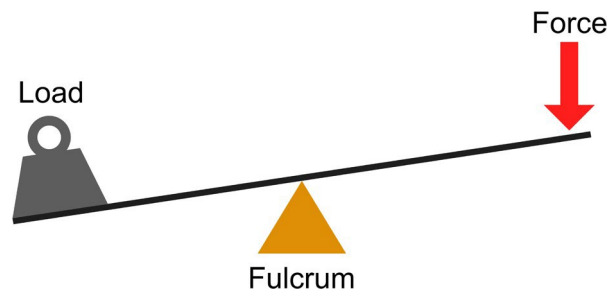


## Moving Beyond Limiting Beliefs

In Health and Wellness Coaching, beliefs can be a powerful force in promoting or inhibiting *'forwarding the action'*, self-efficacy and client growth.

A belief becomes a habit of thought that creates a pattern of behavior. An empowering belief - like: "I am confident in" or "I am competent" or "I can do this" facilitates forward movement.

The disempowering belief acts like the load (resistance) on one side a fulcrum which counteracts any effort (force) to move forward – and keeps clients stuck!



### Ways in Which Disempowering Beliefs Can Impact Clients in the Context of Health and Wellness Coaching

#### A disempowering belief system can impact seeking and receiving medical treatment

- **A belief that prevented early diagnostic detection and medical intervention**

A powerful example of how a belief system held by an entire community actually prevented individuals from receiving life-saving early diagnosis and treatment of breast cancer. Several years ago, I was volunteering for a nonprofit organization in New York City called: *'You Can Thrive'*. It was founded by a young woman who had breast cancer in her thirties, and had found it a frightening, lonely and confusing experience. It was her desire to offer an alternative to other women including a supportive community, advocacy, nutritional counseling, movement classes, and a myriad of supportive body centered modalities such as chair massage, reflexology, acupuncture, and Reiki. Because all of these services were provided free of charge, the organization has depended on individual contributions and grants. It has received significant funding from an organization that was targeting women in an ethnic community, where there was a belief system that once you went to a hospital, you did not come out. The result was that women in this community with breast cancer were being diagnosed in late stage III and stage IV.

The intention was to reach out to this community to provide education and support, and to promote preventive care so that breast cancer could be diagnosed and treated earlier and with more positive outcomes.

- **A belief that impedes self-advocacy on the comeback trail (the 3R's – recovery, rehab and reclaiming one's life)**

Patients who believe that *the doctor is always right*, and they do not have the right to question an approach or a decision, request clarification or ask for something they believe will promote their own forward movement (i.e., when the physician doesn't prescribe rehab following a coronary event or joint surgery). This belief can prevent an individual from achieving their new 100% and settling for 80%, 50%, or less.

### **Disempowering beliefs can interfere with self-care, self-permission to be proactive about one's own health and wellness and follow-through with goals and action steps**

- The individual who puts everyone else ahead of themselves because they do not believe that they deserve to prioritize their own needs and desires.
- The individual who believes putting their own health and wellness needs first is selfish and therefore bad.
- The individual who finds it hard to ask for help and believes that putting everyone else first, will elicit a reciprocal response from others, that they cannot give themselves. So often this backfires and results in increased self-depreciation and resentment.

### **Disempowering beliefs can interfere with movement along the 'Readiness for Change' spectrum**

According to Prochaska, one of the main identifying characteristics of individuals in the Pre—Contemplation stage of change is a belief that they cannot change. Such an individual may have tried to change a behavior (i.e., smoking cessation) multiple times, and because they resume smoking after each attempt, they now perceive themselves as a failure and unable to change. They may equally be feeling demoralized and disappointed in themselves.

### **Disempowering beliefs can keep people stuck in a "fixed mindset" and prevent them from embracing a "growth mindset".**

When confronted with the need to do something that one believes one is not capable of doing creates a significant dilemma. The individual attempts to arrive at the outcome from a "fixed mindset." According to the research of Carol Dweck and colleagues, a fixed mindset diminishes motivation, leads to fixed mindset tendencies and strategies. The individual seeks the easiest and safest way out, avoids personal exploration and 'trial and learn' strategies. Outcomes are minimal without any real achievement of goals, increased self-efficacy or effective strategies to continue on their own.

## **Disempowering beliefs can interfere with achieving one's well life vision**

Such beliefs can hold people back from playing big and full out in their life. Rather they play small, limiting oneself and avoiding risks. It can people from fully embracing their well life vision - how they would truly like to be living their lives. Indeed, it may even inhibit a willingness to recognize and acknowledge their true well life vision.



EXAMPLE: “Powerful questions were used a lot in helping her self-reflect especially on her negative, shaming self-talk that happened a lot. I would ask her how shame helps her, and that question showed her how she used shame and feeling guilty as an excuse scapegoat to get out of doing the things that she needed to for herself like exercising and getting good sleep. She realized she had a limiting belief connected to her shame and guilt self-talk, which was that if you weren’t struggling and feeling ashamed, you were living an easy life and not trying hard enough to be a better person. For her, doing those ‘good’ things for herself to reach her well life vision was not ok because then she couldn’t prove that she was suffering. Her limiting belief was that only those that are suffering could be worthy of love, success, etc. – a thought that she traced back to her upbringing in the Pentecostal church.”

## **Using Body Centered Coaching to Address & Release Disempowering Beliefs**

When there is a disempowering belief that keeps the client stuck, this process promotes both awareness and possibility thinking. It facilitates a shift in perspective by first addressing the belief (naming it and identifying its impact on the client and their life), and then identifying the desired state. In this way the coach facilitates awareness of the discrepancy between the present and the desired states, and/or the distance between a personal goal and the status quo. When a client experiences resonance with what is truly wanted, an opening is created for the client to connect with their own positive core and for emotional engagement (inner motivation) that can lead to a powerful shift.

Identification of a structure that the client can use to release the disempowering belief and embrace a new empowering belief is a little like removing some or all of the stones on one side of the fulcrum that keeps it stuck. The client now has the tool/structure from their own creative design that they can use on their own. This promotes both self-efficacy and self-empowerment.

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