



## SUCCESS BELIEFS

1 June 2015

A few years ago a young man came to see me. He said the reason he came for coaching is that he wanted to understand what was stopping him from being successful. Every time he seemed about to become successful (according to what he considered success for him) it just never happened. Something went wrong.

At the beginning of the third session he was telling me about a time when he felt he was on the brink of success. This was many years ago. He had made contact with some people and was about to secure a deal with them that would move his career and business interests into the big league. At the appointed time he went to meet with them at their offices. He arrived and walked into the room. They followed behind him and then pulled out guns. The one man said to him, "I am sorry to do this to you, but it has to be done." They then marched him to his car, stripped him of his clothes leaving him in his underwear, tied him up, taped his mouth shut, and threw him in the boot of his car. They drove off with him in the boot and drove around for some time before stopping and throwing him out into the veld in some desolate area he didn't recognise. He crawled along the road until he found someone who took him to the nearest police station.

Now we start to understand just why he could not seem to reach the level of success he wants. This traumatic experience taught him to fear success. It taught him (and when we are traumatised our brains learn lessons really fast) that however much he wanted to be successful, it was dangerous. He could even lose his life. And when our brains learn that something is dangerous and possibly even fatal, we are consciously and unconsciously driven to avoid that situation at all costs. So if you think that success could get you killed, and you are on the brink of success, you will find some way to sabotage it. Actually, you don't have to even believe success is dangerous. If you believe that success is not possible for you, you will also most likely mess things up when you are about to achieve that success.

There are lots of consequences that can result from a traumatic event depending on the individual. And they will differ from person to person. We know many of them: Flashbacks and repeatedly reliving the experience; withdrawal; depression; development of new fears linked to the trauma; hyper-alertness and startle responses; - and even full-blown post-traumatic stress disorder. What also can change is the beliefs we hold. The beliefs we have about ourselves, other people, and our world.

Beliefs are thoughts we have that we are convinced are true. They are not facts, they are mostly opinions. However, they are our convictions. Examples of beliefs about ourselves could be: I am hard-working; I am stupid; I am friendly; I am deserving of good things in life; I am capable of achieving the level of success I want; etc. Examples of beliefs about other people could be: Other people are friendly; other people are only interested in themselves; other people will stab you in the back if you let them; some people are kind and helpful, etc. Examples of beliefs about the world could be: The world is a very dangerous place; there is kindness in the world; what you give you get back, if you put in the effort you will reap the reward, etc.

We learn our beliefs from when we are young: From our family, our teachers, our peers, our society, the media, books we read, and from our interpretations of our experiences. We change our beliefs when something happens to force us to rethink them. Often that can be a traumatic event. If you believe the world is basically good, and your life is threatened you can change that belief. The problem is that sometimes the belief changes in a way that does not serve us. So for instance, the belief that "success is dangerous", is not a helpful belief to have when you are a young man who really wants to be successful. It is not true either. That specific situation was dangerous, but mostly, success is not dangerous. That belief needs to be challenged and changed so it becomes a belief that is more realistic and helpful to him. So in his instance it means changing and/or reworking beliefs to include the expanded experience he has of the world: "Success per se is not dangerous." "Some people are dangerous and to be avoided." "Some situations are dangerous and to be avoided." "I need to check out the people I do business with and not go into deals without knowing anything about the people involved." "Success is good." "My success can contribute to a better world." "If I am successful I can be a role model to others." "I am worth being successful if I put in the work required and my success contributes to the greater good."

The good thing about beliefs is they can be changed. If you challenge them enough and can see that what you currently believe is not true and not useful, you can change them. And then you want to replace them with better (more realistic and usually more positive beliefs). The hard thing about beliefs though, is that we have a lot of beliefs, based on what we have been told, what we have heard, what we have witnessed, and how we have interpreted what happens around us. And most of these we are not aware of. They are unconscious. And all our beliefs, conscious and unconscious, drive our behaviour and actions in life. If your beliefs are holding you back from the success you want, then until you change your beliefs to be aligned with the success you want, you will not achieve the desired success. And to change your beliefs you need to know what they are.

So how do I find out what my beliefs are? Especially if I am unaware of most of them. Well, coaching, counselling and therapy is one way in which people learn to make their unconscious thoughts conscious. If you are up for some homework, then you can try the following exercises. If you are not used to thinking about your thoughts and beliefs, then it can be very difficult when you start. But like most things it gets easier with practice.

- What is the level of success your family achieved? Have you taken on their beliefs? (Don't be too quick to dismiss the question and think there is no way I think the same way my father/mother did. Really think about it.)
- What did your teachers tell you that you were capable of? Are these now your beliefs?
- What have your bosses or work colleagues said to you that you are capable of?
- What have partners/spouses told you and are these now your beliefs?
- What is your self-talk? Do you speak negatively about yourself? Is your self-talk full of what is wrong with you and what you will never be able to achieve?

When you challenge your beliefs think about the following: Is this really true of me, or have I just accepted what they told me? Are there situations in my life, times in my life, when this belief was not true? Is this belief a sweeping generalisation - e.g. "I will never get a job", "I will never be loved", "I will never amount to anything", "Success does not happen to people like me," etc. "Never" and "always" are words you want to be careful of using. Then create some better beliefs for you that are grounded in reality and positive.

Have a happy June and think about what you are thinking.