
CHAPTER 2

BELIEFS

“We believe we’re seeing the world just fine until it’s called to our attention that we’re not.”

—David Eagleman, *Incognito: The Secret Lives of the Brain*

I have often found that the thing I needed to read, person I needed to meet, or podcast I needed to hear, has always found me at exactly the right moment. About a year and a half into my healing journey, I was listening to a podcast episode by Hal Elrod, best-selling author of *The Miracle Morning*. He was interviewing Tonya Rineer, a mindset coach who helps women in business realize their true potential by breaking through false beliefs and helping to create a solid foundation of self-worth. After listening to Tonya speak, I knew I needed to talk to her. I hired her initially to coach me with struggles I was having with my business, but quickly I realized that she would help me in ways I couldn’t begin to understand. First, she taught me about mindset. Tonya defines mindset as the collection of thoughts, feelings, and beliefs you have about yourself. At the time I’d met her I had already made huge changes in my lifestyle. I had completely changed my diet. I was following AIP (the autoimmune protocol), sleeping better,

and exercising in a way that served me best. Basically, I had radically changed my physical environment, but there was more work to do. She helped me see that the way I was thinking and feeling about my body was actually inhibiting healing. We worked one-on-one each week on different aspects of my business, but as Tonya got to know me more she started to take note of the words I was using to describe myself. When I was ready, she shared her thoughts about why I was unable to make the shifts needed to grow.

Tonya Rineer, Mindset Coach: We each have a set of beliefs about who we are. Our beliefs will dictate how we will live our lives, what type of car or job we will have, and how we raise families. Having negative beliefs about yourself can very well be the thing that is keeping you from meeting your goals. In order to learn how these beliefs can affect your life, first we have to figure out what they are. Examining and paying attention to the words we use to describe health and life are often good indicators for how we feel about ourselves. Start paying attention and write down any words you use to describe yourself on any given day. After a week or so, look at that list of words and see what types of feelings they provoke in you. Imagine saying those words out loud to a young child. As awareness increases in those areas of your life, the beliefs you carry with you will become clear. When we carry a negative belief like “I am not good at this because _____” or “I cannot do that because _____,” we are automatically preparing for failure, because the choice has been made to do poorly. In order to fully embrace change, in any aspect of life, we must first believe that this is something we are capable of doing. In order to do this we must practice these facts: that we are worthy of being healthy, that it is okay to let go of false

beliefs that are no longer serving you, and that no matter where you are in your journey you are loved, right now, completely. Once you decide this is going to work, then it will be easy!

Just believing something can happen can be enough to make it happen. In 2002, researchers from Oxford University set out to support this idea by seeing if they could help raise IQ scores simply by teaching kids to believe it was possible. It is common belief that IQ scores are fixed. They are largely impacted by things like socioeconomic status, parents' education level, whether there were two parents in the home, and more, none of which can be controlled by the child being tested and often won't change throughout the lifetime. Their results showed that students who believed their IQ scores would improve, without any extra practice, did in fact score higher on the IQ test. These researchers, and many others, are starting to show that simply believing something is possible, and taking steps each day toward the goal, can actually be enough to make you successful.

This is a practice in mindset. Just as researchers have shown that you can improve by believing it is possible, innumerable amounts of research have shown that if you do not believe you can do something you will never be able to. Maybe you have been lying to yourself for a long time saying, "Everyone in my family is overweight. That is just the way it is," or "I never ate those foods as a kid and I turned out just fine." Whatever the lie is that you are telling yourself, it has to be let go. Just simply believing you can do it, is enough to start. You have to take steps in the right direction—but before you can do any of that, you have to believe you can.

“I think I can. I think I can. I think I can.”

—The Little Engine that Could

THIS IS ALL GOOD AND WELL, BUT HOW DO WE ACTUALLY PUT IT INTO PRACTICE?

First we need to understand the importance of the words we use. This may seem like a silly step, and you may be thinking, *Sharissa, what could my words possibly have to do with my health?* Well, I am glad you asked. Our brain is so freaking cool. Here is the deal: We are built for both input and output. For example, we can say something aloud (output) and we also hear (input) the thing that was said, meaning we can say words and also hear them. The brain then interprets everything we hear without malice or bias. If you say it, hear it, think it, or read it, your brain will take it in and process it in some way. Whoa, that is heavy. Let me break it down a little bit more. If you say something crappy about yourself to a friend (“Ugh. My legs are so fat.” “I can never remember anything.” “I am always late.”), that phrase or thought is then input into your brain, and a memory or pathway is created for it. Each time you say it, that pathway becomes stronger and stronger—until that is your new belief about yourself. This is an oversimplified example, and most of these beliefs were developed in childhood.

Words can either trigger your inner critique or inner cheerleader (example: “I am so fat and nothing I do ever works” [inner critic] vs. “I am working each day to be little healthier” [inner cheerleader]). The way you talk about yourself to other people is the way you think about yourself. Words becoming thoughts may not seem all

that bad on the surface, but on a deeper level the body is responding.

