

# Pushing Your Limits

If you have ever found yourself holding back on something you really wanted to do, you are familiar with self-limitation. Limitations can serve us in some ways, like reminding us that we don't have the ability to fly off a roof and land safely on our feet; and they can confine us in other ways, by creating doubt and fear about our ability to create more fulfilling circumstances.

Luckily, most of our self-limitations are easily identified as helpful or harmful; we need only spend some time examining them and decide which we want to keep and which we want to discard.

Take a moment to think about your own perceived limitations. What do you believe you can't do yet? What do you believe you'll NEVER be able to do? Why do you think so? If these concepts seem vague and you're not sure what your own perceived limitations are, take some time to write them down. Try phrases like this: "I can't \_\_\_\_\_ because \_\_\_\_\_." Fill in the blanks, and don't hold anything back. Even if one of your ideas seems ridiculous and you logically know it isn't true, yet your gut confirms it's a strong belief you hold, write it down anyway.

Once you've identified as many of your limiting beliefs as you can; take a closer look at them. Are any of them hopelessly impossible, or do they just feel that way? Have other people been able to accomplish something that you want to accomplish? Have you accomplished anything in the past that was difficult? How did you overcome the obstacles you faced? Could you apply the same process to any goal?

There are no right or wrong answers here, only what you honestly think and feel. Now set your list aside (we'll be looking at it again later in this report) - and let's delve into beliefs a bit deeper.

## Belief: The Foundation of Your Life

Your beliefs are the foundation upon which your entire life rests. This foundation was formed by your childhood conditioning, the experiences you've had during the course of your life, and the conclusions you've drawn as a result of them. Every action (or non-action) you've taken during your lifetime has been encouraged or discouraged by these beliefs. Consequently, most of the situations in your life are a result of your actions (or inactions).

In order to begin pushing your limits and increasing your potential, you need to examine the beliefs you have about your limitations. You've started the process by making a list of your most obvious perceived limitations, but in order to effectively and permanently change them, you'll need to challenge them and actively work on expanding your concept of what is possible.

Whether you realize it or not, you've got a certain internal "set point" where you think your capabilities stop in any given arena. These set points can vary according to the intensity of your beliefs and they may be different for different activities. For example, you might know that you are good at one activity but feel you stink at another.

It can be helpful to examine the reasons WHY you feel this way, because most often our limiting beliefs hold no substance whatsoever. Maybe your older brother told you that you were too weak to be great at sports, so you never bothered to find out. Or your friend laughed at your artwork and you decided it was a stupid hobby anyway.

It's bad enough when other people set limitations for us, but the problem is compounded when we begin doing it ourselves.

- No longer do we need others to tell us we stink at something; we come to the realization all by ourselves.
- No longer do we need someone to tell us we're a loser; one failure is enough to convince us.
- No longer do we need others to deflate our confidence; we can do it more effectively ourselves.

What a shame this is! Do you see the pattern of destruction and the dimmed potential that results from it? For most of us, it takes only ONE negative experience to start an avalanche of massive proportions. Of course, it doesn't usually happen quickly but is rather the result of years of gradually decreasing belief in ourselves.

Before we go any further, it's important to understand that your limiting beliefs were FORMED, sometimes by others in your life and sometimes by you. Either way, they can be unformed, smashed, rolled into a ball and formed into something else entirely – just like a lump of clay. Your beliefs are malleable and flexible! They may feel like “facts” but they are simply thoughts that have gained strength and solidity because of sheer repetition on your part.

When you really start to get this, it becomes very exciting! Suddenly a whole new world opens up to you, a world in which anything is possible.

**Limitations: The Ceiling on Your Potential**

Think of your limitations as a ceiling that hovers at a certain height over your head. The ceiling height is different for each of us, but all of our ceilings have one thing in common: they determine our potential.

If our ceiling is built up high, we have great potential and can achieve much in our lives. If our ceiling is built down close to our heads, we will only achieve the bare minimum for comfortable survival (or even less).

Who is the craftsperson of your ceiling? Why, you are of course! (I know you knew that already.) You set the height of your ceiling based upon the things others said to you, and the conclusions you drew about your capabilities.

