

How to Believe

WORKBOOK

By Kaihan Krippendorff

www.kaihan.net

After a flurry of thousands of emails, responses to my blog on passion, I reached a disheartening realization: passion is useless if you don't already believe.

You see, what we can achieve is limited by what we believe. Henry Ford knew this: "Whether you think you can or you think you can't, you are right."

So here I was passionately committed to become the world-class business guru, best-selling author, the speaker who fills stadiums and yet there was voice telling me, "You can't do it. Keep trying, trying is fun, but in the end you will fail."

You've probably heard that voice as well.

I'm making progress – my book sales are accelerating, my keynote audiences are growing, and I'm sharing the stage with people like Jack Welch and Robin Sharma – but in the back of my mind the voice pulls the reigns: "You can't do it."

Often that voice is deceptive. It sounds encouraging. It says, "Keep trying, keep pushing, at least you will be admired for having made an effort when you fail."

Great "outthinkers" seem to overcome this voice. Their belief matches their passion. Napoleon believed he was the greatest general of his time and so he was. Steve Jobs believed his people could achieve the impossible, so they did. Richard Branson believed he could win against British Airways, and so he won, even though every airline that tried over the prior three decades failed.

Belief is contagious. It wins supporters. It's self-fulfilling. As Harvard professor Rosebeth Moss Kanter shows in her book [Confidence](#), the belief you can win creates momentum which improves your chances of winning.

So what do you do when you don't believe?

Over the past four weeks, I've studied books and articles, interviewed entrepreneurs and experts, then assembled it all for you in a simple framework with which you can systematically attack whatever belief is holding you down. Give me 20 minutes. This works.

Fundamentals

1. **Beliefs aren't real.** They are mental maps, abstractions of reality, that help us predict a complex world by forming simple correlations. My son believes good batteries must be cold, for example, because I keep ours in the freezer. He just associates "cold" with "batteries that have energy." He also believes Santa Claus rides a sleigh and the Easter Bunny leaves candy eggs in our backyard. As a grown-up our beliefs seem more complicated, but they are no more real than the Easter Bunny. They are simply rules, correlations, to help us better predict and explain our worlds.

2. **Four anchors form our beliefs** (for more, read [Why We Believe What We Believe](#) by Andrew Newberg and Mark Robert Waldman):

- Evidence: Something happens (e.g., gifts appear one morning and my mom says they are from Santa Claus)
- Logic: We then check if the belief we formed about the evidence we witnessed makes sense. We call this logic, but logic is simply checking if the belief is consistent with other beliefs we hold (e.g., my son's logic might be: gifts can't just appear out of nowhere, my mom and dad were asleep, so it must have been Santa).
- Emotion: When we experience strong emotion at the time a belief is formed, that belief embeds itself indelibly. The emotion can be positive (love, pleasure, comfort) or negative (pain, shame, fear). The stronger the emotion, the more likely we are to adopt the belief (e.g., a 3-year-old's joy at getting a new choo choo train is strong enough that he will remember the first gift Santa gave him and will start anticipating Santa).
- Social consensus: We believe more deeply if others also believe. We are, after all, social creatures. Beyond the ingrained tendency to follow our clan, communities that share values can collaborate more efficiently, so evolution rewards groups that share beliefs (e.g., my son may know that Maria and Nico and Sofia all say Santa brought them gifts too, so this further strengthens his conviction that Santa exists).

3. We reject what doesn't fit. Once a belief is formed, we explain away any inconsistent evidence. In other words, the need to have consistency between our beliefs persists after a belief is formed. We value consistency over truth and prefer to reject new beliefs and evidence than go through the uncertainty of considering an existing belief is false. We will go through surprisingly great lengths to hold on to our beliefs.

I saw a documentary in which a young child said to his friends, "Santa came to my house and ate a little bit of a cookie, then he went to Jack's house and ate a little bit and drank some milk, then to Maria's and ate some and then ... So if he went to ALL of our houses in one night, it must mean – " You are sure he is about to realize Santa can't be real, but instead he animates excitedly, "Santa must have been really hungry!"

4. Humans need consistency between beliefs, actions, and words. Robert Cialdini calls this "The Rule of Consistency" ([Influence: The Psychology of Persuasion](#)). This is how beliefs hold us down or lift us up. The impact you have on the world is determined by what you do and say. These are the two primary channels through which you interact with and influence our world.

We can act or speak in a way inconsistent with our beliefs, but only for a short time. We are acting, pretending. Eventually our beliefs will win out. So if you believe you can't do something, you may be able to fake it for a while, acting and speaking as if you really can, but you will eventually fall back into acting and speaking like someone who can't achieve it, and, as a result, you will achieve the results of someone who can't ... you will fail.

