

Re-evaluating the Past

Now that we've finished the first module, you must know a lot about yourself! However, knowing yourself means having accurate beliefs about yourself. This may be hard to take in, but ***it's entirely possible that some of the things you believe about yourself aren't true at all!***

In your quest to be authentic, it's wise to examine your past and realize how it has affected your self-concept.

Everyone carries around a past with negative experiences. Some of these experiences were our own fault, while others were not. ***What's most relevant is how the experiences of the past are interpreted.*** It's challenging not to assign meaning to these experiences, but is the meaning that's been assigned accurate? More importantly, is it useful?

There are several signs that you're not using your past constructively:

1. **You continue making the same mistakes.** The past should be useful. From the past, we learn what works and what doesn't, provided the experience is interpreted correctly.
2. **You ignore your past.** Easy to do, but has negative consequences. Time doesn't heal all wounds. Healing heals all wounds. If there's something in your past you feel the desire to forget, it's hurting you in the present.
3. **You've adopted negative attitudes, beliefs, or behavioural characteristics from your parents.** Do you have the same short temper your father had? Do you lie excessively like your mother did? Do you mistrust rich people? Dislike anyone that's a democrat? Beliefs and attitudes that you didn't choose for yourself can be damaging to your self-image.
4. **A single negative experience is affecting your belief system today.** These experiences are most likely to occur in childhood, but aren't limited to your early years.

For example, perhaps you didn't do well in art class in 4th grade.

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You may have drawn the conclusion that:

- You have no artistic ability.
- Your art teacher didn't like you.
- Your art teacher wasn't a good teacher.
- You're not a good person because you're not good at creating art.
- You lack any creative ability.
- You're not good at learning new skills.
- You're not very smart.
- You're not a well-rounded person.

And it can snowball from there. Suppose one of your classmates made fun of your drawing in art class.

- I'm not a good enough.
- People don't like me.
- I shouldn't let anyone see something as personal as my artwork in the future.
- I will avoid exposing myself to any criticism in the future by being very reserved and cautious.

It's easy to see how negative and erroneous beliefs can develop from negative experiences. These beliefs can be extremely limiting and influence every part of your life.

“Love yourself first and everything else falls into line. You really have to love yourself to get anything done in this world.”

- Lucille Ball

Determine if your past is negatively affecting your self-concept:

1. **Make a list of your beliefs about yourself.** Focus on negative beliefs and any limitations. Include all areas of your life where you feel limited or dissatisfied. A few examples include:
 - I'm not good with money.
 - No one will hire me.
 - I'll never had a good relationship.
 - I can't lose weight.

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- I don't have any self-control.
2. **Question the belief.** Most of your beliefs aren't justified if you examine them closely. This is an important step.
 - Where did this belief come from? Is the source credible?
 - Is it based on sufficient evidence? One experience usually isn't enough. Touching a hot stove is sufficient experience to draw a valid conclusion. One failed attempt at dating or starting a business is not.
 - Is the belief reasonable?
 3. **Determine what the belief is costing you.** Inaccurate beliefs can cause a lot of damage. What are the beliefs you hold about yourself costing you?
 - A lack of confidence.
 - Lower income.
 - Fewer friends or a dissatisfying social life.
 - The belief that your options are limited to change your life.
 - Overall dissatisfaction with yourself or your life.
 4. **Choose an alternate belief.** Choose a belief that better suits reality and supports a healthy self-image. "No one likes me" can become "I am able to make friends easily".
 5. **Find evidence.** Staying with the previous example, even if you're friend-free at the moment, you can recall previous friendships. Remember a time in your life when your social life was more active. It's only logical to believe that if you can make a couple of friends, you can also create numerous friendships.
 - Convince yourself that your new belief is possible.

It's common to be limited by the past. ***We often fail to consider that many of our beliefs about ourselves are based on faulty evidence.*** At one point, you didn't walk or read well. Does that mean that you can't do either well today? The human brain feels the need to assign meaning to everything that happens.

Sometimes that meaning is incorrect. Sometimes there is no meaning at all.

Do you have erroneous beliefs that are negatively affecting your self-esteem? In the next phase of this self-concept makeover project, we'll work further on

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building your self-esteem.

Here's what you need to do today:

Please go through this important process of re-evaluating your past by completing the steps in your journal:

1. Make a list of your negative beliefs about yourself. Then, focus on one belief at a time.
2. Question your belief.
3. Determine what the belief is costing you.
4. Choose an alternate belief.
5. Find evidence of your new belief.