Just like your other beliefs, the height of your ceiling is very flexible and is constantly on the move. When you first set a goal you might be fired up and motivated to make it happen. At that point, your ceiling is soaring far above your head. As you begin to stumble on obstacles and lose your initial motivation, your ceiling begins to drop steadily. When you give up because it seems too hard, your ceiling practically rests against the top of your head.

Is motivation the only way to raise your ceiling? No, not at all! Another great technique involves honestly assessing your true capabilities, and beginning to work on expanding them. If you're pretty good at something, work on becoming great at it. If you think you're terrible at something, keep doing it until you get better.

This is an ongoing process of honest assessment, small but consistent effort, and evaluation of progress. It's not rocket science, but it does require an attitude of determination and patience.

However, the good news is that this process of expansion begins to take on a life of its own the longer you work at it. Before long you'll be scoffing at limiting thoughts and attempting things you never would have dared consider before.

Here are some additional ideas for raising your ceiling of potential:

- Question your past “failures.” Did you REALLY fail, or did you just give up too soon? Explore the lessons you've received from each “failure” and see if you can use the insights to form a better plan.
- Be willing to pick up an old dream or hobby and start working on it again. Did someone convince you that your dream was stupid and not worth the effort? Did you really agree with them, or did you simply choose to believe without question? Re-examine your dreams and aspirations. If any of them still stir your soul, follow where they might lead.
- Set new goals and begin to expand your concept of what you're really capable of. Consistently strive to raise your ceiling by thinking and dreaming BIGGER. When you reach the place where you think you need to stop, take one more step. Just one; and that one step will often change everything, either internally or externally.
- Challenge the limitations that others have tried to place on you. Write out your reasons for knowing they were wrong and enter into a dialogue with them about it (even if the other person isn't there, you can do this process on your own). Try phrases like these: “You have no idea what I'm capable of because \_\_\_\_\_.” Or, “I know you're wrong about this because \_\_\_\_\_.” You won't be convincing others of anything, only yourself – which is the only person who counts in this scenario!

Again, this is a process, so don't lose heart if you don't see much progress right away. Keep questioning your limiting beliefs and keep expanding your perception of your potential. Every bit of effort you can put toward this activity will pay off handsomely later.

## Facing Your Fears

As you begin challenging your beliefs and expanding your potential, you may have to face some fears along the way. This seems scary because most of us are used to cowering in the face of fear. We tend to avoid situations that make us feel uncomfortable, and I don't know of any situations more uncomfortable than fearful ones!

However, your fears are truly nothing to fear. Just like the saying goes, "There is nothing to fear but fear itself." (Franklin D. Roosevelt)

Your fears are a direct result of your beliefs. Or, more specifically, your fears are the result of CHALLENGING your beliefs.

Fear is nothing more than a **conditioned response** to a **perceived danger**. If we believe that something is dangerous or harmful to us, we naturally will fear it. Trying to force ourselves through the fear without changing our perception of it is often unnecessarily painful, though effective. There is nothing wrong with forcing yourself to face your fears if you desire to overcome them badly enough. People do this successfully every day.

But if you're a sensitive soul who desires a gentler approach, here are some good ones for you:

- First, convince yourself that there is no danger. It is our belief that something will go horribly wrong if we move forward that keeps us locked in terror. One simple way to overcome this paralysis is by asking yourself, “What is the worst thing that could happen?” And, “Could I handle it if the worst did happen?” Most often, your answer will be affirmative.
  
- Plan ahead so you know what to do if the worst happens. If your fear is public speaking but you really want to (or have to) give a speech, ask yourself what the worst possible occurrence might be if you go ahead. You might answer, “stage fright,” or “flubbing my words.” Consider how you would handle those situations. Could you laugh them off and turn them into a joke for the audience? Could you visualize the audience in their underwear? You get the idea – turn your worst case scenario into a “so what?” and your perspective will change.
  
- Visualize a different outcome. Whatever your feared outcome is, come up with an inner “script” that is in direction opposition to it and replay it over and over in your mind until you believe it. Using the public speaking example from above, visualize yourself feeling pumped up, dynamic and confident as you step onto the stage. See the audience being interested in what you have to say, listening closely, laughing at the appropriate moments, and your words flowing smoothly and effortlessly. Imagine the thunderous applause as you conclude your speech, and imagine the incredible sense of elation you’ll feel for conquering your fear.
  