Interestingly, the relationship also works in reverse: if you persist with actions or words that are inconsistent with your beliefs, your beliefs will eventually change. This is the principle that leads to brainwashing. A study of American prisoners of war who had been brainwashed into believing the

enemy's point of view showed that their abandoning of the beliefs they originally fought for came about because their captors would force them to read texts that espoused opposing beliefs (e.g., communism instead of capitalism). Reading words that were inconsistent with their beliefs day after day for months created a schism in their psyches that had to be reconciled. Their beliefs had to change. It was as if they thought, "If I am saying these things, I must believe them." We will apply this principle as a tool to lock in a new belief later.

The model

Over a 12-hour flight home from Paraguay, I assembled these principles into a model we can use to deconstruct and replace any belief that holds us down. It is simpler than it looks. Stick with me.

Imagine a hot air balloon being held down by four anchors. The balloon represents the belief holding you down and actions and words this belief influences.

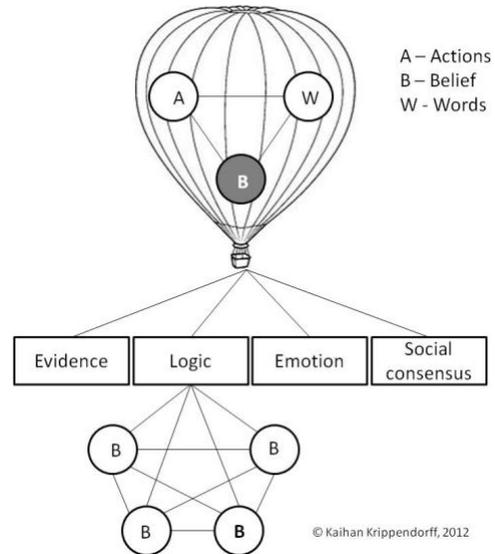
The four anchors represent evidence, logic, emotion, and social consensus.

To release the balloon you must replace the offending belief. Do this in five steps:

Step 1: Identify the belief

Find a belief that is holding you down. Tip: write down beliefs until you find one that hurts. In my case, *"You don't really have what it takes to be world-class author/speaker/thinker."*

What is your goal/vision/dream?



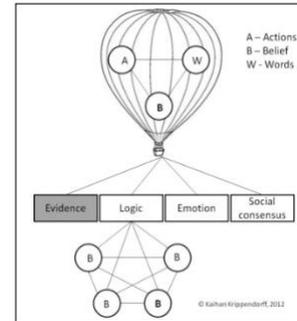
What belief do you think you hold that is inconsistent with your achieving that goal/vision/dream?

<i>What belief do you think you may hold?</i>	<i>Does writing this down hurt/ evoke a strong reaction in you?</i>	<i>If yes, is this the core belief holding you back?</i>	<i>If not, repeat exercise on the next line</i>

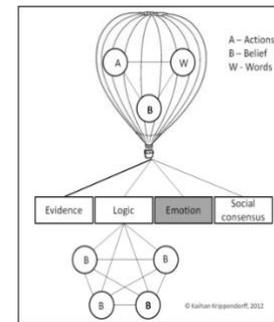
Step 2: **Identify the anchors**

- What evidence/events anchor the belief? Make a list of at least three pieces of evidence that support your constraining belief (e.g., *my books aren't on the NYT bestseller list*).

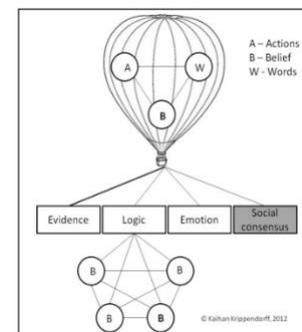
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- What emotions anchor your belief? Your belief is probably allowing you to feel some kind of positive emotion and/or enabling you to avoid some kind of negative emotion. What are these emotions (e.g., *I feel comfort because in not really trying, I know I can't fail*)?

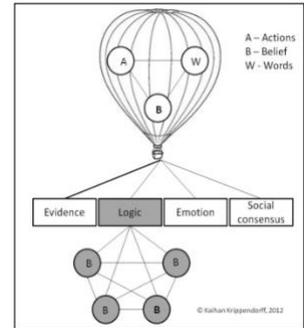


- Who around you reinforces this belief (social consensus)? There is an Indian fable about a lion who grows up on a sheep farm. Because all he sees every day are sheep, he grows up thinking he is a sheep. He eats grass and “baaas” all day. Maybe you are surrounded by sheep who are, intentionally or not, reinforcing your restraining belief. Who are those people (e.g., *well intentioned people who congratulate me on already having achieved the dream; they unintentionally are saying that I have achieved enough so should not reach for more*)?



