



**7 Steps to  
Banishing  
Limiting Beliefs**

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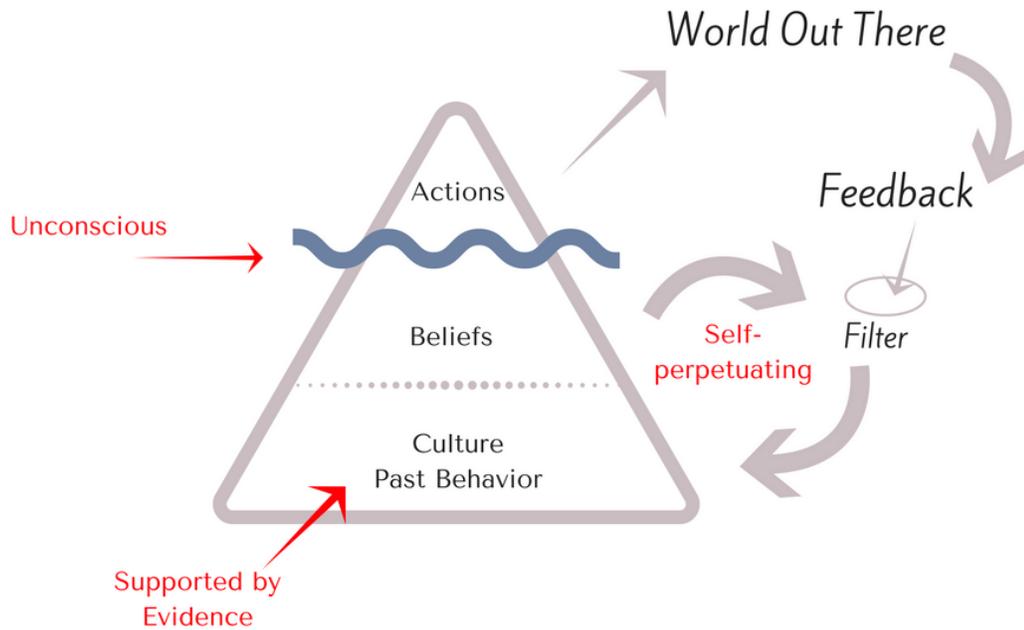


Part of being human is having to put up with maladaptive processes that have outlived their usefulness. Limiting beliefs are one example. These are beliefs that no longer serve us. They cause us to be afraid, paralyze action, and force us to play small. Often limiting beliefs cut us down and are highly self-critical. Common examples include “I can’t pursue my dreams because I might fail;” “I’m not someone who follows through;” and “Nobody cares what I have to say.”

If we want to overcome limiting beliefs, it is helpful to understand some things about the nature of beliefs. As Tony Robbins writes, beliefs are challenging because: “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.”

Let’s take a closer look at how this system works. In the diagram on the next page, you can see that beliefs are at the center of the system, in the middle of the triangle. Think of the triangle as an iceberg. Only what appears above the waterline, our actions, is visible to others. But our actions are rooted in what is below the waterline, often below even our conscious awareness: our beliefs. And our beliefs are influenced by our experiences, our education, our culture, and our past behavior.

When we act, our actions influence the world out there, and the world, in turn, gives us feedback about the effect of our actions. However, this feedback passes through a filter and that filter is comprised of our beliefs, assumptions, and values. Think about it: it is hard to take in feedback that is not consistent with what we already believe to be so. This filtered feedback influences how we come to understand our past behavior. And, finally, our past behaviors influence our beliefs, thus completing the cycle.



There are three qualities about limiting beliefs that make them insidious. See the red text in the diagram above. On the left-hand side you will see that beliefs are often below the threshold of awareness. We are not conscious of them and this allows them to operate unchallenged. Secondly, our beliefs are supported by evidence. The evidence might be flimsy – based, for example, on only one incident – but some evidence generally underlies our beliefs. And finally, on the right-hand side of the diagram, you will see that our beliefs are part of a self-perpetuating system. Our beliefs impact our interpretations of events and those interpretations feed back into the beliefs that we hold.

All of this points to three general strategies that we can adopt for overcoming our limiting beliefs. We can bring our limiting beliefs to conscious awareness, we can find new evidence that undermines our limiting beliefs, and we can break through the self-perpetuating cycle through a technique called Thought Stopping.



It is also helpful to realize that beliefs are rooted in the avoidance of pain and the seeking of pleasure. They are reinforced through consequences and references. When our limiting beliefs were first encoded, they most likely served a helpful purpose.

