

Unintended Outcomes and Compelling Beliefs

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NEW YEAR'S RESOLUTIONS! Yep, it's that time of year! But don't take the easy way out! Don't settle for the obvious resolutions that you attempt every year. This year, why not commit to an effort that will make a major difference in your awareness of the impact you have on those you influence?

Consider becoming more attentive to the unintended outcomes that develop from your actions. Further, I'm recommending you do some analysis to determine what compelling beliefs, lying just beneath the surface of your consciousness, drive your behaviors. If you'll do the work that's required to gain these insights, you'll generate new approaches that may yield much improved choices!

"How will that help?" you might ask. Let me explain. People can be quite action oriented, and that's the focus of attention when most leaders want to improve. They usually ask, "What should I DO differently?"

In addition to considering improved actions, I suggest that you look at what precedes and follows your actions. Beliefs drive your actions. Some may not be well understood, functioning as assumptions and operating just under your conscious awareness. Could it be that some beliefs are actually hurting you?

Additionally, some of your outcomes over the past year may not have been what you had anticipated. Something different happened for some of the people affected by your behavior. Despite your intentions, perhaps you actually created problems for some of your folks.

Now before you push back too hard, please be patient and just consider what I'm suggesting. The beliefs that precede your actions may be different from what you think, and some of the effects of your behaviors may be unknown to you (or may be detrimental in ways you do not understand).

Let's address your outcomes first. Typically, when you take action, you have a pretty good idea of what you want to accomplish, right? But sometimes, the impact isn't what you expected. Perhaps there are unexpected (and maybe undesirable) side effects. My opinion is that this happens more than you know!

Of course, some unintended outcomes can be pleasant surprises. Usually, however, you've chosen your behaviors expecting them to deliver effects that you desire. Surprise outcomes, therefore, are often quite undesirable. Let me offer an example.

The other day, a colleague was stressed. I wanted to help. I listened to understand his situation, then offered a few suggestions (thinking they were pretty good ideas!). To my surprise he let me know, in no uncertain terms, that I was adding to his tension, not easing it! My intervention was not helpful to him!

As a leader in your organization, those consequences may happen to you, too. However, your folks may not be as direct in their comments to you as my colleague was to me! The truth is that you may not always know about the unintended outcomes of your actions.

My suggestion over the next few months is that you resolve to be more aggressive in discovering your unintended outcomes when you offer help or give direction. I recommend you announce your initiative to your organization and ask that individuals provide you with very honest feedback.

My second suggestion deals with the beliefs that drive your actions. You probably think you already understand why you do what you do. However, I contend you have beliefs that function just beneath the surface of your consciousness, and they have a significant automatic influence on your choices. Some of your beliefs are so strong that they seem, when you consciously think about them, to be "truth."

In my example, I believed I could help my colleague. I believed he would appreciate my help. I believed his stress was amplified by some inaccurate perceptions, and he was elaborating his tension. And I believed he could reduce his stress just by thinking differently about his situation.

I was not aware of all those beliefs until I took the time to analyze them for the purpose of reconciling with my colleague! (It was in reconciling with a person I respect that the idea for this article developed!)

My hope in this article is that I've stimulated your interest to learn more. Please join me next week when I share some specific "how to" ideas about exploring your unintended outcomes and compelling beliefs.