- Shrink your fears and squash them like a bug. We often feel that our fears are so much larger than we are. It feels like they LOOM over us, draining our power and diminishing our determination. Change this perception by imagining your fears shrinking, shrinking, growing smaller

and less intense until they have the stature of a bug on the ground before you. Tell the fear that you're grateful for its attempt to protect you, but you don't need protecting. Then...step on it. Squash it into oblivion.

There are many more ways to challenge your fears, but the main point is to avoid letting them control your life. Fear can be so pervasive that it SEEMS to be out of our control, but remember that a fear is nothing more than a thought. Whether you examine it closely, question it, challenge it, work calmly through it or push forcefully through it doesn't matter. As long as you remember that YOU are the one in control, not your fears.

Like most of the other techniques in this report, fear-squashing takes some practice before you get truly comfortable with it. Take your time and keep at it, and before long you'll be one of those people that laughs in the face of fear and thrills to whatever challenge rises up before them.

Finally, learn to use your fears as a valuable tool for awareness. We've covered the negative side of fear, but one benefit it does have is that it acts as a beacon to reveal your limiting beliefs! Any fear (besides genuine dangers, of course) can tell you something about yourself. Where fear lives, so do limiting beliefs. Learn to use this knowledge to your advantage. Follow your fears directly to the roots of your limiting beliefs, and yank them right out.

## Taking Doubt Out of the Equation

Doubt is another destructive force in your life, and is often closely related to fear. In fact, fear can cause doubt, and doubt can cause fear. They can act as aggravators for each other, or co-exist together and make your life hell.

Worse, doubt is the Dream Destroyer. It's the Anti-Hope. It causes you to abandon your dreams before you even know for sure if they're possible or not. You simply decide they are NOT possible and drop them. Doubt can cause you to hang back when you'd rather be moving forward, and it can make you question your inner knowing.

At their core, doubts are simply another form of limiting beliefs. If you doubt your ability to do something, you won't do it. You won't even attempt it. If you doubt the availability of opportunities, you will resign yourself to what you already have. If you doubt the goodness of other people, you will resist any help offered to you.

In order to push your limits, you need to take doubt right out of the equation. You do this by embracing the opposite of doubt: BELIEF. It's not as difficult as it sounds.

What you have to do is make the DECISION to BELIEVE instead of DOUBT. It really is that simple! This is a decision you will need to make moment-to-moment, not just once. Every time you feel doubt creeping in, replace it with fervent belief.

- "I doubt I can do this effectively." becomes, "I KNOW I can do this effectively."
- "I doubt it will turn out right." becomes, "I'm going to make SURE this turns out right."
- "I doubt I have what it takes to succeed." becomes, "I know I can develop any quality I need to succeed."

At first, you may feel as if you're lying to yourself. You may not really believe the words you're saying, but if you persist in choosing to believe them you **will** eventually. But it has to begin with a choice.

Doubt can be sneaky, and it often masquerades as disinterest, bitterness, distrust, or resistance. Sometimes you have to take on the role of detective to figure out what's really going on inside of you. With a little scrutiny and a lot of brutal honesty, you'll see things more clearly. If you struggle to find a connection, try writing the answers to these questions:

- "I am disinterested in \_\_\_\_\_ because I doubt that \_\_\_\_\_."
- "I feel bitter about \_\_\_\_\_ because I doubt that \_\_\_\_\_."
- "I'm distrustful of \_\_\_\_\_ because I doubt that \_\_\_\_\_."
- "I'm resistant to \_\_\_\_\_ because I doubt that \_\_\_\_\_."

If fervent belief won't eliminate your doubts, you can also dissect them and challenge the underlying components, just like you did with your fears. You will likely discover that your doubts are based on disappointing past experiences or hurtful things said by others in your life, and you DO have the option to disregard them completely. Dissection of any doubt (or fear) is a valuable tool because the individual components that make up the sum are often less frightening than the sum itself.

- Dissecting your doubts is as simple as completing this statement to the best of your ability: "I am doubtful about \_\_\_\_\_ because \_\_\_\_\_."

Once the root causes are known, you can deal with them one at a time by altering erroneous beliefs, facing fears and expanding limiting beliefs.