- What logic locks in this belief; what “dependent beliefs” fit? Remember, for beliefs to take hold they must be consistent with other beliefs you hold. This creates a web of interdependent beliefs. List out the key beliefs you hold that fit, that support, that lock in your restraining belief (e.g., *wanting to fill a stadium is self-centered, thinking I can offer what people don’t already know is conceited*).

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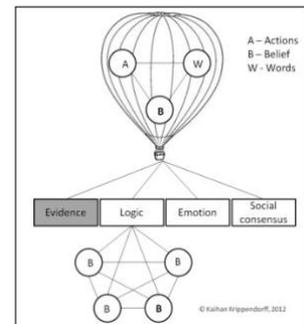
Step 3: Pick a new belief

What alternative belief would be consistent with someone who really achieves your dream? Remember, beliefs are not real; they are simplifications, abstractions, representational maps of reality. So if you could create any belief and live as if it were 100% real, what belief would have you achieve your vision?

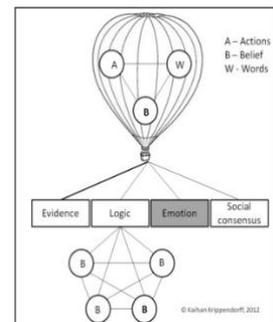
Come up with one belief. If that does not scare and energize you and seem to be a departure from your current belief system, come up with another. If that does not scare and energize you, come up with another. Repeat until you have your true new belief (e.g., *I am destined to a best-selling business thinker and speaker*).

Step 4: Release the anchors

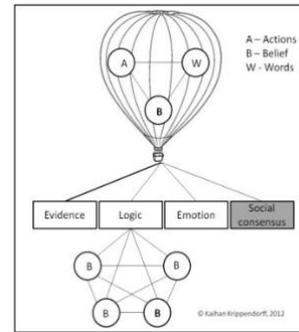
- Evidence: What alternative evidence supports this new belief? Look for other things that are true that are consistent with this new belief (e.g., *people pay me lots of money to speak, I'm sharing the stage with some of the biggest business gurus*).



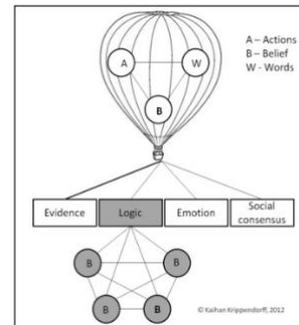
- Emotions: What would it feel like to really live this new belief and fulfill your dream? Envision fully living this belief. What would your life look like? What emotions would you experience (e.g., *passion, purpose, having made an impact*)?



- Social consensus: Who can you surround yourself with to support the new belief? Remember the lion who grew up with sheep ... what other lions would you like to surround yourself with that would have you fully live your new belief? Also ask, who will you limit your time with because they keep you from your belief? This may not be easy to do, but you will find a polite way to reconstruct the people in your environments to create a community that calls you to live and believe what you desire (e.g., *other business gurus and authors*).



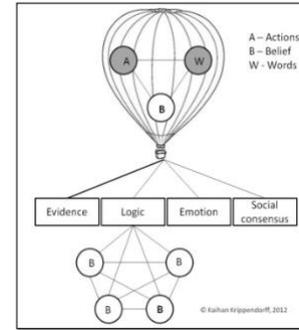
- Beliefs: How can you replace the “dependent beliefs” identified above? Here you want to dig deeper into each interconnected belief and look at the evidence, emotion, and social consensus that roots this belief into your belief structure and look for how you can replace each. I don’t suggest digging into the logic of each belief (the related beliefs) because, for practical reasons, this can lead to an excessively long, and potentially recursive, process (e.g., *this is not conceited because it’s about serving others; the best business gurus do it to serve others, not for their ego*).



Belief	Anchor	How can you replace this?
	Evidence	
	Emotion	
	Social consensus	
	Evidence	
	Emotion	
	Social consensus	
	Evidence	
	Emotion	
	Social consensus	
	Evidence	
	Emotion	
	Social consensus	

Step 5: **Set your course**

Write down five specific things you will do (action) and say (words) that force you to live your new belief. In addition to defining a plan of action here, you are also giving your new belief extra support by starting to align your actions and words with your new belief. Remember the brainwashed soldiers. They adopted words and behaviors that were inconsistent with their old beliefs, and this shifted their beliefs to new beliefs. You are doing the same. By adopting a set of behaviors and using language that is inconsistent with your old belief, you make it impossible for your old belief to persist and give space for your new belief to grow.



- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

Completing this process took me 20 minutes and has put me fully in the game, committed and knowing I can win. Would that be worth your time?