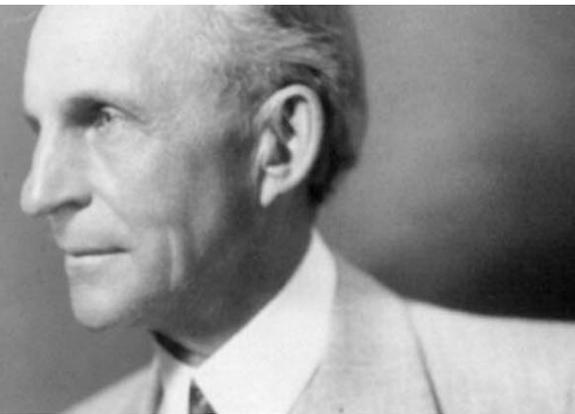


THE SIMPLE, COMPELLING POWER OF LIBERATING BELIEFS

- ▲ **Leaders' Ability to Help Others Change Their Viewpoint Key to Generating Higher Performance**
- ▲ **Inner Beliefs Have Strong Influence in Outer Actions**



Two different people with the same talents, skills, and competencies. One succeeds, the other does not - Why? They both work hard, neither cheated; what took one over the line and not the other? Often it is what is inside the mind that matters. Much of what we believe determines whether we limit or liberate ourselves in our performance. As leaders invest in their organization's internal value proposition, they have the opportunity to envision and support liberating beliefs among an organization's members.

Henry Ford Was Right

Henry Ford once said, "Whether you believe you can, or believe you can't, you're probably right."

Belief can be a very powerful tool that can enhance or inhibit performance. A classic case of this was a group of students who participated in a standardized test at the beginning of the school term. When the teachers received the results, they assigned the children to groups based on their scores. Predictably, the group with the higher scores progressed faster and obtained better grades than the other groups throughout the year.

There was only one problem: the students in that “upper” group had actually scored lower on the original test than the other children! The teachers were completely unaware. It was they who were the real focus of the experiment that was being conducted. With these expectations developed in the minds of the teachers, they acted on their liberating beliefs in the abilities of the “upper” group and instructed those students in a way that delivered better results. Sadly, they also taught the others in a way that fulfilled the teachers’ reduced expectations of their “lesser” capacity. Consequently, those children progressed more slowly and obtained lower grades. The limiting beliefs from these “Who Saida” about that group’s abilities trapped those students and effectively hampered their progress. At that age, children often accept opinions from others as the “truth.”

If this story is any guide, leaders can leverage this process for the good of an organization and its employees, creatively deploying the power of liberating beliefs to help improve performance and employee engagement. A key Leadership responsibility is Connecting the Dots for those responsible for implementation. **Good leaders find a way to help their people envision a way that they can successfully perform a task, even when they are in unfamiliar surroundings.**

FedEx: A Poor Idea?

Maintaining one’s liberating beliefs in the face of a “Who Saida” limiting beliefs is equally important. Fred Smith is the CEO of FedEx, a company that disrupted the entire parcel delivery industry. While he was a student at Yale, he wrote a term paper that outlined what such an organization could become. **The professor, apparently unimpressed with the concept, gave the paper a poor mark.** He could easily have sanctioned that professor’s limiting belief.



Undaunted, Smith later implemented his vision that he created in college. After serving in the Marines in Vietnam, he founded the company that has become a nearly \$70 billion global transportation, business services, technology, and logistics company, serving more than 220 countries and territories.

Fuhgeddaboutit!

I was able to witness this effect on a more personal stage. Many years ago, I worked as a ski instructor at the Copper Mountain Resort in Colorado. One winter, we’d been blessed with early snow, and the resort had opened in advance of the Thanksgiving holiday. Late that Wednesday afternoon, I had just finished a private lesson and was enjoying the sun on the beginner hill when I heard a noise that sounded a little bit like a crow cawing. I looked around and saw very few people on the hill. Again, I heard an “aaaakk” sound. This time, I saw a tiny person at the very top of the lift, motionless. When I asked her what she was doing, she told me she was warning people to stay away from her! It seemed odd, but she was rigidly braced, poles jammed in place in the snow. Naturally, I asked her if she needed any help and we managed to get her to the bottom in one piece.

Since this area on the hill was reserved for lessons, I asked her where her instructor was. Crestfallen, she replied, “She left me.” When I asked why, she said, **“She told me I should forget it, I could never learn how to ski.”** I was astonished. Here was someone who had paid good money to a very qualified instructor in order to be able to pursue a goal that she wanted and risked being thwarted by her guide’s expression of a highly limiting belief.



We agreed to meet first thing the next day. As we got our gear on, she shared with me that she had come with her son and his family, who live in Dallas, to spend the Thanksgiving holiday. It turned out that she was 84 years old, recently widowed, and wanted to be able to spend time with her grandchildren on the mountain. She was deeply disappointed to have traveled all the way from her home in Cincinnati, on to Texas, and then to Colorado, only to be told to give it up.

As we talked further, I learned that she had studied at the Sorbonne in 1933 and had taken classical dance classes there. She was tiny, 5’4”, and wore a size 4 boy’s hiking boot, but she was game.

Plié - Relevé

The solution was simple. What she needed was to connect the dots from her days as a dancer to what she needed to do as a skier. **Instead of giving her the doctrinaire advice for ski technique, all it took was to tell her to execute a simple “plié,” the classic ballet move in which the dancer bends her ankles and knees in a graceful dip.**

That single movement gave her control over her feet and thus her skis. After that, she found her rhythm, sliding safely and gracefully (albeit slowly) down the gentle slope of the bunny hill. She understood she was never going to become Lindsey Vonn (the world’s winningest ski racer). All she wanted was to share time with her family, who were crazy about skiing. She just needed someone to help her “see” her way to the goal.

One leader said, “You can’t.” Another said, “When you can see it, you can do it.” A leader’s ability to create a picture connecting belief to

their people’s action frees them to tap into their capacity to perform. For the most part, people want to contribute and do well at their work. The only thing this delightful lady needed to attain her goal was to see how her competencies related to her current challenge. As with many types of leadership exchanges, I did relatively little but affirm her belief in her capacity. Through her own creative genius, she discovered the “how.”

That Saturday, with the breathtaking view of the Rockies as a backdrop, a diminutive 84-year-old widow shared a bucket list family lunch at a mid-mountain restaurant and made her way happily back down because someone helped her see her potential realized. As a leader, what mountains will you move by simply leveraging liberating beliefs in your people? Organizations who invest in this kind of enhanced value creation in their people tap into the tremendous potential that young and old alike thrive on realizing.