If all else fails and you can't eliminate or dissect your doubt, the only thing left to do is IGNORE IT. Take action anyway, even if it seems like a futile undertaking. Make a promise to yourself that you're going to give it your absolute best, no matter what. Even if it seems to be a waste of time, even if there seems to be no way to create a favorable outcome, and even if the going gets rough - you will still try. It takes courage and determination to do this; don't fool yourself into thinking otherwise. But more often than not, you'll be pleasantly surprised by the results.

## Slow and Steady Gets It Done

By now you are probably beginning to see that pushing your limits is a simple process of examining your repetitive thoughts and beliefs, challenging your perceptions and pushing through any perceived limitations. Remember, limitations are nothing without the power you give them. If you refuse to infuse them with power they are nothing but a random, harmless thought. They may seem overwhelming at first, but once you take them apart and look at them under a microscope you see how inconsequential they really are in the grand scheme of things.

Still, until you have reached a certain point in the process you would be well-advised to take it slow. Just as pushing too hard physically can result in injury, pushing too hard mentally or emotionally can result in disappointment and frustration.

One step at a time will get you where you want to go, and probably result in a more pleasant journey too. Your progress will begin to accumulate on its own soon enough, but in the meantime take it easy!

Try attacking one thing each day, even if it's something small. Face one fear, dissect one doubt, question one belief – and repeat the next day. As you begin feeling stronger you can take on more than one at a time, but start small.

Then, don't hesitate after each step you take. Don't wait to see if you get any "results" from it – just keep moving slowly and steadily. You'll be astounded at how quickly the process begins to snowball and return real results. But if you hang around waiting for them, they might be delayed. Remember, "A watched pot never boils."

## Going the Extra Mile

As your inner strength increases and you begin to feel more in control of your actions, begin upping the intensity of your efforts too. The stronger and more powerful you feel, the more you'll be able to handle. (Again, this is only after you begin to notice some real momentum from your smaller initial efforts.)

The funny thing about progress is that we are often much closer to the finish line than we think. It's our own thoughts, fears, doubts, beliefs and expectations that make the destination seem so small and far away. If we buy into this illusion, we'll give up on the home stretch – not realizing that the finish line is just over the next rise!

Make a promise to yourself right now that you will go the extra mile. Vow to go the extra mile **especially** if you start to lose hope. One of my all-time favorite quotes holds a great deal of wisdom about continuing despite lack of progress or loss of hope:

- "When you get in a tight place and everything goes against you, till it seems as though you could not hold on a minute longer, never give up

then, for that is just the place and time that the tide will turn.” - Harriet Beecher Stowe

It's amazing how often that sentiment ends up being true. Just when we're ready to give up is when we need to push even harder because the tide is beginning to turn! Remember that as you work on pushing your limits. Copy that quote down and hang it where you will see it each day. Let it inspire you and encourage you when you need it the most.

What else can you do if you start feeling despondent?

- Break it down. Remember, feelings of hopelessness, frustration or despondency are frequently caused by trying to take on too much too soon. If you break down larger goals into smaller ones and focus on taking small, attainable actions more frequently, you will create a nice steady momentum.
- Take a break. If you start feeling overwhelmed, it's time to focus on something else! Taking a break is NOT the same thing as quitting. Sometimes you just need to step away from the intensity of change. Take a few hours to do something you enjoy. Call a friend and invite him or her to lunch. Knock off for the day and go to bed early. Even a short break is enough to recharge your batteries, refresh your perspective and renew your commitment.
- Keep affirming that you're almost there. Remember that your perspective can often work against you, fooling you into believing that you're never going to reach your destination. Don't let an illusion trick you. Create your own **beneficial illusion**. Keep imagining the goal waiting just around the next corner. Keep telling yourself, "I'm almost there, just a few more steps. I can take a few more steps." Tell yourself that often

enough and you'll begin to believe it – and create a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Going the extra mile is more of a symbolic sentiment than a physical one. It's about giving your absolute best effort and not investing in excuses. It's about trusting yourself to know when it's time to step back or push forward. More than anything, it's about developing the insight and determination to make each of your actions focused and life-altering in very positive ways. If you can do that, you will be able to melt any self-limitation with the white-hot heat of purpose.

## Keep Building on the Possibilities

As you begin to make progress on pushing your limits, you've got to keep up the effort and continually build on what you've got. Let's summarize what we've covered so far so you can see the process clearly.