Let's suppose that I believe that I'm not someone who follows through. This makes me reluctant to sign up for tasks that call on the trait. That might spare me, and others, some heartache. Such a belief probably stemmed from situations where I was trying to avoid the painful consequences of my own shortcoming. Perhaps it was all rooted in just one situation where I failed to follow through. But I adopted a more globalized belief about myself as protection from some imagined future failure.

While limiting beliefs may have originally emerged for our benefit, long term they are harmful. Continuing with the above example, we see that the belief is damaging because it allows me to use excuses to avoid new experiences. And, when I do take on projects, it sets up the likelihood of a self-fulfilling prophecy that will derail my efforts.

What I really need in this situation are ways to challenge my self-deprecating label. Taking on new projects where I can demonstrate accountability is one way to create new information, or references, around my belief. Another is to remember situations where I did follow through. Next, I can adopt a new belief, perhaps something like "I have great follow through" or "I'm a responsible person," or, if these feel unrealistic, then perhaps, "I am dedicated to being accountable."

#### OVERCOMING LIMITING BELIEFS IN SEVEN STEPS

So, how do we end the nasty cycle of limiting beliefs? There are seven steps:

1. Define a new context
2. Name the limiting beliefs
3. Understand their original value proposition
4. Destabilize the old belief
5. Choose a new empowering belief
6. Reinforce the new belief
7. Activate the new belief



Let's explore each step in detail.

#### 1. DEFINE A NEW CONTEXT

Before we start diving into limiting beliefs, let's consider what you are trying to accomplish in the first place. I'd like you to think about your life as a system. Your life is perfectly organized to achieve the outcomes that you are currently producing. How do I know? Because it does. If you want to change your life, you need some disturbance in the system to throw things off course. If the disturbance is large enough, you will see that it produces different results.

One way to get yourself to produce new results is to get sufficiently dissatisfied with the current state of equilibrium. And one way to do that is to envision an exciting new future state for your system. So, I'd like you to take the time to do this by articulating where you want to be in, say, six months or a year's time. Think about your goals, what you'd like to achieve, and who you want to be.



If you knew you could not fail, what would your life be like?

A large, empty rectangular box with a thin blue border, intended for a user to write their response to the question above.



What is your world like in this imagined future?

What do you spend most of your time doing?

Who are you with?



Who do you help?

How are you contributing and what are the fruits of your contribution?



Spend at least 10 minutes envisioning this future. The longer you spend on this exercise, the better. Now, identify your why. What is the impetus that drives you toward these achievements? Why is your vision important to you? What would you have to believe in order to manifest this life for yourself?



## 2. IDENTIFYING LIMITING BELIEFS

Thinking about the gap between your current state and your aspirational state may help you to identify some of your limiting beliefs. Dedicate another five to ten minutes considering what have been obstacles to leading the life you want.

What is preventing you from having this ideal state right now?

What excuses are holding you back from achieving your goals?

How might you be labeling yourself?



What stories are you telling about achieving your ideal state?

What insights emerged from answering the above questions? Write down any limiting beliefs that have surfaced.



To further help you in generating your list, let's consider the nature of beliefs. One classification of negative thinking comes from *Change Your Brain Change Your Life* by Dr. Daniel Amen. He identified nine types of Automatic Negative Thoughts (or ANTs). As you review the following types of ANTs, consider whether you have limiting beliefs that may take on the qualities described.

The nine ANTs are:

- All or nothing thinking: One example proves the theory. Missing one workout means you're lazy.
- Always thinking: Overgeneralizing. Using the words "always," "never," "every time," or "everyone."
- Focusing on the negative: Seeing the glass as half empty. "I lost 10 pounds, but I wanted to lose 15, so I'm a failure"
- Thinking with your feelings: Assuming your feelings are correct. "I feel like my skin is never going to clear up."
- Guilt beating: Using excessive guilt to control behavior. "I should," "I must," "I have to." Raises our natural resistance.
- Labelling: Name calling. "I'm a loser"; "I'm a failure"; or "I'm lazy." A defeatist attitude.
- Fortune telling: Predicting the worst. "I just had a biopsy; I am sure it is cancer."
- Mind reading: Knowing what someone else is thinking without asking them.
- Blame: Blaming others. "It's your fault." Victim thinking that removes personal responsibility.

You will find that most limiting beliefs fall into one or more of these categories.

