

Management Minute

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Change Your Beliefs, Change Your Life!

The following are ten common beliefs with which many people struggle. As you listen, ask yourself which of these beliefs operate consciously or unconsciously in your life.

1. I must be loved, validated, and approved of by everyone. This belief keeps you from being yourself for fear that you will meet with disapproval or rejection. Individuals who subscribe to this belief often cheat themselves out of being who they are, focusing instead on evaluating situations and other people for how to respond. As a result, difficulties in both professional and personal relationships are common due to the fact that a healthy relationship requires two separate individuals who respect their own, and each other's identity.
2. I am responsible for other people. By taking responsibility for others, you may inadvertently take away their motivation to accept responsibility for themselves. In addition, you put yourself in a no-win situation – trying to control other people is rarely, if ever, possible, and most importantly, when you do this, you lose touch with yourself. How do people get this way? They often come from families where everyone made unreasonable demands or were possessive of others. They have little respect for another person's individual identity because they never learned what it means. Instead of being open and soliciting dialogue, they attempt to read other people's minds and probe into their affairs believing they have every right to do so. In part because they can't see the boundary between where their self ends and another's begins. They have a very precarious sense of their own identity.
3. My happiness depends on people and things outside of myself. Many people try to achieve inner happiness through other people or other things. While other people or things may provide you with some temporary comfort or pleasure, they cannot provide lasting happiness. Ultimately, your happiness depends on you. It's not that simple, though. You need to be flexible and adapt to the circumstances. Basically, when things are going well, you want to have a strong sense of being involved and a part of the process – what psychologists refer to as internal focus of control. But when things are going bad, you need to step out of the role. Give it your best shot, but recognize there are some things you simply cannot control, such as another person's behavior. Now, a sense of external focus of control can be beneficial. When you say to yourself, "I did all I could, ultimately, the decision was made by someone I couldn't influence". This belief is detrimental when you don't even try because you attribute whatever happens in your life to outside factors.

4. I must be the best at everything I do – I can't make mistakes. Perfectionism is a battle that many people fight every day. It is important to accept that everyone had areas of strength and weakness – to be human is to be imperfect. While everybody likes to excel, no one can possibly excel at everything. Most successful people have succeeded only after many failures or mistakes. Life is a learning experience. Some people cannot acknowledge an imperfection in themselves because they never received the love and support to feel comfortable with their shortcomings. Deep down they feel like worthless human beings and end up making unreasonable demands upon themselves and sometimes on others. In that unrealistic, over-demanding world, they are able to justify their beliefs that they are hopeless because their self-imposed demands are so unrealistic. Often, to feel good about themselves, they will project their faults onto other individuals or groups and blame them for whatever goes wrong. In short, when they criticize others, they are really revealing their own shortcomings.
5. I can avoid dealing with problems or pain in life. While you can postpone addressing difficulties and pain in life, you cannot really avoid tough times. Accepting them and dealing with problems and emotions directly allows you to truly put them behind you. Avoiding emotions is rarely effective for the long term. It is not possible to enjoy positive feelings for long when you have denied negative feelings. It is the failure to acknowledge an emotion – the internalization or repression of feelings – that will wreak havoc in your life. I'm not suggesting that you walk into your boss's office and engage in a form of emotional exhibitionism. Carefully chose the right time and place. Perhaps a private airing is most appropriate. Remember, the emotion is signaling a perceived unmet need or problem that needs to be addressed. Denying the emotion is ignoring the problem. You have a choice. You can deal with it consciously on your terms, or you can wait for it to surprise you when your body can't take it anymore.
6. Inconveniences in life are catastrophes. It is important to keep the daily hassles and inconveniences in life proper perspective. What is the worst case scenario? It is really as bad as you fear? Life is full of problems. Your choice is whether or not you accept this fact or repeatedly set yourself up for disappointment by expecting life to be hassle-free. Paradoxically, when you accept this fact, the hassles become easier to tolerate.
7. I must control at all times. It is a fact that there are many things in life beyond our control. What it comes down to is that we are consistently in control of only our attitude, or our happiness. If we believe in the illusion of control, we will repeatedly face the impossible task of trying to govern what is beyond us. While it is beneficial to maintain control over situations that we can influence, the belief that we have power over all events is an illusion that is responsible for much unhappiness. As I noted previously, it's good to have control over some things. But problems arise when control becomes the end instead of the means; when we

refuse to relinquish it even when circumstance call for delegation or simply letting go. Reinhold Niebuhr said it best: "God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and wisdom to know the difference".

8. If people knew the real me, they would not like me. This belief can lead you to pretend to be someone you are not, ultimately distancing you from other people. Including those people who might truly appreciate and enjoy the person you really are. The bad news is that you probably do have some traits or features that others might consider undesirable. The good news is that everyone does. Furthermore, when you can see your own limitations, it becomes easier to accept those of others. You'll be more realistic and not expect people to be more wonderful than they really are. There will be other benefits as well. You'll have less of a tendency to exaggerate the negative.
9. It is wrong to enjoy myself too much. While life is sometimes painful and difficult, it is healthy to enjoy life, to make a decision to seek fulfillment and joy out of the experience available to us. Once you accept this, you open yourself to much more closeness to and appreciation for the people around you.

And finally,

10. I can't change because I've always been the way that I am. If you truly believe this you will change because you have sealed yourself off. Choices are made each and every moment in life. While making changes is sometimes very difficult, you effect change simply by making choices. What characterizes truly healthy people to having the capacity to deal with change. Often, they thrive on it as they view events not as obstacles but as challenges. Many people can't seem to maintain enough openness and flexibility, and end up distraught when things don't turn out as they expected. For those people, even minor changes can make them feel overwhelmed.

These ten beliefs often interfere with your professional development and personal enrichment. They will keep you from achieving your goals by giving rise to unhealthy emotions and inappropriate responses.