

ENGAGING LIMITING BELIEFS

by Caitlin Frost

"WE CAN'T SOLVE PROBLEMS BY USING THE SAME KIND OF THINKING WE USED WHEN WE CREATED THEM."

Albert Einstein

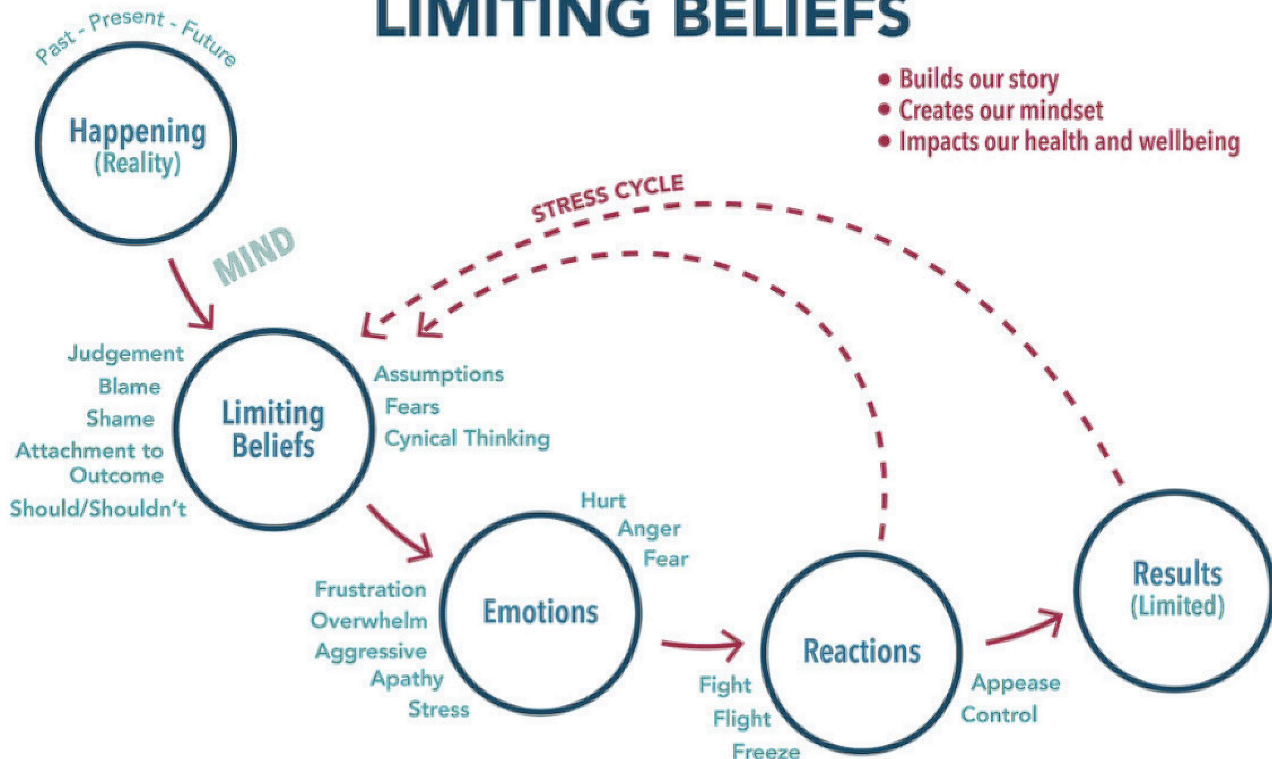
Our own beliefs - about other people, ourselves, and challenges we face have a powerful impact on our actions, emotions and even our capacity to think creatively and effectively. These may be beliefs we are aware of or not, but either way they affect our ability to lead, participate and collaborate to our full potential.

There is a high level of uncertainty in much of our work as we engage in complex challenges for which we don't have solutions. When we are experiencing uncertainty and stress, we are often even more influenced by our fear-based thinking.

We need a diversity of people and perspectives to solve our toughest issues. We cannot do this work alone, and we cannot do it together well across our differences without challenging and expanding our own thinking as a regular practice.

While well-designed and hosted participatory group processes can create better conditions for meaningful conversation and collaboration, the thinking that we bring to our leadership and work together can override the best process designs, keeping us stuck or simply re-creating the systems that are not working.

STRESSFUL THINKING & LIMITING BELIEFS



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Agile and adaptable thinking is a crucial capacity for leaders working to engage the challenges and possibilities in our organizations, communities and in our world in these times. Regardless of whether we are working on large scale global issues, or in small local teams; collaborating with others in long-term initiatives or coming together for a meeting or forum: if we are working with change and complex challenges, and we want to find new ways forward together, we also need to open our view/minds and cultivate new ways of thinking.

This requires us to develop greater awareness of the limiting beliefs we hold individually and collectively, and to engage our own thinking with rigorous practices.

The good news is that changing our beliefs and expanding our own thinking can have a profound effect on what we are able to learn, how we are able to think and act, and what we are able to see as possible.

The practice of engaging limiting beliefs shows up in a number of key places in various tools and processes in The Art of Hosting methods and practices. From the moment of invitation, our beliefs impact who we invite and include (or exclude) and how. When we are hosting and engaging in participatory process (such as Open Space, Circle, World Café, Pro-Action Café) many limiting beliefs can arise in the process of relinquishing command and control to allow space for shared leadership, genuine participation and emergence of outcomes. Limiting beliefs can also show up for people in our ability to be present, participate fully, share leadership, speak honestly, and step into action.

In collaborative, creative process we will always find ourselves in the 'Groan Zone' (a crucial but uncomfortable part of the creative process) where our differences will often come to the surface as conflict, along with our fears and attachments to particular ideas or outcomes. We can find ourselves thrown by our own thinking in the form of judgment, cynicism and fear. These patterns of limiting beliefs also show up as barriers to genuine learning and resourceful response to emerging challenges as described by Theory U and the Cynefin framework. As leaders and hosts of participatory process, our ability to engage our own limiting beliefs is directly connected to our ability to host and lead others through territory that is limited and challenging for them. This requires time, attention and practices that help us to illuminate our limiting beliefs (individually and collectively) and engage them at a depth that allows us to genuinely open our minds, learn and shift.

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