Here some more examples of limiting beliefs:

*Survival beliefs:*

It's not safe to draw attention.

I can't be myself or I will be judged.

I can't ask for what I want because I might get rejected.



*Paralyzing beliefs:*

I don't know what to do.

I don't know enough.❓

*Beliefs about money:*

I won't be able to make money doing this.

I don't deserve it.❓

*Global beliefs:*

I can't handle it.

I'll never succeed.

It's too late to pursue my dreams.

*Shame based beliefs:*

I'm not enough.

I don't deserve success.❓

*Comfort zone beliefs:*

Marketing is just not me.❓

*Beliefs about the way the world works:*

If things don't just materialize, then they weren't meant to be.

*Blaming beliefs:*

It's because of my childhood.

*If Then beliefs:*

I'm a loser because my \_\_\_\_\_ failed.❓

*Fundamental beliefs:*

I can't stand rejection

I have to be perfect

I can't survive outside my comfort zone.



The last category, fundamental beliefs, is particularly insidious. Fundamental beliefs often lie at the root of other beliefs. For example, consider the belief “I can't be myself or I'll be judged.” The fundamental belief that might underlie this belief is: “I can't stand to be judged,” or “I'll fall apart if I'm judged.” To gain traction on limiting beliefs, they must be identified at the root level. Go back through your limiting beliefs and see if you can articulate any fundamental beliefs that add intensity to your original list of beliefs.

## 2. UNDERSTANDING THE ORIGINAL VALUE PROPOSITION OF YOUR BELIEFS

The next step to developing your conscious awareness around your limiting beliefs is to understand where they came from. Remember that limiting beliefs almost always arose for a useful purpose and were designed to protect you. They have only become maladaptive if you have clung to them and applied them in inappropriate circumstances. Consider the category of global beliefs. Those beliefs may have been useful in a one-off situation, but when you engage in All or Nothing or Always thinking, then you are acting as if the trait is always true of you. One failure morphs into the unhelpful (and incorrect) assumptions that you will always fail.

Here are some questions to consider in thinking about where your beliefs came from.

How has this belief served you?

Was there a time when the belief was true?



What experiences support this belief?

Next think about the consequences of holding this belief. How has holding this belief held you back?

What assumptions underlie the belief?



What could you accomplish if you knew the belief was untrue?

Finally, thank the belief for having served you. Acknowledge that it arose with good intentions. You are not attempting to suppress the belief but rather to move on.

Now that you have brought conscious awareness to identify and understand your limiting beliefs it is time to use focused intention to create a shift.

### 3. DESTABILIZE THE OLD BELIEF

This process starts with challenging the limiting belief. One excellent technique for challenging unhelpful beliefs or thoughts was developed by Byron Katie. She calls it “the Work.” The Work involves asking three questions plus what Katie calls the ‘turn around.’

The process begins with “Is it true?” Just answer a simple yes or no. It doesn’t matter which you pick. Ask yourself again, “Do you absolutely know that it’s true?” Something may start to shift in you just by asking these questions.



The next question is “Who am I when I believe that thought [your limiting belief]?”

Finally comes the ‘turn around.’ Here you want to flip your belief around. Find its opposite. Swap out the nouns and pronouns in the belief. For example, if your belief is “My spouse doesn’t support my career,” try “*I don’t support my spouse’s career,*” or “*I don’t support my career.*” Now play with the verbs. “My spouse *does support* my career.” See if there is wisdom in the turn arounds. How are the turn arounds sometimes true?

This exercise helps you develop a fluidity of thinking. You can further challenge your old belief by considering times when the belief was/is not true. Can you remember a time when you did not hold the belief? What were you able to accomplish then?

In what ways is the belief false?



What famous quotes counter your belief?

What will the consequences be if you are unable to make this change and eliminate this limiting belief?



How has holding this belief been painful?

The purpose of this section has been to illuminate how damaging the belief has been. Before proceeding, make sure that you have fully articulated how painful and inhibiting it has been to embrace this belief. The pain of holding the belief must outweigh whatever benefits you may derive from it. Now you will sever ties with the belief.

#### 5. CHOOSE A NEW EMPOWERING BELIEF

Now you're going to take deliberate control over your thought process. You can intentionally create your life and it all starts with a new belief. Choose a new belief that counters the old. There is only one rule: make sure that it is believable. If your limiting belief is "I can't ask for what I want because I might get rejected", it may be too much of a leap for you to go from there to "I embrace rejection" or "I assertively address my needs." Instead, you might try "I am learning that I can handle rejection."