Thoughts, whether negative or positive, trigger hormone responses in your body that make you feel what you are thinking. Our thoughts are so powerful that the body doesn't know if the situation is actually occurring at that moment or not. The body's response system acts as if that event or thing you are thinking about is actually happening right then. For example, if you are thinking about how grateful you are for your family, and friends, and life, your body responds by producing serotonin and completing the circle by making you feel all warm and fuzzy inside. The same is true for a bad thought, although the feeling associated isn't quite as nice. If you are constantly feeling badly and talking negatively about yourself, then your feelings will be negative and the hormones triggered will also be negative. This can trigger feelings of depression, sadness, and loneliness. This is not an environment that fosters healing in the body. Quite contrary, these feelings will make your body feel worse. By changing the words we use to describe ourselves, we can actually adjust how our body responds to stress and healing.

It is easy to get trapped in the loop of bad thought, which causes a bad feeling, which causes you to feel badly—especially if you are saying things like “I will never feel better,” “I will always be fat,” or “I never make any good friends.” It isn't easy to change who we believe we are, and doing so takes time. There is a process to understanding where these beliefs came from, and if you have a strong enough desire to change your life, then these steps must be followed.

Remember earlier in the book I said this is going to be an

interactive read? At this point you get to make a decision. It takes a special type of motivation to go beyond researching and put ideas into practice. In order to get the most out of life, we must always do both. Filling your Pinterest boards with recipes is a beautiful start, but at some point you actually have to get in the kitchen. It starts with the desire to change and a desire to let go of all of the thoughts and beliefs that are no longer serving your life and health. I recommend you get started with the following practice right away. Based on Tonya Rineer's guidance, I have put together some exercises to help you through this process. I have successfully used this practice in all areas of my life. As life is consistently evolving, I find that this is an exercise I do pretty regularly as any new challenges arise.

MINDSET CHALLENGE

Mindset is how you think and feel about yourself. In order to get a feel for that, think about your health as it is right now. Spend a few minutes doing this exercise and then write down some words that come to mind.

What reasons do you have, if any, to want to be healthy?

If you take the steps to become healthier (physically or mentally), what do you think you will have to give up and what consequences will you face for changing these things?

Now ask yourself what you are putting more value on: the reward of being healthier or the negative consequences this may have for you? For example, are you worried that if you change too much that you will lose friends or that you will be too different? Take a minute and write down all of the bad things that could happen if you changed your life.

Next write a list of positive things that could happen if you were a healthier version of yourself. What things could you do or accomplish?

Take a minute and reflect on the things you have written so far. Pay attention to the words you are using. The words you use about yourself often reflect the thoughts and feelings you have about yourself. Words can be extremely powerful. What words are you currently using to describe your health? Think about the last time someone asked you how you were doing. What were the words you used to describe yourself?

What types of thoughts do those words provoke for you?

Notice how the words you used to describe yourself make you feel. Think about each word and how it makes you feel. Like you have a choice? Or that you are trapped? Are you saying things like “I am feeling energetic, I am taking care of myself with this smoothie,

I am really helping myself get better, and I am getting healthier,” or are you saying, “I can’t do anything right, I will never be able to do that, and it is too hard”?

Now, I want you to dream. Take as much time as you need to think about this one and then write a scenario of getting healthier. Use a separate journal or paper for this. Include as much detail as you can. such as places you will visit, clothes you will wear, activities you will do, and the people who will be around you and supporting you while you’re living a full and beautiful life.

Think of what would happen if you didn’t make any changes at all. Where will you be in 10 years if you continue exactly as you are at this moment?

Fear can be so incredibly powerful that oftentimes we will choose to stay right where we are, no matter how horrendous the circumstances, because at least we know what we are dealing with. Fear tells us that knowing what is happening right now, even if it is bad, is better than reaching beyond and trying for something better. Whenever I decide to take on a new challenge I immediately experience fear. I start to get so scared that bad things will happen if I ever step outside my comfort zone. I am ashamed to admit that a lot of times this fear has stopped me from trying new things, such as traveling or new adventures. The only advice I have for facing fear is the advice I follow myself: Love, gratitude, and curiosity will always beat out fear. I find that if I am struggling with something new, creating an environment in which I can learn as much as I can about it first, fires up my curiosity levels just enough that I can

take that challenging first step forward toward that scary place. When all else fails, I think of all the love I can share with other people if I keep moving myself forward in life. Then love always wins over fear.

ACTION STEPS:

- Pay attention to those around you this week and write down all the words you hear people use to describe their current health state.
- For the same people you heard this week talk about their health, rate their overall current health on a scale of 1–10 (10 being the best possible health).
- Reflect on the words others are using and their health rating, and notice if there are any patterns between their current health and the words they are using to describe themselves.