- First in line is the destruction process where you examine and destroy limiting beliefs. You begin to realize how much other people have influenced your beliefs, and how you often picked up where they left off.
- Next is the rebuilding process where you begin replacing your limiting beliefs with empowering ones. You begin to trust your inner knowing again, and honestly assess your capabilities.
- Then you begin challenging and conquering your fears and doubts. You begin dissecting and disarming these negative thoughts, effectively diminishing their power over you.

- Next, you begin to expand your concept of what is possible and proceed at a slow and steady pace. You take it a step at a time while keeping in mind that growth is a process.
- Finally, you commit to going the extra mile and continuing on past the point where you would have normally given up.

Then, the only thing to do is...rinse and repeat!

The more frequently you can complete these steps, the more natural and intuitive the process becomes. You'll find yourself questioning and confronting every stray craving, fear, uncertainty, doubt, lazy impulse and more. You'll stop accepting excuses as facts and start demanding more from yourself. You'll start thrilling to the challenge of adversity and you'll learn to love the feeling of accomplishment as you take just one more step along the path of self development.

You'll probably even develop a greater sense of self-discipline and patience the further you get into this process because you'll gain the insight that anything worth doing is worth doing well and completely – rather than rushing through it. You'll learn to value every moment of the journey, not just the destination.

Eventually you'll reach a point where pushing your limits is largely an automatic reflex. You'll laugh derisively at limiting thoughts and flatten obstacles with one mighty fist. (Okay, maybe that's a bit of an exaggeration but it sounds cool, doesn't it?)

What all this ultimately means is that you'll **stop letting yourself be derailed from what you really want!** You'll have packed your bags and moved to the Land of Empowerment, the most freeing place to live in the world. It really is up to you where you choose to spend most of your time; so choose wisely.

Additionally, never stop developing your self-awareness. It really is the key to any self-improvement. When you have the insight and courage to be honest with yourself, you'll never be able to deceive yourself, trick yourself or betray yourself.

Self-deception is a poison that will kill any attempt you make to improve your life. Don't let it destroy your progress! Self-deception has clear warning signs, so keep on the lookout for these:

- If you place the blame for things going wrong everywhere but on yourself, you are deceiving yourself. Sure, sometimes things just happen through no fault of your own. But if you notice a lot of anger and blaming coming from within you and directed out to others, it's time to re-evaluate your part in the problems.
- If you start justifying unproductive behavior, self-deception has reared its ugly head. Excuses like these will be the death of your progress: "I'm too tired." "It's too hard." "Everyone else has better luck than I do." "I can still be successful even though I don't work consistently on my goals." You already know WHAT you need to do to achieve any goal you set for yourself, you just have to be diligent at DOING it; no excuses.
- If you start double-guessing your intuition, you may be deceiving yourself – or trying to sabotage your efforts. Sometimes we'll receive an intuitive hunch about something and "know" it's true, but logically we can't figure out why so we doubt it. If you've ever done this, you probably remember the sting of regret as you kicked yourself for not trusting your intuition like you should have. Get to know your intuition and exercise it frequently; then you'll be able to know for sure when you should trust it.

- If you start scattering your energy in too many directions instead of sticking to your original plan, you may be deceiving yourself by an endless search for the “next big thing” or the “easiest thing.” There is no next big thing or easiest thing – only the “thing” you choose for your own life. Tackle one thing at a time and stay focused. Your results will speak for themselves.

In general, an awareness of possible self-deception is often enough to stop or reverse it, but sometimes you'll need to take firm action. Again, trust your instincts and take charge when necessary.

Remember at the beginning of this report I told you to set aside that list of things you know you'll “never” be able to do? Take another look at it right now and reconsider the items on it.

Do you still feel the same about them? Or have you begun to realize that you are capable of more than you thought? Don't worry if you're still a bit doubtful; even a tiny increase in hope and belief is a good thing.

Hang onto your list and keep reviewing it periodically. Do this especially once you begin to make measurable progress on pushing your limits, because you will likely feel a lot different about the concept of “never”. Maybe you'll decide you simply don't WANT to achieve the items on that list, or that you want to eventually but not right now.

But with some of them...you just might surprise yourself.

To your success

Iain Legg

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