Write down your new empowering belief.

The goal here is to release yourself from messages that beat you down so that you can unleash your potential. Choose a new belief that speaks to that potential in a way that you can fully embrace.

If you're having any difficulty arriving at this new empowering belief, revisit your aspirational state and ask yourself the following questions. Think about your answers as if you are writing from the future and looking back on how you got to your aspirational state. What was my attitude like while I pursued my goals?

What was my attitude like as my aspirational state began to materialize?



Once I've achieved my goals what did I believe?

How did it feel?

What is my perspective on the obstacles that I encountered along the way?

#### 6. REINFORCE THE NEW BELIEF

Your old belief was held in to place by your efforts to seek pleasure and avoid pain and by the references that you have for that belief. You are now going to bring conscious awareness to the fact that your new belief is a healthier choice for you. It is superior from a pleasure and pain perspective because it does a better job of providing pleasure and/or avoiding pain. The consequences of holding this new belief far outweigh the consequences of embracing the old belief. And most important, you are viscerally aware of these dynamics. Your old belief has been exposed as unworthy. It's time to ditch it and embrace a new reality.



To reinforce your new belief, ask: How will my new belief help me to achieve my goals?

How does it feel to hold this new belief?



What benefit will I derive from the new belief?

What evidence supports this new belief?



Who am I now that I hold this new belief?

Use visualization to help imprint this new belief. Think of a situation where you have previously been tripped up by your old way of thinking. For example, I used to be painfully shy and held beliefs like “People do not want to hear what I have to say.” This belief was particularly activated when I had to bother people with a request or when I wanted to reach out to someone. I’d feel a sheepishness that would often delay me from taking action, or even prevent me from taking action all together. After I had sent an email, the feeling would continue and I’d have a strange sense of shame. I developed a new belief, “Some people definitely want to hear what I have to say and it is my job to reach out.”

For purposes of the visualization, I would imagine a situation where I would reach out to an old acquaintance. I would imagine how I would do it and how I would feel as I composed the email or dialed their number. I would envision the conversation, seeing how I would confidently share my updates with them and how I would listen with curiosity to what they have to say. I would imagine having a positive impact on them.

The most important part of the visualization is to imagine how you’re feeling as you go through the new behaviors that have been spawned by your new belief. Really breathe into the self-confidence that you would feel (or whatever feeling you imagine... make it a positive feeling!) Focus on feeling the feeling with as much intensity as possible. In your



visualization, you might even prepare for some of the things that might go wrong. If you're calling them, you might imagine that you have to leave a message. So, mentally rehearse leaving that message. Imagine maintaining a positive feeling even if they don't get back to you right away. Focus on your own responsibility within your belief, for example, think to yourself: "It is my job to reach out."

Studies have shown that mental rehearsal is just as potent as actually performing the act. It turns out that our brains don't know the difference between practice and performance. Engaging in a daily visualization will help you to establish a place of primacy for your new belief. You want to use your conscious effort to strengthen the belief so that it begins to dominate even when you are unaware of it.

Visualization leverages brain dynamics. You've probably heard the saying "Nerve cells that fire together, wire together." This means that when you do two things at the same time, for example intentionally feeling confident while you imagine emailing an old acquaintance, the network in your brain brings to associate the two mental activities. The more you practice it, the more you will naturally feel confident while reaching out.

It is also true that "Nerve cells that no longer fire together, no longer wire together." So, the more you practice having a good feeling while engaging in the previously intimidating behavior, the more the bad feelings associated with the behavior will fall away. In fact, it could be said that you are addicted to the old feelings. More on that later.

Now it's your turn to try the visualization. Imagine yourself engaging in the new behaviors that your new empowering belief supports. Focus on the good feelings associated with this new belief. What do you see yourself doing? What are the positive feelings that arise from this behavior? How are you moving toward achieving your goals and your ultimate desired state? How does it feel to move toward your desired state? What do you feel in your body as you engage in the new behavior? How do others respond to you? What happens as the result of your action?

You can also reinforce your new belief through embodiment. This means to develop a movement or hand gesture that will symbolize your new belief. One of my favorite



movements to use to encode a new belief comes from the old Mary Tyler TV show (I hope I'm not going too old school on you). Remember in the opening credits how Mary stops on a crowded city street and tosses her hat in the air with glee. When I'm thinking of a new thought or behavior I'd like to embody, I do so with the flick of a wrist, imagining I'm tossing my hat in the air.

