

Your Beliefs and Your Expectations—Part 1

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Many leaders underestimate the power of beliefs and expectations. Some, perhaps, have never considered the effects described in this article!

In stimulating individuals to consider improvement, I often ask, “What change would you make if you had a magic wand?” The concept tends to free people from the constraints of realistic thinking.

Beliefs and expectations may be even more powerful than my imaginary magic wand. They are very real influences on a person’s behaviors and achievements. Though the power of a magic wand is imaginary, a person’s beliefs and expectations have the power of creating self-fulfilling prophecies. They can work for you, but they often are invisible constraints that prevent progress where you think it should be occurring!

Let’s look at how this develops.

Your Parents’ Beliefs and Expectations. When you are a little kid, your parents are the most powerful people in the world! (Some individuals were raised by adults other than parents. These comments apply to whomever served as your primary authority figures when you were young.)

Unwittingly, you are learning from your parents all the time. Certainly they teach you some things consciously. But because of your dependence on and respect for your parents, you are learning even when they are blissfully ignorant that they are building foundational concepts in you.

The beliefs and expectations you develop as a child are indelible. Unless consciously overridden, they are with you for life. Some are distortions of truth, folklore that your parents probably learned from their parents. As a child, you begin to believe things about yourself and develop expectations about the rest of the world that put limitations on what you are willing to try.

Beliefs and Expectations of Others You Value. As you aged, others in your life became important. Your friends became the main source of influence regarding where you went, what you did, and what you thought and felt about yourself.

Now that you are an adult, there are other important authorities in your life—your husband or wife, your other close relatives, your friends, your colleagues at work, and even what you see in the media. Your boss has major beliefs and expectations about your capabilities, your motives, and your commitment. These expectations influence the assignments delegated to you, and the beliefs affect the degree of challenge and support you receive.

Beliefs and Expectations of Self. During your youth and early career, you begin to believe and expect certain outcomes from your behaviors. I am fascinated by individuals whose confidence does not match their competence.

Some individuals who are quite capable seem very insecure, behaving as if they are impostors, having been given responsibility for which they are inadequate. Others seem to have great confidence, but people quickly learn to not count on them to fulfill their commitments.

You have underlying assumptions about who you are, what you can do, and what outcomes you expect to generate. These are not “truths,” but they may as well be, because these beliefs and expectations control what you will attempt. They become your personal self-fulfilling prophecies!

All of this provides a double whammy for leaders. First, all of the above is true for you. And it is true for those under your authority. It is your responsibility to influence those who serve your internal and external customers, yet they are constrained by their self-limiting beliefs.

Are the pre-existing expectations beyond your control? Fortunately not! We’ll cover that next week!

Dennis Hooper is a local leadership development coach, helping leaders build organizations of excellence and servant leaders. Contact Dennis at (478)-988-0237 or at dhooper2@juno.com.