wrong places. People with whom we don't interact on a regular basis cannot help us "become more of who we are". And why become a less-than-perfect version of who they are? After all, their role is already taken! I am a great fan of people who don't want to emulate others, and instead focus on who they really, truly want to become. These people access their deep sources of energy and motivation to get there – complete with dealing with the dark sides of their dreams on the way. These are the kind of journeys that lead to meaningful lives full of proud memories.

What do people praise or appreciate you for? What, as a result, would you love to do in three to five years? To ignore these obvious abilities and accomplishments is to undermine the truth of your potential. Build on what you have, not on what you think you should have. Stop comparing yourself to other people – and absolutely stay away from those glossy women's magazines that show you what's wrong with your body, wardrobe, styling, and even your social life. Make a simple plan and start moving forward one step at a time. Ask yourself "what would be the smallest possible change that would tell me that I was going in the right direction?"

A cousin of unworthiness is feeling like an impostor. When you feel like an impostor, it's as if you're pulling the wool over everyone's eyes. You believe you don't have the skills, the experience, the track record or the know-how to pull things off. I need hardly remind you of the gender bias here... Nevertheless, people trust you to get the job done. But what will happen when your team members or clients discover you were faking it all along? When they do, won't that mean the end of your life and career as you know it? Those who feel like imposters are similar to those who feel unworthy, but who take action anyway.

The recurring pattern for all of these mind-sets is that "things shouldn't be the way they are." Well, in case you didn't realize it, things are exactly the way they are. You should know exactly how much you know, you should be able to do exactly what you do, and you should have exactly what you have. That's

reality. And if people trust you to get a job done, they see something in you that you may not see. So you're not an impostor, just someone doing the best job you can. Get over it. Don't get side-tracked by figments of your own imagination. Take the acknowledgment and recognition and work at doing things even better.

6. FEAR

"I'll be hurt or rejected if I take action"

This is a big one because nobody likes to be rejected. We are always waiting for something bad to happen, but it usually doesn't. We put off making follow-up calls or don't try to negotiate a better deal, because we think we'll be rejected. We don't speak up at a meeting or write that article because we worry we'll be ridiculed. Or we avoid speaking at an industry conference because we'd only make a fool of ourselves. Fear puts us on "play it safe mode." We don't want to take a risk because we can't face the imagined consequences. Remind yourself that it is often not the facts, but our interpretation of the facts that creates emotions. It's "just" your mind at work – and minds create thoughts and feelings all the time; a mind is never still, just like the sea: waves rise up and down, then settle... these states are fleeting, and all we need to do sometimes is acknowledge whether there are indications of a storm...

We conquer fear by making a commitment to finding the truth. Will you really be rejected and ridiculed, or make a fool of yourself? What's your proof; what's your evidence? When it comes to making

that follow-up call, ask yourself how bad it could really be. Will the person you're calling send a hit man to kill you? Not likely! What if they simply have other priorities that you cannot possibly know about, and are not interested right now? Can you live with that and move on? Of course you can. If it is your presentation that doesn't convince, can you improve your presentation? Of course you can. Fear is based on the belief that everyone should like you and accept you. But is that true? Sounds pretty narcissistic to me! So tell the truth about your fear and take one action at a time. Take that scary next step. Come out from behind yourself. You'll have a much richer life as a result. And even the worst of failures provide great learning, plus a real treasure chest of memories to cherish in a decade or two...

6+1 BLAME

"It's someone else's fault"

Blame is the ultimate cop out. It's not your fault that you didn't succeed; it's not your fault that things didn't work out. It was the advice you got, it was the market conditions, it was your partner, your company's overpriced products – it was whatever conveniently comes to mind. What's the belief that underlies blame? The same as most beliefs: "Things should be different than they are." And, of course, if they had been different, I would have succeeded. This is a sad and tragic place to get to.

To get past blame you have to turn your attention to yourself. But the trick is, it can be easy to blame yourself as well – and that's just as bad, if

not worse. Instead, you want to take responsibility. If something didn't pan out the way you wanted, you had something to do with it. That's all. After all, if you had succeeded, you'd take responsibility, wouldn't you? Of course! You'd look at all the things you did to make things work, and you'd work to repeat them. Now, having failed, you need to do the same thing in reverse. Look dispassionately at what you did that made things end up the way they did. Then create a new plan to do things differently. The main thing is to keep moving on: it's the only real choice you have. In case you haven't come across some of the impressive body of research on the topic, brooding reduces our ability to solve problems. The evidence clearly states that brooding is the problem, not the solution (and of course, it's absolutely hopeless for dealing with emotional difficulties!).

If you find blame is a recurrent motif in your life, chances are that you are overstretching yourself and unwilling to accept that you may not be cut out for the type of career/life you are currently envisioning for yourself. Don't expect anyone to hand you a gold medal for your 75th birthday as a token of recognition for a life pursuing a dream that made neither you nor those around you happy. Ultimately, the choice to pursue a meaningful, self-respecting life is yours and yours alone.

Which of these limiting mind-sets and beliefs hold you back? Or do you have a different one that stops you from moving forward? Remember that all limiting beliefs like this are based on a completely false premise: "Things should not be the way



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they are" or "Things should be the way I want them to be."

By the way – I'm not asking that you believe anything I am writing in my articles. What I do want you to do is to notice your beliefs! Your beliefs shape your thinking, your feelings, your actions and your life. And don't believe that either! Take a look and see if it's true. /BW

Neither in my one-to-one work, nor in my articles, is my aim to tell people how to think; I'd much rather weave a basket of thoughts to offer them, not as a conclusive statement, but as a place to put more ideas. My normal way of thinking is to say something to complement the thinking of my counterpart; then we see if this turns into an inspiring, aesthetic and useful dance. Unfortunately, this is impossible to achieve via a magazine – a medium which doesn't allow me to know you, my reader.