Quotes are another great way to bring a tangible reminder into your environment. See if you can identify quotes that help support your new empowering belief. Then make or find a beautiful graphic of the quote. Pinterest is an excellent source for this. You can create your own graphics using a tool like Canva.

A final way to reinforce your new belief is through a totem. A totem is a small object that you associate with your new belief. It could be a stuffed animal, an object from nature like a pine cone or a leaf, a memento or cheap trinket that you pick up online. The only thing that is important is that you can see it or feel it and that it reminds you of your new empowering belief.

## 7. ACTIVATE THE NEW BELIEF

This final step is fairly straightforward. Just start embracing your new belief. Adopt the new behavior associated with it. In this step, you also want to be mindful of any recurrence of the old belief or the behavior that stems from it. A great technique to use for this is called Thought Stopping from Cognitive Behavioral Therapy.

Remember when I said that your brain is addicted to certain feelings? It's true. Feelings are produced by neuropeptides and hormones in the brain. According to Joe Dispenza, "Neuropeptides are chemical couriers that signal different glands of the body to make hormones." Neuropeptides do their thing by docking on cell receptor sites. As you think certain thoughts a chemical signature is released in the brain causing the appropriate peptides to link up with the appropriate cells thereby releasing the chemical process for the corresponding feeling.

As Dispenza explains it, "As you think certain thoughts, the brain produces chemicals that cause you to feel exactly the way you were thinking." But here's the thing. *The chemistry of the brain begins to adapt itself to the thoughts and feelings most often experienced.* If you spend a lot of time experiencing shame, your brain starts to create more shame receptors at



the cost of, say, happiness receptors. And then the brain starts looking for more of the same in order for things to feel normal. The brain's job is to keep things in homeostasis.

Say that you are a ninja at feeling guilty. From your brain's perspective, guilty thoughts and feelings become the status quo. When you are not feeling guilty, the chemistry of your brain is out of whack, it's looking for a guilt rush just so that it can feel normal. You could say that your brain wants you to feel guilty. You've literally become addicted to guilt.

So how do you break the cycle? Conscious awareness. Just reading the above has started the process. When you decide to change your behavior and stop indulging in feelings of guilt, the first thing that will happen is that your brain will let you know it's craving the guilt. Don't listen to it. Tell it that you're no longer playing that game.

You can do this by literally yelling "Stop!" when you have a thought that you're trying not to indulge. I'm not kidding. I've done this and it works. If you can't yell out loud, then scream internally as loud as you can. Toss your imaginary hat into the air. The point is to be disruptive, to cause a disruption in the brain.

After you've stopped the thought, Then, invoke your new Empowering Belief and invite in the more positive feelings associated with it. Remind yourself that you've been addicted to your old feelings. They probably won't go away immediately. But they will diminish if you use this technique.

You want to get new nerve cells firing together. You want to produce different emotional associations between thoughts. And you want to flood your brain with those new emotions. You can change your brain chemistry.

So, to recap we've covered the importance of:

- 1) Defining a new reality so that you have a visceral sense of the gap between where you are now and where you want to be.
- 2) Identifying your limiting beliefs so that you can find the soul-sucking little buggers and eliminate them.
- 3) Understanding the original value proposition of the limiting beliefs so that you understand their allure and how they came to dominate you.



- 4) Destabilizing the limiting belief so that it no longer holds sway over you.
- 5) Choosing a new empowering belief so that you can sprinkle fairy dust over the old beliefs and make them wither away.
- 6) Reinforcing the new belief so that it will be more powerful than the old belief and will keep that bad boy firmly banished, and
- 7) Activating the new belief so that you can start reaping its rewards.

I hope that you found this approach and these techniques valuable. Being held under the sway of a limiting beliefs is exhausting. It can feel like you've got one foot on the brake as you're trying to accelerate down the highway. Lift that foot off the brake and embrace what it feels like to soar.

Want more? In my coaching practice I love to help people to banish their limiting beliefs. [Schedule](#) time for a free discovery session to explore the possibilities. You can also check out my [website](#) for more resources.

Sources:

Daniel Amen, *Change Your Brain, Change Your Life*

Byron Katie, *Loving What Is*.

Joe Dispenza, *Breaking the Habit of Being Yourself*.

Tony Robbins, *Awaken the Giants Within*.

Adam Sicinski, [The Complete Guide to Overcoming Limiting Beliefs](#).