

## **Unexamined, Underlying, Compelling Beliefs**

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Actions produce outcomes. You initiate actions every day that are intended to produce a particular result. Sometimes, however, what develops is something that you had not anticipated. My purpose with this article is to raise your awareness (and stimulate your thinking) such that you are easily able to identify examples of unintended outcomes in your own life.

I've started noticing that there is a pattern in my unintended outcomes, and I'm wondering if it is true for others. May I suggest that you look for this pattern in your own life? If you have thoughts, I'd love for you to contact me and share your experiences and observations!

For years, my signature block has included this phrase: "Your values drive your behaviors." My contention is that to make more effective choices, you should thoroughly understand the driver for your behaviors. Though we all have values, many of us have not thoroughly examined them. It's easy to take them for granted. Yet they are the single largest contributor to why you do what you do.

So, I encourage you to allocate time for scrutinizing your values. Think about what's important to you in life, expressing your priorities so that they can be understood by colleagues and teammates.

Are there additional unexamined, underlying beliefs that compel us to think and act in ways that are not consciously chosen by us, yet influence our behaviors and outcomes? Our "values" are the beliefs that we have examined and know are important to us. I'm thinking there are likely other beliefs we are not able to or willing to describe that also influence our actions.

Additionally, I'm discovering that a high percentage of my unexpected outcomes are undesirable. I'm wondering what I might do to decrease the number of undesirable outcomes. My craving to improve has led me to think about the degree to which those unexamined beliefs influence decisions that lead to the undesirable outcomes.

Perhaps I should describe examples of the kinds of beliefs that I'm suggesting. One is, "I'm not good enough." Another is, "If you find out who I really am, you won't like me." And another, "If I just keep plugging away, somebody will notice." Still another is, "If I admit a mistake, people will think less of me." Here's one, "I deserve better than I'm getting." One more, "Why am I the only one in this organization who comes up with good ideas?"

In the quiet solitude of your own mind, and maybe on rare occasion with a very close friend, you might reveal (maybe discover for the first time) some of those underlying, compelling beliefs. Despite your efforts to ignore them or push them away, they exist, and they are silently working. In subtle ways, they influence your conscious choices, sometimes changing what you might otherwise have done.

So here's my hypothesis. I invite you to join me in thinking about this. My unexamined, underlying compelling beliefs are a major contributor to my unintended (usually undesirable) outcomes. If I could examine (and consciously reject or modify) my underlying beliefs, I could improve the percentage of my desirable outcomes. Do you think that may be possible?

How would a person go about doing that? Here are a few thoughts.

1. Take time to examine and articulate your values. Write them down.
2. Allow some time to pass. As new thoughts occur to you, add to and modify your articulated values.
3. Write down your unintended outcomes when they occur. Make note of patterns that emerge.
4. Search for (allow to surface) your unexamined, underlying compelling beliefs. Capture thoughts so that you can examine them for their possible influence.
5. Keep looking for patterns where compelling beliefs manifest in behaviors that result in unintended, undesirable outcomes.
6. Consider alternative behaviors that might both deliver desired outcomes and reduce the frequency of unintended outcomes. Practice these alternative behaviors until they become comfortable and natural.
7. Observe the reduction in undesirable outcomes while increasing the frequency of desired outcomes.
8. Acknowledge your newly examined (and maybe changed) beliefs. Add to or modify your listing of values. Share your new insights with someone close to you, celebrating your progress. Ask your colleague to help you remain faithful to these new values and insights as you anchor them.